Jung on Synchronicity and Yijing: A Critical Approach
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By

Young Woon Ko
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This book examines Carl Gustav Jung’s (1875-1961) theory of synchronicity and discusses the problem of philosophical sources and *Yijing* (the Book of Changes) that he brings to support his synchronistic principle. By way of the notion of synchronicity, Jung presents the significance of some human experience as unexplainable within the frame of scientific rationality and causality based on logical consistency. Jung asserts that in the phenomenon of synchronicity is a meaningful parallel between an outer event and an inner psychic situation causally unrelated to each other. Jung’s notion of synchronicity is a condensed form of his archetypal psychology, in which the preconceived pattern or the unconsciousness of the human psyche manifests itself. The synchronic event is a phenomenon developed in the unconscious depth of the mind, which is paradoxically made evident within the limit of the conscious mind. Jung theorizes that these ambiguous contents of the unconscious are difficult to be grasped in the conscious mind, because they cannot be verified simply as true or false. For the theory of synchronicity, Jung seeks to verify that paradoxical propositions can be both true and false or neither true nor false in a complementary relation between the opposites of the conscious and the unconscious. Jung argues that synchronistic phenomena are not the issue of true or false performed by the logical certainty of conscious activity but rather are events formed in the process of the unconscious in response to ego-consciousness.

In order to examine the validity of his principle of synchronicity, Jung appeals to the philosophical systems of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), Immanuel Kant (1742-1804), and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). For Jung, these philosophical sources of synchronicity support his criticism of the absolute validity of scientific rationality in which all obscure and paradoxical statements are eliminated in logical reasoning, and they clearly indicate the limitation of human knowledge based on scientific causality and logical reasoning. In contrast to the Newtonian-Cartesian mechanical model, which pursues the absolute knowledge of objective reality by way of which the subject-object and the mind-body dichotomy is formed, Jung’s model of synchronicity posits an interrelationship between these contrasting poles.
However, it is important to point out that in his development of his synchronistic principle, Jung adapts his reading sources sporadically so that some of his arguments become procrustean. In Kant’s critical philosophy above all does Jung’s philosophical source for sustaining his archetypal psychology and synchronicity culminate. Jung advocates for the spaceless and timeless outside human reason and sensory perception, as described in Kantian epistemology, as a source for the theory of synchronicity. Kant draws the border for the limits of human reason within space and time and develops the notion of the thing-in-itself as the spaceless and timeless beyond human knowledge, the noumenon. He solves the problems of any antinomy or paradox emerging in human perception and experience in phenomenon by returning to the logical of Aristotle (384-322 BCE), in which antithetical propositions are demarcated by the contrast of true and false. Although Kant’s notion of noumenon can support the principle of synchronicity, which is not grasped in sensate empirical data, Kant focuses on the limits of human knowledge and experience, so that he constructs no proposition about noumenon. In this fashion Kant’s noumenon distinguishes itself from Jung’s principle of synchronicity constructed by the balance of paradoxical elements.

For Jung, the issue of the empirical phenomenal world is the main factor for his analytical psychology based on experiential data and facts. It is in his culling of discrepant views from his philosophical sources for supporting his theory of synchronicity that Jung has difficulty in maintaining a consistent meaning of the phenomenon of synchronicity.

I examine Jung’s method of validity and his philosophy of science, which bring other philosophical and psychological concepts to support his principle of synchronicity, particularly Plato’s (427-347 BCE) idea of form, Leibniz’s monadology, Kant’s thing-in-itself, Schopenhauer’s notion of will, Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) dream interpretation, and Wolfgang Pauli’s (1900-1958) theory of modern physics. I explore how those reading sources verify Jung’s synchronistic principle and also point out their differences from Jung’s discussion of synchronicity. The purpose of citing the similarities and differences between Jung’s synchronicity and his reading sources is to clarify how Jung attempts to set his distinctive claim for synchronicity form his partial adaptation.

Jung’s synchronistic principle can be understood within a dynamic structure of time, which includes the past, the present, and the future. Given this view of time, Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenological method of time-consciousness becomes a key for understanding the time structure of Jung’s synchronicity. Jung’s view of time that is developed in the synchronistic principle can be clarified by way of phenomenological
time-consciousness, which is not the issue of time-in-itself but that of “lived experiences of time.” Husserl opposes the dualistic distinction between the phenomenon and thing-in-itself. To put it another way, he rejects the Kantian boundary of human knowledge by which one does not continue to practice one’s intentional activity to the given object but ascribes the object itself to the unknowable. For Husserl, all that is meaningful can be knowable to our intuition. The dichotomy of thing-in-itself and thing-as-it-appears (noumenon-phenomenon) is an illegitimate concession to dualistic metaphysics. In other words, thing-in-itself can result from the activity of human imaginative intuition in Husserl’s phenomenology.

The reason for opposing such dualism is closely related to the perceptive mode in the phenomenological method in which the present is not the atomic present but the present draws on the past and the future. This unified whole of time does not correspond to the timeless in the view of thing-in-itself. Unlike Kant’s way based on the rationalist tradition in the subject-object distinction, Husserl’s phenomenology, based on experience and intuition in the duration of time, can collaborate with Jung’s view of time.

The synchronistic moment that Jung presents is the phenomenon always involved in subjective experience and intuition, which are developed in the duration of time. The synchronistic phenomenon is not transcendent or the objective flowing of time-in-itself regardless of our subjective experience.

