

## CHAPTER 4

### SYNCHRONICITY

Nature uses only the longest threads to weave her patterns, so each small piece of her fabric reveals the organization of the entire tapestry.

- Novel-Prize winning physicist Richard Feynmann.

The old word *observer* simply has to be crossed off the books, and we must put in the new word *participator*. In this way we've come to realize that the universe is a participatory universe.

- Physicist John Wheeler.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen how dreams can be gateways into the inner world. Sometimes the gateways open up when we're wide awake. Let me start with some personal examples.

#### Opening Gateways in Waking Life

In an altered state of consciousness we use a different metaphysical system. If we really use a different metaphysical system (and not just think or talk about it), we are in an altered state of consciousness. These two phrases are different ways of describing the same thing.

- Psychologist Lawrence LeShan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>quotation in F. David Peat, *Synchronicity: The Bridge Between Mind and Matter* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence LeShan, *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist* (New York, Viking Press, 1974), p. 155.

I began my training as a clinical psychologist at a “halfway home.” It was intended to serve as a temporary support structure for severely disturbed young adults before they could move out on their own. Those who demonstrated their ability to function relatively independently could move into small apartments within a few miles of the main facility. The main facility evidently had a prior existence as a two-story Southern California motel, complete with a now seldom used swimming pool. A central dining room had been added, together with offices for staff and TI's (therapeutic interns, such as I was).

Though the halfway home was located on a large street, it was relatively quiet and isolated by a tall concrete wall which ran entirely along the street side. Other walls enclosed the other limits of the facility. I don't want to make it sound like a prison, as the setting was quite friendly, given the limits on a facility with a relatively small area. You entered through an open doorway cut into the wall on the street, took a right then a left and you were suddenly inside this strange setting. After I had been there for a while and gotten my feet wet, so to speak, I found that as soon as I entered the doorway, before I could see into the facility, I would know if things were “crazy” that day or stable. There was one other therapist, a young woman on the staff, who had the same ability to sense the level of craziness. If I felt a certain queasy feeling as I walked in, I would immediately check with her. She would either confirm that bad things were already happening or, if not, that she felt the same way and was waiting for something to break. And it would—I don't recall our ever being wrong.

Now how did we know that? As best I can express my own experience, the craziness that was struggling to come out of the patients passed inside me. I'm not sure whether the environment was an intermediary carrier or not; I think so. But there were no environmental clues for me to note; rather I felt something inside myself—a “queasiness” as I characterized it

above, that I translated into things being crazy outside. Sometimes the young woman or I would say that things “smelled” crazy, which is a common reference to an intuitive feeling.<sup>3</sup> In any case, the key fact is that I had found a gateway that could open even when I was conscious. I experimented further with it.

I started using altered states of consciousness in working with the patients, without any real knowledge of what I was doing—except that it helped. By altered states, I’m not implying anything that most would regard as mystical: if the patient was anxious, I would match my breathing and movements to theirs. When we were in synchrony (which we will discuss much more later), I would gradually slow my movements and breathing, and so would they. Usually the patient would end up in something like a trance state. At that point, if I opened myself to them—there’s no other way to express it—I would then find their emotions flowing through me as if they were my own. I would cry their tears, or express their anger. Sometimes, I would have pictures in my mind that weren’t from my own life memories. Usually I would find out later that these images were from the patient’s life. Often they were symbolic rather than literal. From doing dream work, I was used to translating such images.

Of course, I wasn’t always so wise when I experienced feelings that weren’t my own. One patient, nicknamed “Red,” was extremely paranoid. For some reason, he developed a fixation on

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<sup>3</sup> There is actually research that rats can distinguish a difference in smell between schizophrenics and non-schizophrenics. See Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 49. Rats have a much more developed sense of smell than humans, but there is speculation that intuition is an outgrowth of smell. Jung felt that thinking, feeling, and intuition were all outgrowths of sensory perception. Intuition would be a natural outgrowth of smell, thinking out of sight, feeling out of hearing and speech. In my clinical work, I’ve found that the two main varieties of “craziness” seem to be further outgrowths of a normal predisposition to one or another of these functions. Thinkers become schizophrenic, feelers become manic-depressives.

me. He would come around the office where the other TIs worked and say nice things about me to them, usually making sure I could hear him. I didn't realize what was going on then, as Red wasn't one of my patients, and I didn't know him very well. In retrospect, I can see that he was developing an intense fear of me, and was trying to win my favor by placating me.

