



**BOOK AND  
MULTIMEDIA  
REVIEW**

## **A New Approach to Psi: Re-envisioning Paranormal Experience as Meaningful Coincidence**

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Lance Storm's *A New Approach to Psi* defends the thesis that parapsychology ought to abandon the idea of psi as a causally mediated ability and instead re-conceptualize it as a form of synchronicity, which psychiatrist Carl G. Jung (2010) famously characterized as an "acausal connecting principle" governed by the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Over the course of slightly more than two hundred pages, divided into five chapters, Storm examines the wide range of difficulties currently dogging psi research and argues that adopting a Jungian view of psi would enable researchers to better understand these difficulties and formulate solutions.

Storm begins, in the book's first chapter, by describing early parapsychological research, such as that of J. B. Rhine, and illustrating some of the assumptions and confusions that have characterized the field since its inception. Storm highlights, for instance, the confused ways in which the term 'psi' has been used. It's sometimes employed merely as a collective term for extrasensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis (PK), and other anomalous phenomena, but at other times, it's used to refer to some underlying unitary process that's taken to *explain* phenomena such as ESP and PK. Storm ultimately argues that ESP and PK can't be clearly distinguished in the lab and that it makes sense to formulate a theory of psi as a unitary process underlying them both, though the thread of his logic is at times hard to follow.

Storm intertwines his discussion of the idea of psi as a unitary process with his argument against the common assumption that psi always has a causal source, and that this source is an agent or observer (or a group of agents or observers). Storm turns the reader's attention here to the phenomenon of synchronicity and points out that "many cases of synchronicity are too complex structurally (temporally, spatially, agentively, and contextually) for us to accept that a causal agent/observer was completely or even mostly responsible" (p. 38). Storm cites a couple of examples of such structurally complex synchronicities in the writings of Charles Tart (2008) and Dean Radin (2018), but my own favorite example of the difficulty of finding a point of origin for synchronistic phenomena comes from Kirby Surprise.

Surprise (2012, pp. 13–14) tells about a situation in which he was waiting in his car to pick up a friend when he heard a radio promotion for the Stephen King movie *Carrie*. Surprise had already seen the movie, in which a teenage girl crushes her house with the power of her mind. Across the street from where Surprise was parked, there was an old house, and Surprise started thinking about what it would be like to use his mind to tip over such an immense object. As he was thinking about this, the house actually began to tip toward him, its roof falling toward the ground and ending up facing him. Surprise,

astonished but undeterred, told himself that he now wanted to see the house crushed, like it was in the movie. Sure enough, the house began to implode. And, as it did so, a bulldozer became visible, crawling from behind the house over the wreckage.

At first glance, it might seem like this event was the direct psychic result of Surprise's stated desire, but there are complicating factors. If the world were responding directly to Surprise's desire, it seems it would have had to do so *before* his desire came into existence: by causing the demolition of the house to be scheduled on that particular day and by causing Surprise's friend to ask for a lift at just the right time to allow Surprise to witness it. Furthermore, Surprise's desire didn't spring from nowhere. It was caused by the radio ad for the movie, which was caused by the fact that the movie was playing in theaters at that particular time.

When we look at the full array of events connected to this synchronicity, it seems less like Surprise's desire was the source of the synchronicity and more like his desire was just one of many orchestrated elements. And, though Storm himself doesn't mention this particular case, it does precisely illustrate another point of his: that many of the decisions individuals make are ultimately steered by the synchronistic depths of the collective unconscious. Storm writes,

A *transcendent* experience could be in the 'backyard' of the deeper realms of the unconscious, with individuals clearly but merely occupying roles, meaning that many decisions they make will be governed by that state and will only be *thought of* as acts of volition. (p. 49)

In Surprise's case, the source of his experience of mentally crushing a house wasn't just in the *metaphorical* backyard of the unconscious, but in a very literal backyard as well! And Storm's ultimate point is that *all* psi occurs in this way—orchestrated by factors deeper, less personal, and less straightforwardly causal than parapsychologists have assumed.

