

# SYNCHRONICITIES, OR MEANINGFUL COINCIDENCES

*From a Martinist Manuscript*

People have always noticed that certain events of their existence are not due to pure chance. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the theory of cause and effect, characterized in particular by the duality of subject/object, was used as a reference to explain these events sometimes ascribed to chance, for lack of a better explanation. But very quickly, they found that this theory was not satisfactory to understand those that could not be linked to an apparent cause.

Much research has been conducted on events that cannot be explained by chance or by the principle of causality, and important literature has been published on the subject. New thought patterns have emerged recently, particularly in the field of quantum physics. Most argue for the uniqueness of the universe. Thus, where we once thought to find atoms, there are actually only energy fields and a wave function that is sometimes localized in the form of particles. The distinction between matter and energy, in which the physics of the nineteenth century developed, has been increasingly abandoned. We also know now that emptiness is not a space devoid of matter, but that it contains a potentiality from which particles emerge. In short, several theories have been developed to better understand not only the behavior of the infinitely small in quantum physics, but also that of complex systems in nature and significant coincidences or synchronicities in everyday life. We therefore came to the conclusion that the entire universe contributes to the appearance of each event. It is in this context that Carl Gustav Jung, MD, the famous Swiss psychiatrist, formulated the theory of synchronicity to explain the significant coincidences that he himself had experienced, and this well before the current theories.

If we were to consult an older dictionary to understand the meaning of the word “synchronicity,” we might be surprised to find that this word does not appear there. However, we should find the words “synchronism” and “synchronous.” This is because the concept of synchronicity was created in the middle of the twentieth century by Carl Jung, who used it in a very specific sense that we will explain later.

The word “synchronicity” consists of two Greek terms: *syn*, which means “together,” and *khronos*, which means “time”: the two together meaning “that which occurs at the same time.” In other words, these are two events that occur simultaneously, that is to say, a coincidence. If it were just that, why is the term “coincidence” not used to describe this type of event?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that the word “synchronicity” is a neologism that conveys a very precise meaning, according to Jung’s understanding. Indeed, according to him, “synchronicity is the connecting principle between our psyche (that is, our soul) to an external event where we feel in communion with others and with the universe. It is therefore a descriptive expression to link two events which are so, not by a cause and an effect, but by their mutual meaning.”

This concept created by Jung has been enriched over the years with the contribution of new sciences that have led to the development of more recent theories, such as “the butterfly effect” and that of “chaos,” to which we will refer later. There has also been significant research conducted by several psychologists. Psychologist Jean-François Vézina, in his book entitled *Necessary Chances*, gives the following definition of the word synchronicity:

“Synchronicity is a coincidence between an inner reality (subjective) and an external reality (objective) whose events are linked by meaning, that is, in a non-causal mode. This coincidence provokes in the person who lives it a strong emotional impact and demonstrates profound transformations. Synchronicity occurs during periods of impasse, questioning, or chaos.”

### ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT OF SYNCHRONICITY

Until the nineteenth century, the so-called “mechanistic” approach to reality prevailed. A fragmented form of thinking resulted from the fact that the scientific model of the time, still largely predominant at present, consists of divisions, of causality, and functions in duality, that is, the separation of subject/object, matter/spirit, observer/observed, time/space, etc. This sense of separation is imposed by the ego, because it thinks that it is in the separation, and it thinks that actuality is in the separation. In the paradigm or mechanistic model, nature has no intention, motivation, or even finality, but only transitive and mechanical causality processes.

Jung had an early idea of synchronicity after a meal with Albert Einstein around 1920, as indicated in the following quotation from Jung, from a correspondence with Carl Seelig:

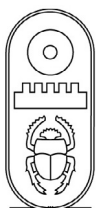
It was Einstein who first gave me the idea of a possible relativity of time and space that would be determined by the psyche. It is from this same first impulse that, more than thirty years later, my relationship with the physicist Pauli developed, as well as my theses relating to psychic synchronicity...

Jung developed the concept of synchronicity with his friend Wolfgang Pauli, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1945. This is the most complex concept that Jung developed. It was elaborated over several years and has been developed with impressive rigor. However, it has remained

unfinished, because the majority of people at the time, with a Cartesian mindset, were not prepared to accept a concept that had a greater spiritual connotation than scientific. Indeed, the principle of acausality proposed by Jung and Pauli to explain synchronicity, in complementarity with that of causality, did not shift the traditional scientific model where causality reigned supreme, and aroused many criticisms. The most acerbic critics saw synchronicity as just a subjective creation, done in an attempt to find significant symbols where, according to them, there were none.