I was pleasant enough to Red since he meant nothing special to me. But his anxiety around me increased. Since this was all coming out of him rather than being an objectively accurate response to a frightening situation, there was probably little, if anything, I could have done to defuse his anxiety. Then one night, when I was outside talking with another patient, Red started shrieking his anger and fear at me from his room. The basic litany was that he knew I was out to get him, but he'd get me first. And he had a knife!

That's a frightening situation for anyone to be presented with. I discussed it the next day in a supervision group with other TIs. They were supportive, but I experienced no relief at all. I became anxious whenever I saw Red, though he now avoided me as much as he had previously sought me out. Soon I was anxious anytime I was at the half-way home, regardless of whether Red was around; everyone began to seem dangerous. I began dreading my visits. I even considered terminating my residency there (as so many other TIs had already done).

Then one day, it hit me that I was experiencing paranoia, just as Red experienced paranoia. I hadn't recognized the symptoms because I had previously had very little paranoia in my own emotional make-up. With no category in which I could put this nameless anxiety I was experiencing, it infiltrated insidiously into my whole outlook on life. As soon as I realized I was experiencing paranoia, the paranoia ceased. The same day, Red had an acute psychotic episode, where he ended up curled into a fetal position and had to be taken to a hospital for short-term treatment. As far as I can determine, Red never even saw me that day. When he returned to the

facility several days later, I was a proper therapist again, trying to find some way to help a patient in pain. He and I had no further problems.

Another time, the patient helped me, rather than me helping the patient. I was experiencing an emotional problem, and was in a good deal of pain. The pain was caused because I was stretched between two sides of a moral dilemma and wasn't willing to change my self-definition. I helped myself deal with the pain in the way I usually did at that time: by helping patients deal with their own pain. I was having a session with a patient, who I'll call Jean here. Jean had a very, very hard time articulating. Every word was a struggle because she was constantly experiencing so much emotion—usually anger—that the emotion intervened between her thought and her speech. I had never heard her able to speak clearly about anything, though I had learned that she had depths of perception once I got past her speech problem.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, her speech became startlingly clear, and she told me exactly what I needed to do to resolve my emotional problem. It was like the best therapist/guide in the world was there, who had been listening carefully to my problem, and now gave me exactly the counsel I needed. Of course, I hadn't even mentioned my problem to Jean. As quickly as it happened, Jean was back to her old speech pattern, discussing her issues. Remember the quiet voice from within that we discussed a number of times in the chapter on dreams? This was the same sort of voice, one that had to be honored. The difference now was that the voice wasn't coming from within me in a dream, or even within me in a waking state, but from outside me, from the mouth of my patient. Of course, afterwards, Jean knew nothing of what had happened.

### **Synchrony, Intimacy and Psi**

This two-step process—first the pattern, then the explanation—is how we try to reduce the power of chance over our lives. All intelligence, at however low a level, tends to take

the first step. . . . It's usually said that Science consists of this two-step process, plus a third step which consists of adding fresh bits to the pattern and seeing whether the explanation still works. But in fact quite a lot of science never gets further than the first step.

- Writer Peter Dickinson.<sup>4</sup>

Psychologist and dream pioneer Henry Reed, whose wonderful first dream we have already discussed, has in recent years done similarly pioneering work in psychic connections between people: extra sensory perception. He proposes something that sounds strange only because we think of ESP as strange: that ESP is an extension of normal intimacy between people. Think about that. When we are with a stranger, most of our communication is limited to the content of the words we speak. As in all interchanges between two humans, there is also an unspoken body language that we read unconsciously, but when we don't know someone well, there are definite limits to our ability to interpret the other's actions.

Then imagine two lovers in the early thrall of their love, where they are so intent on each other that the rest of their environment virtually fades from their awareness. They notice anything and everything about their loved one: every movement, every glance is significant to them. If we watch them closely, their actions are like a wonderful dance, part choreographed in advance by the archetype invoked by love (much like Lorenz' jackdaw) and part unique to their pairing. They rarely miss a step in this elaborate dance.