Finally, I examine Jung’s discussion of Yijing, one of the primary classics in the Chinese traditions, for his theory of synchronicity. I discuss the distinction between the two by pointing out the perspective of Yijing uncovered from Jung’s partial understanding. Then I explore how the organic model of Yijing can supplement Jung’s theory of the synchronistic relation between the psyche and the physical event by looking to the process of change in the development of time. Through his reading of Yijing, I also discuss Jung’s notion of the divine developed in the synchronistic principle.

Jung regards the images of yin-yang interaction developed in the text of Yijing as the readable archetype and the symbolic language of Yijing as driven from the archetypes of the unconscious. Yijing specifies the phenomena of changes that our ego-consciousness cannot grasp. In this fashion, within the text of Yijing is the principle of synchronicity by way of archetypal representation, which is prior to ego-consciousness. By focusing on a method of oracularity, Jung maintains that the hexagrams of yin and yang attained by the odd and even numbers formed by dividing the
forty-nine yarrow stalks or throwing three coins down together display the synchronistic relation between the participant’s psychic world and the physical world. This method of *Yijing* is conducted by emptying the ego-consciousness and drawing upon the dimension of the unconscious via archetypal representation. An encounter with a wider horizon of the mind can be explained as the process of self-cultivation in the East Asian tradition. Jung articulates this process as the process of individuation, or self-realization through the realization of a balance between the conscious and the unconscious. According to Jung, the phenomenon of synchronicity refers to the close connection between the archetypal vision of the unconscious and the physical event. Such a connection is not simple chance but rather is a meaningful coincidence.

In particular, Jung’s psychological interpretation of the divine clarifies the religious significance of the relationship between the human mind and the supreme ultimate developed in the *Yijing* context. Jung examines the human experience of God in the inseparable relation between the divine and the human unconscious. Jung’s discussion of the divine is developed by examining the archetypal process of the unconscious shown in the experience of synchronicity. The human experience of God, as an unconscious compensation in response to ego-consciousness, is the religious and theological motif that Jung brings into his discussion of synchronicity and archetype. That is, Jung’s notion of the religious self is derived from the experience of self-transformation, which is performed through the archetypal representation of the divine. In this sense divine nature is always known and constructed in-and-through the human mind.

From Jung’s perspective, God is God-within-the-human mind. Yet, Jung’s argument concerning God is different from the idea that God is the result of individual psychic phenomenon. Jung relates God to his notion of the collective unconscious of the human mind, which is beyond the personal dimension of the mind. Jung defines the divine character in relation to the universal and collective dimension of the human mind.

The definition of the Supreme Ultimate in the *Yijing* tradition has been often identified with non-religious form in the absence of divine character and transcendent reality. However, the concept of the Supreme Ultimate cannot be attributed simply to the non-religious tradition in terms of Jung’s interpretation of God experienced through the human mind of the unconscious. According to Jung the image of God through the unconscious represents the wholeness encompassing the contrasting poles of good and evil in their compensatory relationship. This can be an analogical model for developing the divine and religious image of the
Supreme Ultimate in the *Yijing* tradition, which represents the balance of the opposites through the yin-yang interactive process.

Yet, it is in his culling of discrepant views from his sources for supporting the theory of synchronicity that Jung has difficulty in maintaining a consistent meaning of the phenomenon of synchronicity. Jung’s concept of archetype as the a priori form of the human mind, which is the basis of synchronicity, shows a clear distinction from the central theme of *Yijing* as the principle of change and creativity in time and the empirical world. This distinction well represents the distinction between Jung in the Platonic and Kantian Western tradition and *Yijing* in the East Asian tradition in which ultimate principle is constructed in the dynamic process of the empirical world rather than the a priori.

In this sense Jung’s points of view about *Yijing* are formed through his theory of synchronicity rather than through actual usage of or an immersion into the *Yijing* cultural system. Jung’s application of *Yijing* into his argument of the timeless with his notion of archetype exhibits a theory-laden observation. This observation articulates his difference from the *Yijing* tradition based on the principle of change that posits great value to the time-factor of the phenomenal world.

Jung’s phenomenon of synchronicity ascribed to the representation of the archetype as a priori form can be seen as reductive in terms of *Yijing*, which posits the sources of various empirical data in the concrete phenomenon of change in the world. Also, Jung’s explanation of archetype itself has difficulty, consistent with his partial application of Kantian noumenon. While Jung argues the archetype as a priori form unknown to the empirical world, he also brings it into the synchronistic event, which Jung regards as an empirical phenomenon. In this regard the relation between ultimate principle and the empirical world developed in the *Yijing* tradition can intensify Jung’s attempt to draw the pattern of the archetype into the phenomenal world. To put it another way, ultimate principle or pattern formed in the interaction of human mind and nature in *Yijing* can become a model for the meaningful relation between the mind and nature that Jung argues in phenomena of synchronicity. Given this model of *Yijing*, Jung’s a-causal connecting principle and archetypal representation can be understood in a pattern constructed within the principle of change and creativity in the dynamic structure of time rather than from the point of view of a transcendent absolute form of knowledge beyond human experience.
In this chapter I introduce the principle of synchronicity in relation to the notion of the collective unconscious and explain how Jung identifies the synchronistic phenomena with an unconscious process of the human mind.

The Collective Unconscious, Instinct and Archetype, and Archetypal Images for the Theory of Synchronicity

Jung’s project on synchronicity as a meaningful coincidence dates from 1925 to 1939 during which he opened a series of seminars at the Psychological Club in Zurich. It is from this period that his theory of synchronicity becomes a major part of his analytical psychology, even though he only first publishes his essay On Synchronicity in 1951 and then revises it in 1952 with the name Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle.