In fact, if we take a retrospective look at the development of human thought in this area, we realize that the premises of the concept of synchronicity date back to an earlier period. Aristotle, philosopher of antiquity and disciple of Plato, thought that everything in nature had its utility. He also thought that there are four forms of causality of events occurring in nature, in a strictly linear pattern: material causality, efficient causality, formal causality, and final causality. Hippocrates, the founder of Greek medicine, said in his day that there are hidden affinities in the universe that allow for coincidences, thanks to mutual attraction. Pico della Mirandola, philosopher of the Renaissance, wrote that “there is a unity in things by which each is in agreement with all others.”

Paul Kammerer was the first to “dare” treat coincidences in a scientific way, before Jung. He spent entire days sitting in public places cataloging his observations to identify coincidences. His observations led him to develop a law known as the “law of series” published in 1919. According to Kammerer, there is a universal force that works to bring people, things, and events together; a force acting like gravitation, not only between the masses, but also between time and space. The law of series by Kammerer has fallen into oblivion, however it was one of the first attempts to address “scientifically” the phenomenon of



coincidences and understand some aspects of synchronicity.

In all these theories, an essential element was missing for the comprehension of coincidences that cannot be explained by causes that are intelligible to humans. This element is the signifying dimension or meaning, but also the spiritual dimension. It is on this point that Jung's merit is immense with his theory of synchronicity, a new term he carefully distinguished from synchronism in one of his works:

It is probably opportune to draw attention to a possible misinterpretation that the term synchronicity might give rise to. I chose it because the simultaneity of two events connected by meaning and not by causality appears to me as an essential criterion. I therefore use the general concept of synchronicity in the particular meaning of temporal coincidence of two or more events, without causal connection and charged with an identical or analogous meaning; this as opposed to "synchronism," which refers only to the simple simultaneity of events.

If Jung had not died in 1961, he could have experienced the emergence, in the mid-sixties, of the so-called "Butterfly Effect" and current approaches to chaos theory. These ideas have scientifically confirmed the validity of his theory, thanks in particular to Edward Lorenz's work on weather forecasts. According to this work, which currently requires the use of powerful computer modeling, reality does not consist of decomposable parts conforming to the principle of causality, but rather of patterns of behavior (called "Patterns" by the specialists) that bind together, according to levels and hierarchies by replication of the totality, in the manner of a hologram. These models of organization, based on the repetition of the initial motif, are faithful to the forms of nature and have allowed the emergence of new scientific concepts such as that of

fractal geometry. The fractal is a geometric form derived from the developments of chaos theory, which is at the heart of the current synchronistic worldview. It is a geometry in which we can find a small motif at the same time in both its details and in its totality. Let us note that this property of fractals has a curious similarity to that of the *sephiroth*, these swirls of energy, true archetypes of the mystical thought of Judaism that constitute the tree of life of Kabbalah. On the tree of life consisting of ten sephiroth, each *sephirah*, while having particular properties that characterize it, contains the power of the nine others. Thanks to computer science, chaos theory has also made it possible to highlight the agents responsible for this type of organization in complex systems. In the field of physics, these agents are referred to by the name of "attractors," whose role, according to Jung, can be likened to that of the archetypes of the collective unconscious responsible for synchronicity.

### **SYMBOLIC VALUES AND PRACTICAL USE OF SYNCHRONICITIES**

The natural activity of the collective unconscious in us is to produce archetypes, meaning symbols that can manifest in our lives in two complementary ways: either in the form of dreams during our sleep, or in the ordinary activities of life in the form of synchronistic events, especially at a time when we are going through a period of turbulence. In fact, there is an archetype for each of the universal experiences that we must go through as an individual, as this quotation from Jean-François Vézina reminds us:

Since the beginning of humankind, people have had a mother, a father, and have had to cross great passages of life: birth, the passage to adulthood, sickness, losses, finding a place in the community, and death. Each of these ancestral experiences has left its mark on the collective unconscious,

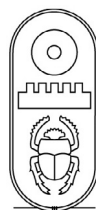
and most societies have the means to integrate them and restore them to consciousness. But since our Western societies offer fewer and fewer rituals to help us cross these great passages in life, the integration of archetypes can be problematic and can cause significant conflicts. Synchronicity then becomes by the force of things, a “royal door” open to the collective unconscious allowing us to be more aware of these archetypes.

When we go through these passages personally and have a synchronistic experience, we are inclined to further activate these archetypes. The definition of synchronicity indicates that events must be related to each other by meaning and not by cause. It is therefore appropriate to look for the meaning of coincidences rather than the cause. We must find out what dialogue we can maintain with ourselves and with life in relation to the synchronistic event. Synchronicities, especially synchronistic encounters, are creative experiences that we must integrate into our lives. They put us in touch with the wisdom of the collective unconscious. In this sense, archetypes are psychic nuclei, or “psychic attractors,” that influence the relationship of the self with the outside world and the inner world. They are sources of wisdom, certainly, but also sources of conflict when the individual experience has contributed to polarize them negatively, according to the experience of the person, because the archetype, just like the complex, operates under the sign of duality: positively or negatively.