Then think of a long-married husband and wife with a good marriage. Notice just how few words go on there. They understand each other so intimately that each can virtually complete

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<sup>4</sup>Peter Dickinson, *Chance, Luck and Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), pp. 30-1.

the other's thoughts. They no longer need the intensity of attention of the two young lovers since the other is so embedded within them that they are able easily to function either separately as individuals, or as a pair, each complementing the other to form a whole that is neither one nor the other.

In the field of emotion, which is a phenomenon very much on the border between physiological and psychological reality, rhythm is essential. In states of strong emotion we make rhythmical movements (stamping our feet, for instance) and tend to repeat endlessly the same thoughts and utterances. This led Jung to suspect that unconscious complexes might have a periodical rhythmic nature.<sup>5</sup>

Research by experimental psychologists William Condon and Ray Birdwhistell and by linguistic anthropologist Edward T. Hall demonstrated that this synchronous dance of individuals is more than a metaphor. Filming human interactions in a variety of situations, then viewing them at slowed-down speeds, they were able to watch how tiny, nearly imperceptible body movements by one person cued movements by another. Hall comments that: “viewing movies in very slow motion, looking for synchrony, one realizes that what we know as dance is really a slowed-down, stylized version of what human beings do whenever they interact.”<sup>6</sup> This ability to synchronize our movements to our environment “appears to be innate, being well established by the second day of life, and may be present as early as the first hour after birth.”<sup>7</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I told how I would consciously synchronize my movements and

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<sup>5</sup>Marie-Louise von Franz, *Time: Rhythm and Repose* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 72.

<sup>7</sup>Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, p. 73.

breathing to that of a patient in distress, then guide them into an altered state. In a remarkable example of how this can operate at an unconscious level within a full group, one of Hall's students filmed school children playing in a playground during lunchtime. Though at first viewing of the film, the children seemed to be each "doing their own thing," after repeated viewing, Hall and his student noticed that one little girl was especially active. Over the course of the lunch break, her play took her over the entire schoolyard. The movements of all the other children came in synchrony with her own as she moved into their territory, until the whole group was moving in an unconscious symphony, led by the little girl as conductor. When Hall and his student asked an expert on rock music to watch the film, he was actually able to find a currently popular tune that fit the rhythm so perfectly that once it was "synchronized with the children's play . . . [it] remained in sync for the entire 4-1/2 minutes of the film clip."<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Reed's work starts with this synchrony, then moves beyond into psi. He is a frequent lecturer and workshop leader who uses these occasions to conduct group experiments that benefit both the audience and scientific research. For example, he plays "The Getting to Know you Game" with these audiences. He has a number of varieties of this experiment. In one, a member of the audience, the "agent", reads a nursery rhyme or the alphabet or, more recently, simply counts backwards from 50 to 1. The audience is asked to both concentrate on the voice and observe anything going on within themselves as they listen. Afterwards, they share what went on inside them. "Purely subjective responses show surprising relevance to the objective facts concerning the vocalist's personal life, beyond matters of temperament and mood to facts in the

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<sup>8</sup>Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, p. 77.

vocalist’s environment.”<sup>9</sup>

This technique maximizes the information that Dr. Reed can receive and validate. More recently, he has developed several one-on-one variations which maximize the number of people who can be helped by the intuitive insight. In each, he has the audience break into pairs. One variation proceeds as above, with one person counting slowly backwards from 50 to 1, while the other person notices their own stream-of-consciousness. Afterwards, the receiver tells the speaker what they experienced and the speaker tells what does and does not fit their life.

In the “problem response” version, the speaker picks an issue on which they would like to receive advice, but keeps it secret during the countdown. Dr. Reed has found that the listener’s response usually provides insight into the problem. Finally, in a “soul retrieval” mode, the listener is:

given a format for a story to imagine while traveling on the river of sound of the speaker’s voice: go underground, meet an animal helper, find the lost soul fragment of the speaker, heal it and return with it, learning from it what it can contribute to the speaker’s life. At the end of the countdown, the listener shares the story with the speaker and gets feedback. This procedure, as simple as it is, with untrained people, strangers as partners, has proven very profound, healing, [calling up] powerful emotional reactions.<sup>10</sup>

I remember participating in a similar experiment at a workshop in Asilomar in 1981, led by a medical doctor and clinical psychologist. He concentrated on a particular variety of psi: psychometry; the ability to access information about a person by physical contact with the person

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<sup>9</sup>Henry Reed, “Intimacy and Psi: Explorations in Psychic Closeness,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 41, Par 1 (1986), p. 81..