With the notion of synchronicity, Jung attempts to show the archetypal process of the human psyche, which is driven from the a-priori form or primordial image deeply rooted in human unconsciousness. Jung argues that the depth of the psyche is closely associated with an outer event through the synchronistic moment. He maintains the following in his essay on Synchronicity:

If, therefore, we entertain the hypothesis that one and the same (transcendental) meaning might manifest itself simultaneously in the human psyche and in the arrangement of an external and independent event, we at once come into conflict with the convention of all scientific and epistemological views. . . . Synchronicity postulates a meaning which is a priori in relation to human consciousness and apparently exists outside man.
Jung focuses on the non-causal dimension of the human experience irreducible to the cause-effect system of mind and nature. Jung argues that the correspondence of the inner psyche to the outer event is performed by the archetypal representation derived from the collective unconscious, which is beyond the individual self. Therefore, the synchronistic phenomenon cannot be properly described by the causal relation between mind and nature according to traditionally-Western logical reasoning.

Jung’s notion of synchronicity is based on the concepts of collective unconsciousness, which is composed of instinct and archetype and the archetypal image; these elements are correlative with one another for the whole scheme of his psychology. According to Jung, collective unconsciousness refers to the deepest layer of the human psyche. It is given by birth and greatly influences one’s psyche in various ways without being recognized by one’s consciousness. Jung distinguishes this collective area of the unconscious from the personal dimension of the unconscious. The former, the “collective unconscious,” is shaped a priori and reveals universal phenomena throughout all humankind beyond time and space. The latter, based on particular experiences of individuals, refers to a dim state of the personal psyche (or memories), which have disappeared from ego-consciousness by being repressed and forgotten. Jung calls this “the personal unconscious.”

Although “collective” and “personal” are easily distinguished in their definitions, those two words convey a complex of meanings in describing the unconscious aspects of human experience. The notion of “the unconscious” indicates an obscure phenomenon not grasped in any conscious knowledge, so that it is very difficult to be described in a linguistic manner. In other words, whether the unconscious is the personal or the collective is not clearly distinct in our psychic experience.

From this meaning structure of the unconscious, Jung presents the concept of collective unconscious in an attempt to distinguish himself from Sigmund Freud and to establish his own psychological system. Jung writes the following about Freud’s description of the unconscious:

In Freud’s view, as most people know, the contents of the unconscious are reducible to infantile tendencies which are repressed because of their incompatible character. Repression is a process that begins in early childhood under the moral influence of the environment and continues throughout life. By means of analysis the repressions are removed and the repressed wishes made conscious.
Thus does Jung see Freud’s notion of the unconscious including the process of repression by the ego-consciousness. In a conflict between one’s situational limitation and infantile wishes, the repressed psychic contents remain unconscious, a situation which can also bring forth various types of symptoms and neuroses in the process of one’s wish-fulfillment. By regarding this Freudian notion of the unconscious as only part of what makes up the unconscious, Jung seeks to extend its meaning:

According to this [Freud’s] theory, the unconscious contains only those parts of the personality which could just as well be conscious, and have been suppressed only through the process of education. Although from one point of view the infantile tendencies of the unconscious are the most conspicuous, it would nonetheless be a mistake to define or evaluate the unconscious entirely in these terms. The unconscious has still another side to it: it includes not only repressed contents, but all psychic material that lies below the threshold of consciousness.  

Jung turns around the relation between the conscious and the unconscious through his criticism of Freud. He maintains that the realm of the unconscious does not originate in the deposit repressed from the conscious but rather the conscious sprouts from the unconscious. Of course, this turning point does not suggest Jung’s overall denial of Freud’s notion of the unconscious. Jung is greatly influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytical method and develops his major psychological concepts within the context of his discussion about Freud, who elaborated the correlation between ego-consciousness and unconsciousness in a scientific manner. Jung affirms and advances Freud’s idea that the unconscious emerges in person’s fantasy, lapse of memory, neurosis, and symptoms, the expressions of which also appear in the person’s dreams. Yet, Jung’s dissatisfaction with Freud’s method occurs at the point where Freud reduces all the sources of the unconscious to the contents of the infantile wish repressed from the conscious and focuses on those contents in terms of the instinctual drive. It is from this criticism that Jung posits the presence of the unconscious that encompasses the deeper level of the human psyche, which Jung calls the collective unconscious.

The psychic contents of the collective unconscious are based upon non-sensory perceptions. Jung’s collective unconsciousness includes archaic vestiges inherited from ancestral experiences and thus directly unknown to the percipient’s experience. Jung differentiates the collective from the personal unconscious as follows:
The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity.\textsuperscript{6}

Jung’s exploration of the psychical dimension outside the phenomenal world limited in time and space is based on his assumption of the collective unconscious. According to Jung, the scope of consciousness is narrow in comparison with that of unconsciousness. Human consciousness functions simply with some contents in a given situation but does not embrace the whole feature of the psyche. These contents of the collective unconscious are commonly found at a deep level of the psyche throughout all of humankind.\textsuperscript{7}

The contents of the collective unconscious, therefore, become the source of the production of mythical and religious motifs with the non-rational dimension of the human experience. Jung attempts to derive the concrete and immediate features of the psyche from the notion of the collective unconscious. From his perspective, rationality results from the process of abstract reasoning from psychic data grasped in consciousness.

