

BOOK REVIEWS

SYNCHRONICITY: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCE, edited by Lance Storm. Grosseto, Italy: Pari Publishing, 2008. Pp. xxii + 316. \$18.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-88-95604-02-2.

Meaningful coincidences have captured the public imagination, reflected in a growing number of new books on the subject. Many of these books consist largely of anecdotal accounts that make for interesting reading but do not directly contribute to the advancement of scientific thinking in this area. In contrast, Storm's book is a treasure trove for those with a serious scholarly interest in this topic. In his foreword, Robert Aziz notes that "moving through the material and chapters of this work, one will have the feeling of being an attendee at an International conference on synchronicity, perhaps the first international conference on synchronicity. A circle has been drawn and a roundtable discussion has been convened" (p. xix). Aziz's comments are right on the mark. The collection of essays in Storm's book tackles the very bones of Jung and Pauli's conceptualizations of synchronicity, addressing such fundamental issues as the role played by archetypes, explorations of the concepts of causality and acausality, and perhaps of most interest to parapsychologists, the relationship between psi and synchronicity. The different perspectives offered by the various contributors blend to form a rich mix. However, potential readers should be forewarned that this is not an "easy read." This book demands to be read slowly, in order to fully appreciate the scope of each contribution.

The book consists of 18 essays, divided into six parts. Part I, "The History and Philosophy of Synchronicity," provides insights into how the respective backgrounds and interests of Jung and Pauli contributed to the construction of their theory of synchronicity, with papers provided by Kenower Weimar Bash, F. David Peat, Roderick Main, and Marialuisa Donati.

Part II, "Synchronicity in Practice," turns to real-life applications of synchronicity, with examples provided from a clinical psychiatric practice (Berthold Eric Schwartz), *I Ching* consultation (Shantena Augusto Sabbadini), and attempts to quantify meaningful coincidences experimentally (William Braud).

In Part III, "The Ontology of Synchronicity," the concept of acausality (and archetypal involvement, especially as it relates to psi phenomena) is challenged by John Beloff, followed by a paper by Charles Tart in which he proposes various types of causality and their potential relationship to synchronicity (including "paranormal causality," which he distinguishes as different from "absolute synchronicity").

The relationship between psi and synchronicity as defined by Jung is further explored and contrasted in Part IV, "The Synchronicity Debate," with contributions by Mansfield et al., Storm, and Palmer. Victor Mansfield, Sally Rhine Feather, and James Hall shed light on the relationship between J. B. Rhine and C. G. Jung, drawing upon the "Rhine-Jung Letters," a 27-year correspondence between the two men. Of note, they present an excerpt from a 1951 letter in which Jung (referring to his synchronicity paper) states "I have been able to finish a paper that is largely based upon your ESP experiment...." (p. 130). The authors note that this "startling revelation ... cannot be found in Jung's Collected Works, his published letters, or his autobiography" (p. 130). However, they go on to question whether psi phenomena can really be viewed as examples of synchronicity, critiquing the notions of acausality (that Rhine himself was not yet ready to concede) and archetypal meaning promoting individuation, as applied to parapsychological experiments. The authors also stress that while parapsychological phenomena can be studied empirically and exhibit "scientific" causality, synchronicity experiences are more difficult to capture and study in a laboratory setting (although their paper does end with discussion of a possible experiment suggested by Jung).

Lance Storm presents a different perspective, seeing psi and synchronicity as more alike than dissimilar. He questions the assumption that archetypal meaning is not active in psi experiments, and deviating from a classical Jungian perspective, states that "synchronicity appears to be more causal than Jung imagined" (p. 167). Storm suggests that both synchronicity and psi may be viewed as scientifically causal, in part because each has metacauses (psi-permissive and psi-conductive conditions in the case of psi; and archetypal contingency in the case of synchronicity). He goes on to cite the work of Braud and Jung to support his contention that synchronicity can, indeed, be studied using careful empirical investigation.

John Palmer's contribution adds yet another perspective to the mix. He points out that Jung's definition of synchronicity as a correspondence between a subjective and an objective event, automatically rules out examples of pure telepathy from being considered synchronicities. However, he goes on to note other similarities between synchronicity and psi, observing for example, that psi experiences also occur sporadically in nature, and that "there is no 'repeatability on demand' in parapsychology" (p. 181). Palmer ultimately concludes that "there is indeed some overlap between synchronistic and psychic correspondences, but the overlap is not total. There are some synchronistic correspondences that are not psychic, and there are some psychic correspondences that are not synchronistic" (p. 183). Palmer's contribution continues with a discussion of the theories used to explain synchronicity and psi, and ends by addressing the issue of whether synchronicity can be tested empirically by suggesting a collaborative research approach testing whether deliberate archetypal activation prior to a psi task (that also meets criteria for synchronicity) is reflected in better psi scoring.

Part V, "New Conceptions in Synchronicity," leads the reader into novel territory with contributions by Lila Gatlin, Joseph Cambray, and George Hogenson. Drawing upon information theory, Gatlin introduces the idea of evaluating synchronicity (and to some extent, psi phenomena) from the perspective of meaningful information creation (as contrasted with information transmission or causality). She states, "we may regard the process of meaningful information creation in the real world as the expression of a symmetry principle which complements and completes the second law of thermodynamics and operates through the mechanism of meaningful coincidence, or synchronicity" and goes on to note that "meaningful coincidence is the basis of all life, and is in essence Darwin's (1889) evolutionary principle" (p. 200).

