

Perspectives on Change I: Chaos and Language

In and Out of the Rabbit (W)hole

When experienced as part of a ritual education rather than a literal prediction or a moral allegory, the *xiang* or Symbol, the basic unit or Signifier of the language of Change, becomes what chaos people call a Strange Attractor: a centrifugal configuration in the imagination something like an inner whirlpool that pulls the seeming oppositions in our experience down into the turbulent and synchronistic chaos below. This Strange Attractor is a model of how the “holographic modeling capacity” of the archaic ritual education expresses itself, continually making and breaking symmetries. It precisely mirrors the *hole* or lack in our lives, the “missing information” that connects us to the (*w*)hole (Briggs and Peat). It is the logic that cuts its own throat. We can appropriate some of the imagery of chaos theory to help us understand how this strange language can work on us.

A Strange Attractor is a radical configuration of virtual space that arises out of the de-stabilization of an existing system of regularly alternating opposites. It is a fractal pattern: it holographically repeats at all levels and parts of a system, linking parts and the whole. This is what “holographic” means: each part is a complete expression that replicates the whole. Wherever you look in the language and structure of Change, from the largest to the smallest part, you will find this process at work.

Chaos theorists model a stable interactive system, a symmetrical kind of meaning or identity, as a Torus Ring: a doughnut shaped configuration of virtual space with two interconnected sine-wave cycles spiraling around it, like the interconnected waxing and waning of predator and prey populations. A Torus Ring arises out of the flux of phenomena as a sort of logic that stabilizes identity. In a Torus Ring the waxing of one cycle connects directly and regularly with the waning of the other. In Chinese thought this would be a model of what is called *hua*, gradual and basically predictable alternation, like day and night, systole and diastole, breathing in and breathing out. It organizes intelligence through a kind of dialectical thinking something like an “image-concept” in which thesis and antithesis regularly interact to produce a synthesis which in turn becomes the thesis of the next cycle.

However, if we add an Iterator to this system, a feedback loop that offers a continual mirroring and re-doubling of the system’s operation something very odd happens. Local areas of dissonance or disturbance begin to appear in the stable cycle: we begin to be “bothered” or “haunted” by things we do not quite understand. Through the continued action of the Iterator, this localized dissonance is mirrored and fed back into the system again and again, something like interrogating the symbols through divinatory questions or the strange “rippling” effect of the chains of mythic associations that move through a *Xiang*. Caught in this iteration, the Torus Ring destabilizes farther and farther until a critical point is reached. We go into a kind of identity crisis. The separate systems

composing the Ring (and our identity) fall apart, dropping us into “turbulence”. The ever deepening induction of this turbulence creates a sort of “hole” in virtual reality that acts like a whirlpool or magnet drawing everything that approaches it “down the magic rabbit (w)hole.”

In this turbulence, a fairly precise analogy to what the Daoists called the “fertile chaos”, all regular cycles of information exchange between the parts of a system fall apart. This means the “death” or end of a stable system’s existence, fragmentation and a broken mirror. This is the precise point at which the logic cuts its own throat.

However, at a certain point – and we do not know why - wave patterns emerge from an unknown center, the “circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere”, to quote a Renaissance image of God. The fragmented components begin to re-assemble in a strange new way. They spontaneously link, re-synchronize and re-double to produce and project a series of “carrying waves” that can literally pass through what we call “matter.” Chaos people call this kind of wave a Soliton, the imaginal equivalent of a tsunami. In Change it is a *Fu*, a gift or blessing that provides a “connection to the spirits that will carry you through”. This is what the Chinese called *bian*, a radical, sudden and quantum change of form that is quite unpredictable.

The whole process can be seen as a reflection of the old Daoist metaphysical paradigm: The Way (*Dao*) gives birth to the One (unity of experience); the One gives birth to the Two (a regular system of interacting opposites); the Two gives birth to the Three (the stable system with an Iterator added); the Three gives birth to the Ten Thousand Things (an infinite number of phenomena that each contain and carry the primal unity forward in a fractal or holographic form).

It has been said that the system or language of Change is a vast latent network of connections that can create “significance”, empower something to “signify” or release meaning only when it is activated by the “charge” given by an inquirer’s question and the emotional and individual “need to know” behind it. We can see how this language works in the interaction between the structure of Change (the Matrix or multidimensional system of diagrams), the Omen-words that the Matrix organizes and displays and the act of divination that activates the whole process.

The Matrix or System of Change is built on an extended fractal doubling or mirroring: It creates mirror symmetry on all levels 1) by doubling the kinds of lines and diagrams of which it is composed; 2) by doubling the literal world it ostensibly refers to in its “writing”; and 3) by doubling the inquirer’s sense of his or her situation in the world of its symbols.

An Asymmetrical Redoubling or Iteration is set in motion within the system structurally through 1) rotation of the diagrams themselves; 2) chiasmus, the inversion of certain numbers in a local sequence; and 3) displacement of the markers that should logically occur at certain places in the overall symmetry

implied by the Sequence. This iteration is itself redoubled as the Inquirer enters the symbolic world of the Response to the question he or she has posed.

Proliferating and dissonant amplification of this Iteration occurs through the multivalent meanings of the symbols and the chains of association they set off. This creates areas of local disturbance that are fed back into the system again and again, troubling the Inquirer's experience of him or herself and his or her projections onto the system.

This results in *huo*, a confusion or "tangling" of language, subjective identity and the world of experience. It is where a mysterious "someone", a euphemism for the creative spirit, is at work. This can be technically expressed as an emerging "intertextuality" of word, subject and world. The "words" or "markers" in such a language become Gates or Symbols connecting us to the imaginal world in ever multiplying and quite confusing ways.

A critical point is reached. The "subject" (person and topic) reflected in this Turbulent Mirror and the Mirror itself come apart. The Inquirer is led to see him or herself as a complex fiction that is synchronistically or holographically part of a greater fiction. A new kind of identity arises here, a sort of Dream-ego or Liminal Identity that is capable of being acted upon directly by the "spirits" (*shen*) called up by the symbols. Constellating this Dream-ego or Liminal, fictional Identity is a prime goal of all ritual process. It is the place of the *Ji*, the hidden triggers and infinitesimal beginnings that are the wellsprings of Change, what Jung called the psychoid level where psyche, matter and spirit interact. It is where we begin to "see-through" ourselves.

A "carrying wave" of potential arises from the psychoid levels as a result of this change in awareness. It acts on the Dream-Ego or Liminal Personality to re-configure and link the various parts of the disassembled identity, including parts that have been "shadowed or repressed, in a more efficacious (*shu*) manner.

The Inquirer "puts on" and "acts through" this new Liminal Identity like a mask. He or she re-enters the stream of events, related in an imaginal way, walking on a pathway that leads to and from what Eastern Sages call the Source of Being, the *Dao* or Way. This mysterious doubling and re-doubling of experience and the imaginal induction at its core is the place where we experience the "pre-rational verbal therapy" of a divination system, the *psychogogia* or leading-out of the soul that "seeks to produce and does in fact produce a real and effective change in the mind of one upon whom they act" (Lain Entralgo).