In the second and third chapters of the book, Storm turns to evaluating some of the explanations that parapsychologists have given for the difficulty of creating robust demonstrations of psi in the laboratory. They've appealed, for instance, to experimenter psi and the decline effect, both of which Storm argues are not very persuasive phenomena when one looks closely at the experimental data. Storm titles the second and third chapters "The Trickster in

Parapsychology: Part I" and "The Trickster in Parapsychology: Part II," due partly to the fact that parapsychologists often refer to experimenter psi and decline effects as part of the "Trickster-like" nature of psi. It's not clear to what extent parapsychologists who make such remarks actually consider archetypes like the Trickster to be influential in the workings of science (rather than merely a fanciful manner of personifying frustrations in the laboratory), but Storm himself clearly sees the Trickster as a real live influence, and as one that has doubly hoodwinked parapsychologists—by leading them to believe these "tricky" experimental effects exist even though the data, viewed more carefully and objectively, don't provide convincing evidence for them. Storm also sees the Trickster at play in the domain of various questionable research practices and the difficulty of grappling with false positives and false negatives.

What is clear—to both Storm and the parapsychology community in general—is that, whatever may be going on in psi phenomena, psi researchers have not yet uncovered a way of reliably producing large effect sizes in the laboratory. If the ability-based, straightforwardly causal model of psi were correct, it seems we ought to have made significant progress in this area. Storm views the fact that we haven't made such progress as pointing to a fundamental lack of understanding about what psi phenomena are and why they exist. And this is the gap that Storm wishes to fill with his new vision of psi as synchronicity.

Storm's fourth chapter goes into some detail describing his psi-as-synchronicity hypothesis and laying out parallels with other existing theories of psi while also highlighting differences. Storm looks at Psi-Mediated Instrumental Response Theory, Meaningful Information Creation, psychopraxia, Decision Augmentation Theory, the Model of Pragmatic Information, Archetypal Synchronistic Resonance, the Multiphasic Model of Precognition/Informational Psi, and First Sight Theory. Many of these see psi as meaning-based and unitary, but only one invokes archetypes, which, for Storm, are crucial to understanding the operation of psi as synchronicity.

For Storm, as for Jung, synchronicity is bound up in meaning, affect, and even "numinosity"—that intersection of meaning and affect that we experience in feelings of profound mystery and awe. Crucially, however, Storm and Jung take the meaning, affect, and numinosity experienced in synchronicity to be derived from "archetypes" and their acausal "constellation" (that is, activation or manifestation), not only in human minds and lives but in the

non-human and even non-biological realms as well. Storm cites F. David Peat's description of synchronicity as "a microcosm which reflects the dynamics of the macrocosm as it unfolds simultaneously into the mental and material aspects of a person's life" (Peat, 1987, p. 187; quoted in Storm, 2025, p. 45).

Storm returns repeatedly to the assertion that archetypes constellate unpredictably, independently of human desire or intention, and that this helps to explain why psi in the laboratory remains erratic and psi research has made so little progress beyond demonstrating the presence of some fairly small effect sizes. Storm writes, "with psi it is thought the external world is beholden to human whim, whereas synchronistic outcomes are indeterminate and statistically dependent upon archetypal and environmental factors" (p. 46). Storm sees the agent of synchronicity—and, by extension, of psi—as something more holistic and comprehensive than a single individual's intentions, feelings, or conceptions of meaning. He writes, "We can see how there is an interplay between what the individual wills (intends) and something 'other', and this interplay paints a bigger, more dynamic (synchronistic) picture of psi" (p. 49).<sup>1</sup>

Psi researchers, Storm asserts, have ignored the significant role of archetypes and archetypal resonance in their experiments, to their detriment. Storm writes, "Under the principle of synchronicity, ... a psi hit (e.g., 'equivalence' in synchronicity) is only ever an approximate *correspondence*, not to a target, but to archetypal content *represented* in the target (or even from some other source such as a decoy)" (p. 164). Experiments with psi can be baffled if the experimenters are not aware that hits manifest as a result of how a target connects to a subject's "complexes": to the archetypal themes that are currently significant and important to them. Experiments need to be designed to facilitate archetypal resonance only with the intended targets and to discourage inadvertent resonance with decoys. Merely telling a subject which psi target to focus on will not be enough if their psyche is deeply drawn to an alternative. Focusing on the wrong target will show up as psi missing unless experimenters specifically design their experiments to account for the possibly subversive influence of archetypal resonance.