Jung introduces and employs the concepts of the collective unconscious in \textit{Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido} in 1912 (translated as \textit{The Psychology of the Unconscious}), which is later revised under the title \textit{Symbole der Wandlung} in 1952 (\textit{Symbols of Transformation}). According to Jung, creative fantasy is continually engaged in producing analogies to instinctual processes in order to free the libido from sheer instinctuality by guiding it toward analogical ideas.\ldots The libido has, as it were, a natural penchant: it is like water, which must have a gradient if it is to flow. The nature of these analogies is therefore a serious problem because, as we have said, they must be ideas which attract the libido. Their special character is, I believe, to be discerned in the fact that they are archetypes, that is, universal and inherited patterns which, taken together, constitute the structure of the unconscious.\textsuperscript{8}

By using the metaphor “water” for the flow of libido, Jung brings the character of perceptual direction to the psychic structure. Libido is the energy producing the psychic quality that transmits the unconscious
contents (such as creative fantasy or imagination) into the conscious. This process of libido is not developed simply in a repetitive and quantitative pattern but in a specific way as in the direction of water-flow. Libido does not mean the phenomenon of energy that manifests simply quantitative character. As Volney Gay makes the difference between energy and libido, “it [energy] is purely quantitative and relative, not qualitative and particular. Yet libido has special negative qualities (need, displeasure, unlust) and special positive qualities (pleasure and satisfaction).” Libido refers to the particular character of the psyche with qualitative energy that shows one’s own inclination. Jung attempts to connect the notion of libido with archetype by indicating that the libido is not driven only by the instinctual dimension. According to Jung libido per se is deeply rooted in archetype as the a-priori form of the psyche.

Archetype is the ultimate factor of the unconscious that brings the libidinal flowing into the specific form of the psyche. While instinct means behavior itself appearing in its natural process, archetype is the a-priori form of instinct itself or self-recognition of instincts. To put it another way, Jung maintains that archetype is a form of idea or pattern leading instinctual energy. In this definition of archetype, libido refers to the psychic process developed in archetypal structure, which links instinctual elements with a particular pattern.

Both instinct and archetype for Jung are the elements comprising the collective unconscious. These two are not personally acquired but inherited factors in the structure of the unconscious. Yet, while instinct is concerned with all unconscious behavior and physiological phenomena as the basic process of human existence, archetype is defined as the phase prior to instinct. In other words, archetype is concerned with one’s own idea, perception, and intuition formed in the deep level of the unconscious. Jung supposes that the archetype is the fundamental root providing the psychic experience with a certain character in a definite fashion. The relation between archetype and instinct is as follows:

We also find in the unconscious qualities that are not individually acquired but are inherited, e.g., instincts as impulses to carry out actions from necessity, without conscious motivation. In this “deeper” stratum we also find the a priori, inborn forms of “intuition,” namely the archetypes of perception and apprehension, which are the necessary a priori determinants of all psychic processes. Just as his instincts compel man to a specifically human mode of existence, so the archetypes force his ways of perception and apprehension into specifically human patterns. The instincts and the archetypes together form the “collective unconscious.”
Thus is the relation between archetype and instinct not antagonistic but correlative in the constitution of the collective unconscious. Psychic energy such as creative fantasy and imagination should be considered the transformation of instinct in the innate form of archetype. “Both (instinct and archetype) are real, together they form a pair of opposites, which is one of the most fruitful sources of psychic energy. There is no point in driving one from the other in order to give primacy to one of them.”

In this manner Jung accentuates the complementary relation between instinct and archetype as aspects of the collective unconscious.

Whereas instinct can be known scientifically in the disciplines of physiology or neurology in relation to the body-ego, according to Jung, the character of archetype as the unknown reality is not grasped in our perception. Jung writes that “even if we know only one at first, and do not notice the other until much later, that does not prove that the other was not there all the time.” Jung’s statement indicates that our archetypal knowledge cannot be identified with the physical world. He argues that archetype cannot be grasped by our knowledge and understanding; archetype is not known in itself but represented in different images of our life.

In an attempt to distinguish the quality of archetype from instinct, Jung uses metaphors of color.

The instinctual image is to be located not at the red end but at the violet end of the colour band. The dynamism of instinct is lodged as it were in the infra-red part of the spectrum, whereas the instinctual image lies in the ultra-violet part. If we remember our colour symbolism, then, as I have said, red is not such a bad match for instinct. But for spirit, as might be expected, blue would be a better match than violet. Violet is the ‘mystic’ colour, and it certainly reflects the indubitably ‘mystic’ or paradoxical quality of the archetype in a most satisfactory way.

The reason the color of violet as a metaphor helps to understand archetypal images is the fact that it is not at the same level as other colors but rather is the color encompassing several other colors. While “red” or “blue” refers to a distinctive color, “violet” consists of the combination of such colors, thereby becoming analogous to the paradoxical images of archetype. With reference to this quality of colors, Jung uses another metaphor, ultra-violet, to suggest the invisible portion of the spectrum beyond the color of violet, archetype itself. Just as ultra-violet shows the character of the meta-color (i.e., color of colors), so is archetype itself the ultimate form prior to the differentiation between mind and body or spirit and instinct.
Jung’s use of violet as a metaphor is not a perfect fit for archetypal image. Whereas archetypal image is driven from the a-priori form of our experience, violet comes from the a-posteriori form that results from the mixture of different colors. Despite this difference Jung characterizes violet as the color that receives other colors, rather than as to the name for a particular color.

Violet is a compound of blue and red, although in the spectrum it is a colour in its own right. Now, it is, as it happens, rather more than just an edifying thought if we feel bound to emphasize that the archetype is more accurately characterized by violet, for, as well as being an image in its own right, it is at the same time a dynamism which makes itself felt in the numinosity and fascinating power of the archetypal image.

As violet appears in some combination of different colors but is not simply definable for its color itself like red or blue, so archetypal representation is expressed in diverse images of the phenomenal world but not easily grasped by our perception. In this manner, we cannot define archetype per se, which is not simply located in our perception. Archetype is represented by paradoxical features rather than clear-cut contents of a concrete notion.