<sup>10</sup>private communication from Dr. Henry Reed.

or with an object belonging to the person. He felt that psychometry was normal ability that anyone could use, one which was especially useful for therapists. Because this was a controversial stance, he came up with a hilarious cover term for the use of psychometry for psychological diagnosis: holographic diagnostic techniques. We each paired up with someone else from the group whom we had never met before. Then we took turns as “sender” and “receiver.” The receiver would hold the sender’s hand in theirs and concentrate on their own inner process. As a receiver, I remember that I got a picture of a farm house with an old couple. It turned out that the person I was with had, in fact, been raised on a farm by his grandparents!

This was so impressive to me that, when working with patients, I always tried to observe whatever came up in my own mind, remaining open to the possibility that it had something to do with my patient. This works equally well in normal life. I think that we all do this a great deal of the time, reading information about the other person on an unconscious level, then acting on it ourselves with no intervening conscious notice. The process of observing our inner process while engaging in normal interactions with another person at first seems awkward, but itself becomes almost unconscious after a while (if this isn’t a contradiction in terms.)

### **Synchronicity**

It is the nature of synchronicity to have meaning and, in particular, to be associated with a profound activation of energy deep within the psyche. It is as if the formation of patterns within the unconscious mind is accompanied by physical patterns in the outer world. In particular, as psychic patterns are on the point of reaching consciousness then synchronicities reach their peak; moreover, they generally disappear as the individual becomes consciously aware of a new alignment of forces within his or her personality.

F. David Peat<sup>11</sup>

Often we find that gateways open in our lives in ways that don't fit readily into traditional views of reality. Jung coined the term *synchronicity* for meaningful coincidences, occurrences which had significance for us, but for which there is no simple causal explanation. We are all familiar with such events, yet we tend to dismiss them as coincidences, ignoring the fact that it is their meaning for us that seems to trigger them in our lives. For example, thinking of someone and at that moment hearing the phone ring and finding that it is the same person on the phone. Or needing a special piece of information and a book arrives in the mail with just the information that you need. Take a small synchronicity that occurred while working on this chapter. A fan of a previous book, with whom I had no contact for a year, suddenly wrote me to ask if I could tell her what synchronicity was. Clearly, her interest in synchronicity wasn't what made me write about it, nor was my writing the cause of her interest. The two were separate, yet came together in a way that was meaningful for both of us. How can we explain this (other than, of course, to ignore the fact that it had meaning for both of us and to dismiss it as coincidence)?

In my own life and in the lives of those around me, I have repeatedly found that synchronicities increase in intensity, frequency and clarity at special times. These include times of transition, ceremony, crisis, fear, and other exceptional times: birth, death, marriage, separation, changes in my professional life, etc. Accordingly, when synchronicities begin to appear in my life, I know that something special is afoot, and try to get in touch with those synchronicities, to become more centered, more aware of what the psyche is trying to tell me. When I'm successful with this process, the synchronicities increase in frequency. Psychologist

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<sup>11</sup>F. David Peat, *Synchronicity: The Bridge Between Matter and Mind* (New York: Bantam, 1987), p. 27.

Ira Progoff agrees with this position.