Cambray introduces another perspective in his analysis of synchronicity in light of complex adaptive systems (CAS), an idea stemming from the work of Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine and related exploration of chaos and complexity theories. Cambray notes that CASs have "emergent properties,' that is, self-organizing features arising in response to environmental, competitive pressures" (p. 217). He extends this view to the clinical setting, suggesting that "synchronicities can be explored as a form of emergence of the Self and have a central role in individuation or psychological maturation...." (p. 219), and goes on to provide clinical examples of synchronicities arising at "the edge of chaos and order" (p. 224).

Building upon ideas related to self-organizing systems and the work of Harvard linguist George Kingsley Zipf, Hogenson proposes that synchronicity does not lend itself to statistical testing because it is best understood in terms of power law analyses, which have been applied to "a wide variety of phenomena, from ion transfers in the brain, to word frequencies in text, to volcano eruptions and earthquakes" (p. 238). He states, "Jung's entire system, insofar as it is a system based on the nature and function of the symbol, can be viewed as a continuum of self-similar (i.e., fractal) structures, distributed along a power law distribution. Furthermore, the variant elements of the system, namely the association, the complex, the archetype, the synchronistic event and the emergence of the Self, become evident as the system transitions through a series of self-organized critical moments that result in phase transitions within the symbolic system as a whole" (p. 241). According to Hogenson's theory, it is at moments of "symbolic density" that phase transitions and synchronicities manifest.

In Part VI, "Summing Up Synchronicity," Storm concludes the book with summary chapters on "Synchronicity, Science, and Religion," "Archetypes, Causality, and Meaning," and "Synchronicity and Psi."

Storm's final chapter brings us back to the "synchronicity debate." Following up on Palmer's paper, Storm questions whether a test of pure telepathy is even possible, given the possible confound with clairvoyance. He then goes on to build a case underscoring the importance of

recognizing possible shared underpinnings between synchronicity and psi. For example, he discusses the confound of “displacement” to meaningful (but incorrect) targets in psi research, drawing a parallel to the meaning associated with synchronistic events, and suggests controlling for this by “[allowing] participants to preselect meaningful items over meaningless ones, and then [testing] their psi capacity to generate hits within the meaningful set only” (p. 280). He adds, “if psi were regarded as synchronicity, and tested as such, things might start to improve for parapsychology” (p. 281).

Storm also reports intriguing research by Norman Don and his associates, who applied signal processing techniques to psi datasets and noted “periodicities in the correlation of guesses with targets” (p. 283), which they termed “correlation waves.” Storm interprets these correlation waves (which according to Don “seamlessly joined the beginning and end of the experiments” (p. 284) and “[were] present throughout the entire structure of the data” (p. 286) as evidence for archetypal involvement “once again indicating a common factor shared by synchronicity and psi” (p. 287). Storm also suggests that since these correlation waves reflect both hits and misses they cannot be the simple consequence of egoic volition, per se, but rather, they reflect “activation of the totality of the Self system” (p. 287). (However, there are other possible interpretations as well—one possibility presumably being that the correlation wave could be a reflection of the multiple sources of intention in an experiment—including experimenter and participant effects.)

Storm’s book concludes with an appendix containing an interesting discussion of a somewhat unorthodox series of *I Ching* studies that he conducted with Michael Thalbourne in which they explored whether having participants “preselect 16 two-word descriptors out of the complete set of 64 descriptors that corresponded to 64 *I Ching* readings” (p. 293) was associated with a greater frequency of attaining hexagrams corresponding to the pre-selected descriptors. Significant effects were noted in two of six studies, with the “overall trend [being] towards above-chance hitting” (p. 294). Storm interprets these mixed findings in light of possible confounds related to not meeting sufficient criteria for synchronicity to manifest.

If it is not already apparent, the reader should be aware that much of the discourse in Storm’s book centers on how various perspectives agree or deviate from the Jungian perspective. Since the term synchronicity was, after all, coined by Jung, this should perhaps not come as a surprise. However, it is worth noting that we are still in the infancy of understanding the factors that may be at play when meaningful coincidences occur, and that Jung and Pauli’s conceptualization, while certainly impressive, is one theory. For example, it may be that meaningful coincidences and psi phenomena are telling us something fundamental about the nature of consciousness and the structure of what we call reality, that goes beyond

archetypes, and (as acknowledged by Storm) may not be strictly acausal. In this light, the question of whether psi phenomena meet Jung's requirements for "synchronicity," albeit theoretically interesting, becomes somewhat of a moot point. A more relevant question would be the broader issue of whether psi phenomena and meaningful coincidence experiences reflect the same or related phenomena. Of course, this is not to suggest that the discussions regarding synchronicity and psi in Storm's book cannot be applied to this broader discussion; indeed they can, and by exploring such fundamental ideas as causality, meaning, and intentionality, they shed light on important issues to consider.

In the end, Storm has provided an excellent exploration of meaningful coincidence as contrasted through the lens of Jung and Pauli's theory of synchronicity. He also provides several interesting ideas for how a consideration of Jungian requirements for synchronicity might be applied to potentially enhance psi effects in research. His book is a must read for the serious thinker in this field, and he has done his readers a tremendous service by compiling these wonderful papers together in one volume.

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