Because the archetype is a formative principle of instinctual power, its blue is contaminated with red: it appears to be violet, again, we could interpret the simile as an apocatastasis of instinct raised to a higher frequency, just as we could easily derived instinct from a latent (i.e., transcendent) archetype that manifests itself on a longer wave-length. Although it can admittedly be no more than an analogy, I nevertheless feel tempted to recommend this violet image to my reader as an illustrative hint of the archetype’s affinity with its own opposite. The creative fantasy of the alchemists sought to express this abstruse secrete of nature by means of another, no less concrete symbol: the Uroboros, or tail-eating serpent.

Jung maintains that archetype refers to the symbolic phase of the pre-ego status, which is unknown to human consciousness. Through the example of the uroboros, Jung defines archetype as the non-differential feature and the wholistic image of the universe before the emergence of the ego. This means that archetype is not a certain stage of the ego-development but affects its whole stages. By way of this, archetype refers to the united form between individual and the collective, the psyche and the physical event, the subject and the object, the human being and nature. These opposite characters can become antagonistic in their separation by the emergence of the ego-consciousness but paradoxically united and
undifferentiated in the archetype.

According to Jung, the archetype itself is distinguished from archetypal representations. Like the invisible character of ultra-violet, archetype is the non-differential or “irrepresentable” form.

The archetypal representations (images and ideas) mediated to us by the unconscious should not be confused with the archetype as such. They are very varied structures which all point back to one essentially “irrepresentable” basic form. The latter is characterized by certain formal elements and by certain fundamental meanings, although these can be grasped only approximately. The archetype as such is a psychoid factor that belongs, as it were, to the invisible, ultraviolet end of the psychic spectrum. It does not appear, in itself, to be capable of reaching consciousness. I venture this hypothesis because everything archetypal which is perceived by consciousness seems to represent a set of variations on a ground theme.18

While the archetype itself is defined as a psychoid factor, which is invisible and undifferentiated in “the psychic spectrum,” archetypal images are mediated to our experience through a variety of features in the flow of libido. Archetype itself indicates the realm beyond our knowledge and understanding. On the other hand, archetypal images and ideas refer to the various features of the archetype represented through the mediation of the unconscious.

At this juncture Jung argues that the synchronistic phenomenon is rooted in collective unconsciousness and therefore should be understood as archetypal representation. Because the synchronistic event is formed through archetypal representation, it is not a simple chance occurrence but should be regarded as a significant phenomenon of psychic experience. The correspondent relation between the inner psyche and outer events does not mean a simple parallel of unrelated phenomena, but rather that an archetypal representation is revealed in actual life. In this respect Jung examines the notion of synchronicity with “absolute knowledge of the unconscious.” That is to say, Jung attributes the source of the meaningful synchronistic relationship between mind and nature as an expression of the absolute knowledge, the archetype, which we cannot constitute in our consciousness.

The synchronistic event is initiated by compensatory needs of the human psyche. In other words, the synchronistic phenomenon is closely associated with the collective unconscious, the repressed personal unconscious, or even the conscious orientation by the compensatory relation between the conscious and the unconscious to keep a balance between each. The process of compensation takes place in the relation
between the conscious and the unconscious, whereby the unconscious keeps contents that the conscious does not grasp. For instance, when the conscious is extremely rational, the unconscious stores emotional aspects that the conscious denies.

The synchronistic phenomenon emerges by the entrance of the unconscious contents into the conscious in the compensatory relation. Jung offers an example of the synchronistic experience.

My example concerns a young woman patient who, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably ‘geometrical’ idea of reality. . . . She had had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab—a costly piece of jewellery. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. . . . I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (Cetonia aurata), whose gold green colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, ‘Here is your scarab.’

Jung attempts to make a meaningful parallel between the scarab events happening in different situations in which one (dream state) compensates the other (Cartesian ego) by showing the content of dream realized in the actual event. The compensatory relation developed in the opposite pole to the patient’s rationalism is practiced in a non-causal event by the relation between the dream contents and the physical events.

For this compensatory relation, Jung notices the fact that, while the patient talked about the scarab event in her dream, the physical scarab actually appeared at the window. This fact is synchronous in terms of clock time. On the other hand, the patient’s dream case and actual event are not synchronous because of the distance of time between the dream event and the actual event. Robert Aziz says that “even though the intrapsychic state and the objective event may be synchronous according to clock time and spatially near to each other, the objective event may, contrary to this, be distant in time and/or space in relation to the intrapsychic state.”

According to Jung, the relation between the intrapsychic state and objective event, whether it is simultaneous or distant in time, is a meaningful relation by the double emergence of the scarab in both the unconscious (i.e., dream state) and the conscious (i.e., talking about it).
For Jung’s theory of synchronicity, this scarab event functions as a symbol for the balance between the patient’s unconscious and conscious state. The connection between the dream state and the actual event is neither causal nor rational in logical reasoning but leads the patient to a new phase by bringing out the non-rational emotion repressed by her extreme rationalism.

Another example for synchronicity, with regard to clairvoyance, is shown in Jung’s citing Kant’s description of Swedenborg and the Great Fire of Stockholm in his second Zofingia Lecture in 1897:

A classic example of clairvoyance, which has been authenticated by reliable historical sources, is cited by Kant in his letter about Swedenborg, to Frulein Charlotte von Knobloch. In his letter Kant describes how Swedenborg, while he was in Gothenburg, had a clairvoyant vision of the great fire which took place in Stockholm in 1756, and how hour after hour he reported to the horrified public the progress of the fire. All this happened on a Saturday evening, and it was not until the evening of the following Monday that a messenger arrived in Gothenburg on horseback bringing the news from Stockholm. A number of skeptics, in order to come up with a natural explanation of this extraordinary event, actually went so far as to accuse Swedenborg of having set the fire himself!