By definition one cannot *cause* synchronistic events, but on the basis of observations in this area over the last twenty years, it does seem to me to be possible to develop in a person an increased sensitivity to synchronistic events, and especially a capacity to harmonize one's life with such occurrences.<sup>12</sup>

When I was still seeing patients in a clinical setting, I found that nearly all my patients went through similar issues at the same time. This was especially noticeable at watershed points in their lives. For example, when after a lot of progress, my first patient of the day was stuck on what, for example, could be loosely termed a father issue (or a mother issue or a variety of others), I knew that I would be dealing with the same issue throughout the day with most of my patients. This was most marked when after being stuck for a long time, one patient suddenly had a break-through. It was quite exciting to see a whole series of epiphanies throughout the day. But a similarity of theme that lasted over an extended period of time was the more common synchronicity that I noted. Since I saw patients who varied from very disturbed patients at a halfway home to outpatients in a counseling center, the particulars of the issue would take different form. But then all Jungians are used to seeing the variety of clothes that a symbol wears. In Victor Mansfield's words from his recent book on synchronicity:

An important implication of acausal connection through meaning is that in *synchronicity the meaning is primary while the objective and subjective events that correlate are secondary and contingent*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ira Progoff, *Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 132.

<sup>13</sup>Victor Mansfield, *Synchronicity, Science and Soul-Making* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 26.

After I had noticed this going on, I went out of my way to remove any possibility that these events were actually causal and that perhaps I was the cause. I would simply note what was going on with the first patient, then stay a bit more detached than otherwise in the early part of a session, so that I wouldn't be feeding the patients cues as to what I expected. In retrospect, I think this was a needless precaution on my part since usually they would come in with the issue plainly on the table. And, of course, it wasn't only my patients that were going through those issues at the same time, so was I. This recognition that what was happening in others might say something to me, and vice versa, was one of the most helpful tools I ever discovered in dealing with this strange unitary world we live in.

Again notice that this required me to discover a previously hidden meaning; i.e., that a patient's issues were not only theirs but mine as well. That in turn caused me to focus more closely on the cycles of emotions and events that we all pass through, either observing others to learn more about myself, or myself to learn more about the situation others were in. There was already a meaning there trying to come out, but it required focus on my part to see it.

As time went on, I began to notice that these synchronicities extended to those with whom I was connected closely in any way, not only those I saw routinely in my daily life, but also those from whom I was separated by distance and only communicated with occasionally. Often very specific types of events would show up across the board. Here I often found that one or another of us might be a few days or even a few weeks behind or ahead of the main group of people, but that seemed only to make this more believable. Synchronicity isn't necessarily simultaneity in time, but simultaneity in inner experience. Time and again, this awareness has enabled me to be able to help someone who wasn't forthcoming with their situation, but who I knew needed help because they were going through something similar to myself and other

friends.

Jung’s definition has led to frequent misunderstandings because “coincidence in time” is generally understood as an astronomical simultaneity dependent on clock time. It is rather, a *relative simultaneity*, to be understood as the subjective experience of an inner image coinciding with an outer event. Only in this experience is the time difference abolished, since the event, whether in the past or future, is immediately present. It may happen that inner image and outer event are connected together by an objective, clock-time simultaneity, but that is not the decisive factor. The decisive factor lies in a subjectively experienced, relative simultaneity.<sup>14</sup>

I’ve also found that synchronicity extends to the inanimate objects that are most significant in my life, especially my car and my computer. Undoubtedly this is an extension of the process I’ve already been presenting: a pattern emerges in the psyche and bursts forth in some way that grabs my attention and causes me to further focus. So it picks not only the people who are significant in my life, but the objects. I’ve grown so used to this happening that I’m no longer startled by it. I just stop and look at the event as if it were a dream and interpret it that way. For example, on the few occasions when my car has overheated, it coincided with my pushing myself too hard and not realizing it. My battery never dies when I’ve got lots of personal energy, only when I’m drifting into depression.

Though I’ve had many similar experiences with my computer, I remember one event in

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<sup>14</sup>Aniela Jaffé, *From the Life and Work of C.G. Jung* (Manuel Tamayo Daimon, 1989), p. 20.

particular. Several people who were connected with Subud<sup>15</sup> had read a book of mine, contacted me and asked to see me informally. I was working at my computer and had forgotten just when they were going to arrive. Suddenly my computer went crazy, with all sorts of strange symbols racing up and down the computer screen. Nothing I could do would change it, including turning off the computer then rebooting it. Just then the doorbell rang to announce that my visitors had arrived, so I left the computer as it was and went down to meet with them. Their visit turned out to be a very strange and memorable event, though one that ended up having more effect on the life of another friend of mine than it did on my own life. When they had left and I returned to my computer, it had returned to normal and never again duplicated this strange behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Psychologists Allan Combs and Mark Holland see these physical instances of synchronicity as serving the purpose of enlightening the psyche to something it is overlooking.