The meaning that is required in synchronicity is not only subjective, because it has an observable effect, that is to say, it displays a strong emotional charge and reflects transformations in periods of transition and of questioning. The meaning of a synchronicity takes root at a deep level of the collective unconscious, at the level of what Jung calls the “objective psyche.” This is the deepest form of the

collective unconscious where the contents are all related to each other, thus forming an undifferentiated unity that would, so to speak, burst into consciousness during critical periods or transitional periods. It is never the external synchronistic event as such that carries meaning. The meaning is gradually woven into the course of history, in the way we decide to continue our life after this or that event. In a meaningful coincidence, meaning would come out of an impulse coming from the Self, that is, the archetype of meaning. It is as if, in a synchronicity, a dialogue was established between the “director” (the Self) and the “main character” of the story (the self). The latter can agree with the Self or refuse to follow the impulse coming from the Self. It is the availability of the self before the symbolic impulses of the Self that will determine the coherence of our synchronistic experience.

The psyche thus produces symbols and dreams just as naturally as nature produces flowers. Faced with this natural phenomenon, several attitudes are possible: we can pick the flower, breathe its fragrance, write a poem about it, or analyze its chemical properties, break it down, and try to clone it. The spontaneous creation of symbols by the Self unites our opposites and our tensions and is part of this natural movement of life that pushes us to open ourselves to the unknown and to continually seek to surpass oneself through creativity. We observe this creativity in nature that always seeks its way under the impulse of life’s vital force. This same force is at work in the psyche through symbols. The synchronistic event is not a sign that tells us to do something, like a pedestrian light that indicates whether we can cross the street or not. Synchronicity is rather a set of symbols that does not always imply a literal response to the impulse it causes. The synchronistic symbol is rather a signal that helps us to direct ourselves in life. The meaning of this symbol is therefore not well determined in its form. It is concretized by the experience that results from the



encounter and the unconscious challenge that tries to unravel. The meaning of a symbol prompts us to move, to question ourselves, and to choose an orientation, without showing us the destination or the place where the answer lies.

True synchronicity is transformative by essence, and its meaningful relationship occurs in a striking way, independent of the individual's own will and without them actually seeking it. If this is so, it is because its meaning operates more through emotions than through reason. One of the effects of meaningful coincidences or synchronicities is to open our consciousness to a greater perspective of oneself and of the world. The more we progress on the path of spirituality, the more our consciousness expands and the more likely we are to experience synchronicities. If we seek the meaning of a synchronicity, we will find no reasons, no logical causes, but a meaning, a direction based mainly on intuition.

The quest for meaning can become an obsession, while the meaning of a synchronicity has an almost exclusively irrational foundation. Moreover, the many coincidences in our lives are not all synchronistic. So, we need to be discerning, but also use common sense in the research on a synchronicity that is possibly intervening in the events of our life. As we have pointed out, the meaning of a synchronicity calls more upon the intelligence of our heart than on our reason. It is an intuitive message from the Self that is specifically intended for us at a given moment of our lives and that no one else can interpret for us. When someone tries to interpret a synchronicity for us, it is as if we were receiving a personal letter that would have been opened without our knowledge and whose terms would have been changed completely. Moreover, it is only through intuition, or even better by meditation on synchronistic symbols, that

the Self, our Inner Master, can reveal its meaning to us so that it can be integrated into our lives. In depth psychology, it is recognized that if we refute the meaning of a transformation, the unintegrated symbol takes the form of a symptom. We operate then according to a model characterized by inconsistencies of behavior vis-à-vis the norms of our society. This is an important aspect to consider in the process of individuation.

Integrating the information of a synchronicity is not an easy thing. This involves personal work and often requires giving up the certainty and comfort of a life sometimes perfectly ordered. Keeping a journal in which one notes the clues of synchronicity, just like a diary of dreams, can help us locate these subtle inclinations in our lives. By carefully noting the event, the effect it has on us, the context-related elements surrounding these coincidences and encounters, and meditating on them, we can more easily bring to light these messages from the psyche. Thus, in hindsight, we can observe how well existence synchronizes the events that will have an importance in our lives.

Synchronicity therefore implies a significant change in our conception of the world. It suggests the idea that we live in a world where everything is connected and, moreover, a world where events can be linked by meaning, and can be arranged without a cause.

This is what Rosicrucianism and Martinism have always taught by urging every member to maintain good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, because all of this reflects, in one way or another, on the whole universe.