By bringing Kant’s issue of Swedenborg’s clairvoyant experience to his approach to the noumenon outside perception, Jung argues that the vision of the Stockholm fire is associated with the depth of the human psyche, which is connected with physical event. For Jung, while our knowledge is limited to the causal law of space and time, we can experience the noumenon beyond time and space through our psyche.

What Jung emphasizes in Swedenborg and the Stockholm fire is, above all, that a physical event has to do with the observer’s psychic vision, which is unfettered from causality. The parallel between the inner psyche and outer event emerging at a distance in time is causally unrelated, thereby implying that one’s imaginary vision can be beyond any time-space bound. For Jung this event of the Stockholm fire is an archetypal representation of the psyche and shows the psychic relativity of time and space in the unconscious.

Jung’s explanation of the synchronistic event has many entangled aspects in the unclear meaning of the term “synchronicity” and his obscure distinction between archetype in the timeless and spaceless and archetypal images in the phenomenal world. This vagueness of the synchronicity theory is often found in Jung’s ambivalent statements. We read the following explanation by Jung of the types of synchronistic events:
1. The coincidence of a psychic state in the observer with a simultaneous, objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content (e.g., the scarab), where there is no evidence of a casual connection between the psychic state and the external event, and where, considering the psychic relativity of space and time, such a connection is not even conceivable.

2. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding (more or less simultaneous) external event taking place outside the observer’s field of perception, i.e., at a distance, and only verifiable afterward (e.g., the Stockholm fire).

3. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding, not yet existent future event that is distant in time and can likewise only be verified afterward.²³

Jung does not necessarily identify the synchronistic phenomenon with the simultaneous occurrence of a psychic state and a physical event. Jung includes not-yet emergent but anticipated events with respect to the inner psychic situation in the category of synchronicity. This is why Jung writes in his essay *On Synchronicity* in 1951 that “in groups 2 and 3 the coinciding events are not yet present in the observer’s field of perception, but have been anticipated in time in so far as they can only be verified afterward. For this reason I call such events *synchronistic*, which is not to be confused with *synchronous*.”²⁴ At the same time, however, in the new version of his essay *Synchronicity* in 1952, Jung makes the contradictory statement that “synchronistic events rest on the simultaneous occurrence of two different psychic states” as in simultaneity of a clock-time framework.²⁵

Therefore, Jung’s synchronicity theory does not clearly make a set of formulas or rules by way of which we can put a certain phenomenon into a specific model. As Jung differentiates “synchronistic” from “synchronous,” the synchronistic model does not always mean the simultaneously corresponding state in clock time between the psychic state and the external event. Jung’s various explanations under the name of synchronicity show that the synchronistic moment is defined as some complicated phenomenon unexplainable by the causal law of the phenomenal world.

Jung’s inconsistent descriptions of synchronicity pertain to the problem of the time-factor. To put it another way, the problem that Jung’s argument of synchronicity is faced with is linked with his notion of time developed in the intermixture of the archetypal level of time (i.e., the relativity of time) and the conscious level of time (i.e., clock time). The different statements on the meaning of synchronicity originate in his vague
distinction between archetype itself and its images in our empirical world. In other words, Jung assumes the relativity of time or the timeless in the realm of archetype beyond the phenomenal world and focuses on archetypal images. Yet he also applies the concept of archetype in the physical time of the phenomenal world’s clock. As Aziz points out,

Accordingly, just as Jung’s failure to distinguish consistently the archetypal image from the archetype was the source of endless confusion, so too is Jung’s blending of the conscious and unconscious levels in his discussion of the synchronicity concept a serious obstacle to understanding, and not just for his reader, but for Jung himself. This is particularly evident . . . with Jung’s discussion of the time factor.26

If archetype is unknown, the question is how we know archetypal representation or imagination by way of which the synchronistic phenomenon occurs. A paradoxical issue is that archetype as the timeless is represented in time. At the same time that the unknown realm of archetype is psychically imaginable in our time and space, Jung sets up the synchronicity theory to dissolve the cause-and-effect bind in the phenomenal world.

The problem of not being explained well in a unified frame is also found in another factor related to synchronistic events. Jung maintains that the synchronistic event can result from the conscious orientation of the subject regardless of unconscious contents. This type of synchronistic phenomenon is characterized by “the conscious orientation of the subject around which the compensatory synchronistic activity centers.” 27 For example, a person named Henry Fierz notes the following in his meeting with Jung:

Jung had read the book and he thought that it should not be published, but I disagreed and was for publication. Our discussion finally got rather sharp, and Jung looked at his wristwatch, obviously thinking that he had spent enough time on the matter and that he could send me home. Looking at his watch he said: “when did you come?” I: “At five, as agreed.” Jung: But that’s queer. My watch came back from the watch-maker this morning after a complete revision, and now I have 5:05. But you must have been here much longer. What time do you have?” I: “It’s 5:35.” Whereon Jung said: “So you have the right time, and I the wrong one. Let us discuss the thing again.” This time I could convince Jung that the book should be published.28

Jung’s compensatory reaction to his previous opinion is caused by totally unrelated events (i.e., the publication of a book and the wrong time), the connection of which is made by the conscious orientation of the subject.
Jung puts such an event into the theory of synchronicity by suggesting that one consciously transforms two unrelated events into a meaningful relation.