One of the authors likes to refer to such coincidences as “perverse synchronicity.”....The key is to relax into the moment, realize that life will not end if the next stoplight turns red, and try to be centered on yourself. Doing this can lead to surprising results. You may find, for instance, that the tricks are actually not so bad. Upon regaining your composure, you often discover that each trick is followed in time by another coincidence that provides a solution to it.

Jung agreed that when the energy in the unconscious was powerful enough, synchronicity

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<sup>15</sup>Subud is an estoric group founded by a Javanese mystic named Bapak Muhammed Subuh. Subuh discovered an inner force, an energy, which could be transmitted to others through a group practice called the latihan (i.e., the Indonesian word for “exercise”).

<sup>16</sup>For those who think that this might sound like an incipient computer virus, it took place on a little Commodore 64 before destructive hackers bothered with personal computers. The only other time a similar event happened was on another Commodore 64 when lightning struck the wiring of our house. Unfortunately, that poor computer was permanently damaged.

could extend to inanimate objects:

It often seems that even inanimate objects co-operate with the unconscious in the arrangement of symbolic patterns. There are numerous well-authenticated stories of clocks stopping at the moment of their owner's death...Other common examples are those of a mirror that breaks, or a picture that falls, when a death occurs; or minor but unexplained breakages in a house where someone is passing through an emotional crisis.<sup>17</sup>

In his spiritual autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he gave a personal example. He had been arguing with Freud about such inexplicable, seemingly paranormal events. Just as Freud was leaving, Jung felt a burning sensation in his diaphragm, as if it were a "glowing vault." At that moment, there was a sharp sound from the bookcase, and both turned to it, fearful that it might fall. "There," Jung said to Freud, "that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorization phenomenon." When Freud pooh-poohed this as nonsense, Jung told him he was mistaken and said "to prove my point I now predict that in a moment there will be another such loud report." And, of course there was.<sup>18</sup>

This story illustrates the difficulty in finding handy little intellectual boxes in which we can put such events. Did Jung cause the event because he was so heated up by the discussion, so irritated at Freud, that it burst out of him? Then the second time, he actually consciously caused it to happen? Perhaps. Or perhaps, as Jungian analyst Aniela Jaffé suggests, since "Jung was in a

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<sup>17</sup>C.G. Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious" in C. G. Jung, editor, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1964), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup>C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, revised edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), pp. 155-6.

highly emotional state . . . his consciousness was drawn, so to speak, into the realm of the unconscious and he was able to ‘know’ the coming event.”<sup>19</sup> How about my patient who turned briefly into my counselor—did my need for help cause her to speak? Perhaps, or perhaps we’re in deeper waters than simple causal explanations, even those that involve paranormal causality.

Aniela Jaffe points toward one answer: “one of the main points of Jung’s investigations on parapsychology is that *synchronistic events are manifestations of an archetype*. In other words: the archetype is their “organizer.”<sup>20</sup>

Notice how similar this is to our relationship to our dreams. We can neither control nor organize our dreams, that organization has to come from within. Though we can’t control our dreams, we can become more attuned to them. Even lucid dreams are more like a dialogue with the unconscious than a drama that we are writing from scratch. The process of learning to listen to the psyche is similar, whether we are listening to our dreams or observing the synchronicities that occur in life. In that process, something new emerges inside. At this stage it is an archetypal pattern, unformed in any way we can appreciate. It then clothes itself in the images, emotions, and behavior we have experienced in our life as well as those we have learned of at second-hand through art, entertainment and education.

First the pattern forms. As it emerges it catches our attention, so that we listen, we *focus*. My experience leads me to believe that perhaps focus is the necessary catalyst for synchronicity to occur. Transitional times take us out of the mundane “robot” existence we

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<sup>19</sup>Aniela Jaffé, *Apparitions and Precognition* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963), p. 191.

