

THE RAMBU SOLO THROUGH THE LENS OF CHAOS THEORY

Bob Roan

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Robert.Roan@post.harvard.edu

What fascinated me about this topic was the concept of realms and boundaries. Realms let me think about the nature of space and time while boundaries let me think of chaos theory. I'm going to use Dr. Laura Grillo's paper to show how the Rambu Solo, a form of divination, both operates in a chaotic way and achieves its goal in a chaotic way.

I'll start by using a little relativity theory to imagine a parallel universe of objective psyche space-time, and then visualize dying as a pilgrimage between universes. Next I'll explain how the Rambu Solo, functioning as a chaotic operator, could open up the dying process to our participation by stretching out space-time in ways predicted by relativity theory. I'll finish by taking chaos theory into meaning, which I believe is the goal of the Rambu Solo.

One of the fundamental premises of Einstein's theories of relativity is that space and time cannot exist separately, but only together in what we call space-time. "What if" this is true in the mythological world and there is no such thing as just sacred space or sacred time. It would be impossible to be in sacred time and profane space or the other way around. There would be only sacred space-time.

Yesterday, we briefly discussed the idea of an objective psyche that surrounds us. Let's hold that concept, which I believe is a robust alternative to the assumption that the mythological realm is deep inside us. "What if" putting human nature at the center of this objective psyche is the manifestation of the same archetype that put the earth at the center of the universe? "What if" objective psyche space-time was created in the big bang and is as ubiquitous as the visible world?

If there is an objective psyche space-time equivalent to the profane space-time of the visible universe, the only place they can exist is in parallel.

If there are two parallel universes, then we should expect a visit from Eros, who will attract them to each other. This could be what Dr. Grillo was observing when she wrote of a mutual dependence between the living and the dead and the many different ways in which they are connected to each other through their involvement in the funerary rites.

The people of Toradja are simultaneously in two universes. They are in the sacred space of the Rambu Solo in the objective psyche universe as well as the profane space of every day life in our visible universe.

The "AND" concept from depth psychology becomes applicable. We have a tripartite structure of "me", the profane, "you", the sacred, and the "we" of the sacred AND profane.

The Toradja participate in this we of "sacred AND profane" through the Rambu Solo, which is the container for a pilgrimage from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. There are many similarities between pilgrimage and dying. For example, last month's pilgrimage presenters made a number of points which also apply to the Rambu Solo:

John talked about the importance of imagination on a pilgrimage. It's indispensable to the Rambu Solo,

Mara spoke of the mystery and lack of predictability in the pilgrimage. Dying has those characteristics as well, and

Liz came very close to calling pilgrimages journeys through liminal spaces, which is a good description of the boundary between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead.

How do we get into that liminal space so we can join the pilgrimage?

In the profane realm, deaths take less than one bed-minute, using the terminology of space-time. The space in which it occurs is a bed and a person goes from living to dead in less than a minute. One bed-minute is too tiny for us to do anything but observe.

The crux of the theories of relativity, which we started with, is that different observers of the same event report that it took a different amount of time and occupied a different amount of space.

“What if” this is what happens with the Toradja, for whom death takes about a village-year, which is hundreds of millions of times larger than a bed-minute and is big enough for our participation.

I believe Dr. Grillo’s paper identifies the Rambu Solo as the cause of this change when she tells us that “The cult establishes a new relationship to time and space...” If we look at what we know about rituals and what her paper tells us about the Rambu Solo, we see many similarities with chaotic dynamics.

Last week, we talked about rituals as builders of containers into which grace may come. “What if” the funerary rites of the Rambu Solo open up a bit of space-time in which they build a container into which grace comes? Then the funerary rites use that additional grace to open up a little more space-time into which a little more grace comes. And so on and so forth.

“What if” those are the iterations of chaos theory? Dr. Grillo’s paper uses the phrases “repeatedly reiterated in every invocation” and “repeating themes,” both of which also suggest patterns, another characteristic of chaos. She also describes another pattern, the belief that the afterlife is identical to the Toradja society, all the way to the social stratification. Good news for the status quo!

There are a number of other patterns, and a very significant one is the ladder, which is a prime candidate to be a strange attractor.

I’ve shown how the Rambu Solo operates in a chaotic way. Now I’ll explain how it achieves its goal in a chaotic way. Divination was described last week as a means of recasting experience to make meaning of chaos.

Dr. Grillo’s paper concludes by saying that “culture must triumph over the physical fact of death and the chaos that it threatens to impose.” I think the chaos that threatens is entropic chaos, the order that never returns. The triumph is in changing entropic chaos into deterministic chaos.

Relationship is key to transforming entropic chaos to deterministic chaos. The Rambu Solo is full of relationships. These relationships help people navigate the pilgrimage between life and after life. Instead of entropic chaos overcoming them, life begins to feel familiar again as patterns return, and the survivors reach the higher level of order which can characterize deterministic chaos when, as the paper says, “the dead is reconfigured as a significant entity.”