**The Synchronistic Model in a Weak Sense**

In these different kinds of synchronistic phenomena and explanations, the synchronicity theory is not used in a “strong sense,” in which we can anticipate its phenomenon in a fixed rule. In this respect, then, the synchronistic model is used in a “weak sense.” For the distinction between a strong and weak use of “model,” Gay writes that when it is used in a strong sense, “model” refers either to a set of interrelated concepts or mathematical propositions, or to an artificial object which is designed to duplicate the essential features of another object’s relationship to its environment. . . . When it is used in a weak sense, the term ‘model’ refers to a high-level set of principles or theorems which organize and systematize lower level theorems and observations.  

Jung’s synchronistic model is used in a weak sense in that Jung attempts to make a close connection between non-casual events, and he hardly constitutes his theory logically or mechanically in a formula. As Gay indicates, “synchronicity refers only to those events that another age might call miracles. They must be events that one knows could not have any reasonable, causal connection.” In this regard the synchronistic model is dependent on our own interpretation of an actual event. In other words, the synchronistic event is not characterized in a determinate relation between the psyche and nature by way of which we can discern a specific phenomenon. By bringing two different and a-causal occurrences of the inner psyche and the outer event into a meaningful relation, Jung only attempts to set up a model of synchronicity.

In a weak sense, the term of synchronicity fails to refer to its original meaning, simultaneity. As Arthur Koestler points out, “one wonders why Jung creates unnecessary complications by coining a term which implies simultaneity, and then explaining that it does not mean what it means. But this kind of obscurity combined with verbosity runs through much of Jung’s writing.” Presenting the timeless and spaceless quality of archetype through the meaning of synchronicity, which refers to the concept of temporality, has a real limitation.

For the synchronistic principle, Jung brings the archetypal character as the timeless into his discussion of the unity between the inner psyche and external event, as the archetype per se indicates the undifferentiated
dimension of psyche and nature. “There is an inter-connection or unity of casually unrelated events, and thus postulates a unitary aspect of being which can very well be described as the *unus mundus*.\(^{52}\) Jung’s notion of archetype is based on the *unus mundus*, which means that there exists the one world prior to the distinction between psyche and nature. According to Jung, the *unus mundus* becomes a living reality that we experience in a psycho-physical continuum of archetypal events, the psychoid or non-differentiated state of the psychic and physical characters. The effect of the synchronistic event is to bring the psychoid state into our experience with the “essentially transcendent nature of the archetype as an arranger of psychic forms inside and outside the psyche.”\(^{33}\)

In this manner Jung’s theory of synchronicity based on the psychoid and archetypal patterning of events argues for the unity of the subjective mind and the objective event. Yet, the meaningful relation and complementation of causally unrelated events does not necessarily point out the mutual identity between them. In this regard Aziz states the following:

> They (causally unrelated events) are understood to give expression to the meaning of the constellated archetypal pattern in question, the two or more events are not identical in every aspect. Both are meaningfully related to each other, but the nature of their relationship is along the line of a type of mutual complementarity rather than that of mutual identity.\(^{34}\)

Although the synchronistic principle presumes the psychoid nature of archetype described as *unus mundus*, Jung’s explanation of the synchronistic phenomenon is not always dependent on the mutual identity of the psyche and nature or the *unus mundus*. Jung focuses on the interactive and compensatory relation in which the unconscious and the ego-consciousness respond to each other. Such interactive and compensatory relationship assumes that the unconscious and conscious are two different types of the psyche. In this sense, if the physical event in the synchronistic moment is associated with the projection of the unconscious, it should be distinguished from the ego-consciousness in order to make their compensatory relation. From this perspective, Jung’s notion of *unus mundus* may dilute the meaning of the compensatory relation dynamically developed in the difference between the collective unconscious and the ego-consciousness. In this context Aziz highlights that when causally unrelated events are considered in a meaningful relation, they should not be conceived of as the undifferentiated unity of psyche and nature. Synchronicity, in which the objective event is meaningfully related with one’s psyche in the a-causal relation, cannot be explained without
knowing one’s own unique context. In other words, the participant’s psychic situation in the synchronistic moment brings the meaningful relation to the objective event. The objective event can be interpreted in many ways according to the individual’s own interpretation.

Given this explanation of the synchronistic model, the assumption of psychoid archetype as a-priori given source is not necessarily required for the compensatory or meaningful relation between the psyche and nature. Even without the assumption of archetype, the synchronistic principle can be explained if it indicates that a person provides the occurring event with a meaning on the basis of a person’s own psychic compensation.

In other words the relation between causally unrelated events above all depends on an individual’s own psychic situation of high intensity according to which the physical event can be interpreted as synchronistic and thus meaningful. This phenomenon is evident in the example of one person’s deriving transcendent power for reacting to another person’s state of neediness: in this state one person “performs ego functions for another person who cannot perform them for himself or herself.”35 According to Gay,

Jungian theory takes the principle of synchronicity as a given and seeks to find explanations for it. I do not. . . . I propose to treat the concept itself as a highly condensed psychological event. I suggest that we interpret the concept as a rational theorem that denotes a state of need: it names a class of experience in which one needs to discover the existence of a new selfobject relationship.36

This statement suggests that the synchronistic experience is closely tied to the state of the self with the need for a new selfobject relationship in its recovery from the fragmentation of the self, that is, the failure of normal interaction of the self and its environment.

