

Turning Inside Out and Outside In: The Anthropologist is “Mounted”

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I like this topic because it goes to one of the things about ritual that most fascinates me. How does ritual work? I’m going to use the idea of “entering” to explore both what is being entered and motion.

I’m going to build on “[The Rambu Solo through the lens of chaos theory](#)”, in which I used the funerary rites of the Rambu Solo to speculate about the nature of space and time and the way the ritual uses chaos.

In that paper, I postulated that there is an objective psyche space-time parallel to the profane space-time of the physical universe. I now imagine psyche as a collection of worlds of belief, among which I include the worlds of the living and the dead from the Rambu Solo. And I believe that the physical universe, instead of being in parallel with that collection, is part of it. It’s another world of belief.

This leads to a “world of belief” archetype, which has amazing possibilities. The one that I’ll follow looks for the archetypal in modern physics.

Let’s start by wondering if location is an archetype. I am “in” Carpinteria. I am “outside” the Protestant tradition “in” which I was raised. We’re always somewhere. Isn’t even nowhere somewhere in psyche? Won’t every world of belief have the potential for location?

Location in the physical world uses a coordinate system of the four dimensions of space-time as a reference. In other worlds of belief, the coordinate system will be comprised of different dimensions. If dimensions can describe an archetype, location, then dimensions must be archetypal as well. Then motion is also archetypal, a property of every world of belief.

Motion is relational. In the physical world, it’s the relationship between space and time. In another world, the specific dimensions will be different, and the relationship will be different, but there will be a relationship and it will feel like motion. It will be a relationship between different kinds of archetypes, just as time and space are different.

For example, in the world of belief of my family of origin I may locate myself relative to the Mother, the Father and the Puer. However, these archetypes are too similar to provide motion so the world of belief has at least one more dimension. This dimension needs to be as different from the family archetypes as time is different from space. An archetype like creativity or fear might be appropriate, in which case motion could be a relationship between the experience of the mother and the amount of creativity (or fear).

Entering a different world of belief involves changing the archetypes by which we locate and orient ourselves. I believe our unconscious is adept with all sorts of archetypal changes but our conscious mind cannot let go of space and time. Therefore any world of belief we can enter and experience consciously must have spatial and temporal dimensions.

However, those dimensions do not have to be length, width, height and linear time. For example, crowdedness is a spatial property which may function as a dimension in Vodou or Santeria. Stories, which have a spatial-temporal surface, may function as a dimension in the world of belief at Pacifica.

My [previous paper](#) brought in chaos as part of both the goal and the means of the funerary rites. I identified the goal as transforming entropic chaos to deterministic chaos and the means as chaotic operations opening a space-time passage between the worlds of the living and the dead.

I was intrigued in our last meeting by Saffron's suggestion that it is the act of creation, not what is created, that has value. The act of creation in the Rambu Solo is the chaotic opening of a space-time passage between worlds of belief. If this is where the value is and it can only be reached through chaotic operation, then this ritual needs chaos to perform its creative function. This reframes the funerary rites from a means for coping with death to a way of exploiting death's chaotic possibilities.

I said that I really liked this topic because I get to wonder how ritual works. My new hypothesis, for which I am indebted to Saffron, is that ritual works by introducing something incompatible with the operative coordinate system in order to create chaos at the edges of the dimensions. The chaos expands to our sense of location and we become disoriented. Entropic chaos threatens. A strange attractor appears. The chaos becomes deterministic as the dimensions reconfigure and open into a new world of belief.

Let's apply this hypothesis to altars. Our distinguished teacher has told us that ritual heats up the altar in a process of activation. Then the relations of the objects to one another changes them from matter to energy. How does all this happen?

I believe the crowdedness of the altar is ready to conflict with our usual expectations for a visual field. As ritual draws our awareness to the altar, the visual conflict causes psychic friction which generates heat. The heat starts to dissolve those aspects of our active spatial dimensions which have the least expression in the altar's structure. Our orientation loosens as our coordinate system becomes murky. The indeterminacy makes many coordinate systems possible and we begin oscillating between those possibilities.

The process of activation turns the altar into a strange attractor. It is no longer a passive collection of objects but an energetic whole in creative tension with the emerging dimensional underpinnings of the new world of belief.

I've enjoyed using what I know about physics to further explore how ritual works. It's opened a lot of vistas and I hope to explore some of them in my final paper. There's a lot of physics I haven't even touched. There's a lot of ritual I haven't even considered. I haven't looked at divination or the way these religions experience time. I'd like to explore the trickster. I wonder if complexes are the shadow side of worlds of belief. Boundaries are always fun to look at. What determines if a strange attractor appears?

On a personal note, I am still entering the world of belief here at Pacifica. As a scientific rationalist of the modern school, there is much about this world that seems like nonsense. Papers like this, in which I am able to imagine a fundamental similarity between the world of psyche and the world of modern physics, are quite disturbing to my referential system. The idea that there is a world of belief archetype behind both the inner and outer worlds is generating a lot of chaos. I wonder if a strange attractor will appear.