<sup>20</sup>Aniela Jaffé, *Apparitions and Precognition* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963), p. 192.

normally lead and cause us to focus on our life. Once we notice a synchronicity and open ourselves to the possibility of other synchronicities, we become ever more focused. A good metaphor for the process might be that synchronicity serves as a lens that concentrates the diffuse world of the unconscious until it emerges into consciousness. When a visual lens focuses diffuse light, the light becomes more and more intense. Focused enough, it can actually cause combustion. Similarly with the focus that synchronicities bring into our lives, though here the combustion creates not flames, but *meaning*.<sup>21</sup>

It may be difficult to imagine how archetypes can organize not only our inner world, but outer events as well. Jung's answer, which we have referred to in the introduction, is that archetypes are *psychoid*; i.e., both physical and psychical. This is a strange way of viewing things which tends to turn our normal view of reality, even paranormal reality, on its head. For example, think about Dr. Reed's "The Getting to Know You Game." We presented it for simplicity as if there was a speaker or agent and one or more receivers. But we can also view the same situation as if an archetype of relationship is being awakened and because of its psychoid nature, the entire environment, including all the people are acausally connected in a meaningful event. This is most pronounced in the "soul retrieval" version we mentioned earlier, in which a consciously chosen archetypal fairy tale structure is used as the organizational principle. Because this outer format closely matches what is actually going on in the experiment, it is especially powerful for the participants.

### **Saliency**

When we try to understand nature, we should look at the phenomena as if they were

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<sup>21</sup>This idea that focus creates meaning is, by the way, basically the same theme that Colin Wilson explores throughout most of his books, though he doesn't address synchronicity per se.

*messages* to be understood. Except that each message appears to be random until we establish a code to read it. This code takes the form of an abstraction, that is, we choose to ignore certain things as irrelevant and we thus partially select the content of the message by a free choice. These irrelevant signals form the “background noise,” which will limit the accuracy of our message.<sup>22</sup>

Jung conceived of synchronicity as an explanatory principle to deal with meaningful acausality. Unfortunately, it is this very acausality that causes traditional science to dismiss synchronicity out of hand, no matter how many seeming examples are presented. Classically, science has been based on physical cause-and-effect. Relativity demonstrated the equivalence of matter and energy, which somewhat diluted the picture. Quantum mechanics brought probability into the equation so that, at the quantum level, we could no longer speak of direct cause-and-effect, simply of probabilities of outcomes. More recently still, a new factor—information—has moved into a central position. Mathematician, psychiatrist, and experimental psychologist William Sulis has proposed that naturally occurring complex systems are information driven. Since almost everything in nature of much interest is a complex system, information moves to the forefront and Sulis proposes an alternative to physical or energetic causality, which he terms *saliency*. “The critical issue is not whether information is present, for that will always be the case, but rather whether or not the information which is present is salient for the system in contact with it.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the environment might be filled with information, but information that is only useful when its complement is found.

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<sup>22</sup>J. M. Jauch, quotation in Sarah Voss, *What Number Is God?: Metaphors, Metaphysics, Metamathematics, and the Nature of Things* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 103.

<sup>23</sup>William F. Sulis, unpublished paper for UNESCO conference, 1999.

Even random noise can be seen as filled with information for an organism that needs something to complement itself. In other words, saliency is neither in the organism nor in the environment, but only in the coming together of both. For example, remember that dreams seem to be produced by random neural firing that especially affects the emotional parts of the brain (i.e., the limbic system which we termed the mammal brain). The neocortex, i.e., the human brain, jumps into action, trying to make sense of the biologically meaningless information flooding the brain. It structures the material into story lines—dreams—which address unresolved issues, attempt to integrate new experience, project possibilities, etc.

Saliency provides a scientifically rigorous alternative to causality. Notice that not only have we moved past the concept of mechanical or energetic causality, we are now dealing with a total pattern which includes both what would formerly have been viewed as the cause and the effect. Both are now part of a single pattern in which the information in one links with the information in the other in order for something new to emerge. What is that link? I would suggest it is “meaning,” though Sulis like any good pure scientist, objects to finding meaning in nature. Commenting further about synchronicity and saliency, however, he comes very close to the position we are taking in this book when he says that “I like to think of reality like a giant ocean, and synchronicity like the currents. There are many differing currents. Some are local, some are global. One can form endless patterns but some are mere random fluctuations, while others are significant. Not knowing the currents can get one killed. Knowing the currents one can travel far. Not everywhere mind you. And not always in the way planned or desired. It is knowing when to go with the flow, and when to cross the flow.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>William. F. Sulis, private email correspondence of 5/11/99.