This observation about the selfobject clarifies such an occult phenomenon as the experience of the synchronistic moment by the narcissistic self. According to Heinz Kohut who developed self psychology, “The grandiose self expects absolute control over a narcissistically experienced archaic environment. The appropriate mechanisms—they belong to the aggression-control-power sector of the personality—are set in motion, in expectation of total dominance over the selfobject.”37 The narcissistic self has the archaic mode of experience in need of some transcendent power from its environment as the selfobject. This means that the synchronistic moment is constructed by the self-request to reinstate the relation of the self to its environment. Kohut continues,
Under certain anxiety-provoking conditions, then, the archaic need for support becomes so great that the omnipotent object will, regressively, arise out of the ego ideal and be, again, as it was once in early life, experienced as an archaic, prestructural, external power. Thus, it may happen that an individual at the very peak of psychological independence—when he lives in fact more actively and expresses the goals of his nuclear self more completely than the average human being can ever hope to do—believes that he has no initiative and feels himself ‘lived’ by influences from outside himself.  

From Kohut’s perspective, perceiving the omnipotent environment is connected with the state of the ego-ideal in which the self projects its archaic need into the external object. Advancing Kohut’s theory of selfobject, Gay argues that the synchronistic experience refers to a response to the fragmentation of “a self-selfobject relationship,” wherein the patient looks for fulfilling an emotional needful state to recover the disturbance of oneself (i.e., “narcissistic impairment”). Thus the patient is highly sensitive to an outer event and drives it to a meaningful relation according to psychic need or intensity, which also makes possible the occult experience, that is, the synchronistic moment. Gay points out that synchronistic events are strikingly parallel to selfobject transferences in that both exemplify a merger of oneself with another such that ordinary boundaries are dissolved: in union there is strength. This strength increases almost geometrically, it appears, as the number of participants increases. Two people engaged in an occult event, for example, a séance, may serve one another as selfobjects.

A perceived failure in the selfobject dimension of a relationship causes one to scan one’s emotional environment searching for a clue or sign from a transcendent power. That transcendent power is given the task of reorganizing the self and repairing the breach in it caused by the failure of the selfobject.

The transcendent power in a synchronistic moment comes up against the compensatory reaction to the needful state of the self in its unbalance of the self (i.e., fragmentation, disturbance), thus seeking balance by repairing the chasm with the selfobject. The synchronistic moment cannot be explained without highly condensed psychic situations in which one attempts to fulfill the state of need through the physical event and give it a meaningful parallel according to the psychic need and compensation. In this manner the physical event at the moment is not predetermined a priori through archetypal representation vis-à-vis one’s inner psychic situation.


but refers to the environment grasped and meaningfully interpreted in one’s psychic intensity. Therefore, the synchronistic phenomenon becomes closely associated with the moment of selfobject transferences by way of which the observer intimately parallels the objective event with the observer’s psychic situation.

In this fashion the synchronic phenomenon does not necessarily require the presence of the archetypal representation. Without the assumption of archetype, it is possible to explain the synchronistic phenomenon by way of the issues of ego-ideal and selfobject. The difficulty of Jung’s explanation of the synchronistic model lies in the fact that Jung himself fails to drive consistently into his theory of archetype a wide range of synchronistic phenomena, which emerge in the relation between one’s psychic situation and its environment.
Notes

1 Jung first introduces his notion of synchronicity in a 1928 seminar and then publicly addresses the notion in memory of Richard Wilhelm, the German scholar of Chinese tradition. In a series of seminars from 1925 to 1939, Jung presents a number of topics including Analytical Psychology (1925), Dream Analysis (1928-30), and Kundalini Yoga (1932). During this period, Jung also becomes interested in applying Asian thought to his analytical psychology.


3 We read the following in Jung’s original writing: “Eine gewissermaßen oberflächliche Schicht des Unbewußten ist zweifellos persönlich. Wir nennen sie das persönliche Unbewußte. Dieses ruht aber auf einer tieferen Schicht, welche nicht mehr persönlicher Erfahrung und Erwerbung entstammt, sondern angeboren ist. Diese tiefere Schicht ist das sogenannte kollektive Unbewußte. Ich habe den Ausdruck "kollektiv" gewählt, weil dieses Unbewußte nicht individueller, sondern allgemeiner Natur ist, das heißt es hat im Gegensatz zur persönlichen Psyche Inhalte und Verhaltensweisen, welcher überall und in allen Individuen cum grano salis die gleichen sind.” See Gesammelte Werke of C. G. Jung, ed. Lilly Jung-Merker, Elisabeth Ruf and Leonie Zander, vol 9i, Über Die Archetypen Des Kollektiven Unbewussten, (Olten und Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter-Verlag, 1968), 13, hereafter referred to GW with volume number for the German version of Jung’s Collected Works. According to Hull’s translation, “the personal unconscious” (das personaliche UnbewuBte) is “the superficial layer of the unconscious,” while “the collective unconscious” (das Kollektive Unbewußte) is universal by having “the contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals.” In other words, the realm of the personal unconscious cannot encompass all the layers of the unconscious. For Jung, the personal unconscious is rooted in and depends on the collective unconscious, which is inborn in a universal pattern of the psyche (“Dieses ruht aber auf einer tieferen Schicht, welche nicht mehr persönlicher Erfahrung und Erwerbung entstammt, sondern angeboren ist.”). See Jung, CW 9i, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1968), 3-4.


5 Ibid.

6 Jung, CW 9i, The Concept of the Collective Unconscious, 42.

7 Jung uses the term “Objectivitat” in order to describe the collective unconscious uncaught in the personal psyche. The collective unconscious is objective at the opposite meaning with the subjective, which constitutes one’s ordinary experience. In Jung’s original writing, we read: “Das kollective Unbewußte ist alles weniger