We can see examples of saliency occurring at many different levels broadly throughout nature, from the sub-atomic level upwards. At the behavioral level, remember how Lorenz' baby goslings and mallards seemed to “imprint” a “mother archetype” onto Lorenz. For those who feel uncomfortable with Jung's term *archetypes* in the context of animal behavior, elsewhere I've coined the alternate term *cognitive invariants*, “a somewhat ungainly term that might be more welcome and intelligible to modern science. Cognition is the mental process of knowing or perceiving, invariant means constant; hence those constants which in part determine our knowledge of reality.”<sup>25</sup> So, we could say that the babies drew on a cognitive invariant for the child's experience of the relationship between mother and child.

Key is that these examples and the others that Lorenz provided of mating behavior and defensive behavior, are inborn hard-wired predispositions that are triggered by highly specific information cues from the environment. An image of lock and key comes to mind. Imagine these cognitive invariants as wholly contained behaviors (with accompanying predispositions toward images) which are locked until a highly specific key appears in the environment to open the lock and release the behavior. Note that this is not either physically or energetically causal; information is all that is exchanged. And neither the mother nor the child causes the experience of the mother/child relationship to be activated; rather both together form this new whole. If the imprinting has occurred as it should onto a mother gosling or mallard, the other side of the relationship would have also been triggered. In Sulis' words: “Saliency does not depend upon the energy which is exchanged but rather upon the form, texture, and context within which the

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<sup>25</sup>Robin Robertson, *Beginner's Guide to Jungian Psychology* (York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, Inc., 1992), p. 39.

exchange takes place. Pattern takes precedence over substance.”<sup>26</sup>

Jung viewed synchronicity as a subset of acausal events in general, one in which meaning was central, psychological meaning. But saliency allows us to stretch the concept of meaning down to a point where it no longer has to be psychological meaning. Saliency can occur without synchronicity but synchronicity cannot occur without saliency. Sulis and the author both agree that synchronicity in an extended sense pervades reality; that is, there are many more acausally linked events happening at any point in time than causal events. And even causal events are better viewed within the broader view of saliency and multivariance.

Saliency provides a way to approach synchrony, and from synchrony to synchronicity. Imagine a room full of pendulum clocks, initially all at rest. Then, one at a time, start each pendulum moving. If you’re careful, at first you may be able to have all of them at different parts of the cycle of their swing. For example, one might be just starting its downward swing, one may have reached the bottom of its swing, ready to move up again, a third might have reached the peak of its swing, ready to move backward once more. If you leave them alone for a while, then come back, you may be surprised to find that now they all swing together in perfect harmony. The movement of each has had an effect on each of the others, Gradually they come to a single rhythm which harmonizes all the movements before.

In physical systems, this mutual feedback of *salient* information is termed *entrainment*. It operates in biological systems as well as in physical systems. For example, that’s why crickets chirp together rather than at random, why groups of fireflies tend to flash at the same time. There have been experiments that show when women are living together isolated from others, their

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<sup>26</sup>William F. Sulis, unpublished paper for UNESCO conference, 1999.

menstrual cycles come into balance in the same way. Or reconsider the lovely example we gave earlier in our discussion of synchrony, of the little girl who led the entire school yard into her rhythmic movement. We could say that the girl's movement caused each of the other children in turn to match her rhythm, but it's more elegant to think of the rhythm already being there and gradually the whole playground matched the rhythm. The little girl was the first to tap into the rhythm and part of that movement included her moving all around the playground. If the rhythm had been strong enough, it might well have pervaded the playground even if the little girl didn't move throughout the whole playground.

Whether we term it saliency or meaning, the universe is filled with information. My own opinion is that meaning pervades the universe at every level, and we barely tap that source of limitless meaning. That meaning lies behind our personal destinies as much as it defines the movements of stars in the sky. We have only to find the right keys for the locks that open the gateways.