I was surprised that, although recognition of the influence of archetypes returns over and over as the central piece that Storm believes is missing from current psi research, the book offers no detailed exploration of what archetypes are or where they come from. The most detail Storm provides on this subject is in a paragraph on page 34:

Jung ... describes archetypes as nodal points or structural components of the collective unconscious (deep in the mind) that govern or influence our "patterns of behaviour" .... In other words, archetypes play a pivotal role in how we think, feel and act. They are innate and inherited. From an evolutionary or hereditary point of view, archetypes have become so distinct and well-defined as human factors that govern whole ways of being, they can be depicted and observed as motifs or idealized characters in a cultural product (*though these are only ever representations*)—examples include Hero/Heroine, Wise Old Man/Woman, Child, and contra-sexual components of the hero and heroine (i.e., *anima* and *animus*, respectively). Other psychological constructs include the persona (one's social mask or public image), natural numbers, the ego, and the 'central archetype' or Self (Jung also spells it as "self"), which is sometimes referred to as 'higher self' to avoid confusion. While archetypes are indeterminate in number, one assumes there must be an upper limit.

Storm adds that "[a]n archetype forms the substructure of a synchronicity, giving it its common theme, and acting as a defining quality throughout the experience, thereby, intensifying the meaningfulness" (pp. 34–35). And he notes that success in psi research "is a matter of whether an *archetypal situation* can be set up based on *the psychology of the particular individual*" (p. 35, italics in the original).

I confess that, after finishing Storm's book—and even after having read a handful of other books by Jungian theorists—I am still confused as to what makes something an archetype, as opposed to, say, just an emotionally charged idea or concept. I imagine that many parapsychologists will feel similarly puzzled. What is the nature of these "archetypes," and by what sorts of rules do they operate? In most of the book, Storm focuses on archetypes that are psychological constructs, such as the Ego, the Self, the Shadow, the Anima, the Animus, the Child, the Hero/Heroine, and the Wise Old Woman/Man. But then, when discussing a synchronicity of his own, involving an electric fan, he says it's likely that an archetype such as "energy," "electricity," or "spinning wheels" was involved (p. 137). Elsewhere in the book, he mentions the archetype of "circularity" (p. 163), and in the passage quoted at length above, he mentions the "natural numbers" as archetypes. If things like

electricity, spinning wheels, circularity, and even numbers can be archetypes, I confess I have no idea what makes one idea an archetype rather than another. It seems like *anything* could be an archetype to the right person—even a Kleenex or a blade of grass.

While I happen to agree with Storm about the usefulness of conceptualizing psi as synchronicity, understanding synchronicity in terms of archetypes seems to me to introduce unnecessary confusion and ambiguity, and I believe it would make more sense to directly theorize about the roles of meaning and affect in psi and synchronicity. At one point, Storm offers the following formula: archetype + affect + numinosity + meaningfulness = synchronicity (p. 52). In the same paragraph, he says that “we could assume an archetypal influence if the presence of affect, numinosity, and meaningfulness are discernible” (p. 52). But do we need to? Mightn’t these factors, on their own, be enough to power synchronicity? Assuming that there is something that differentiates an archetype from just any old idea or concept, isn’t that thing precisely the concept’s meaningfulness within our minds—its intense affective charge, to the point of numinosity? Might it not be the philosophical, psychological, and emotional resonance of a synchronicity that brings it into existence, rather than its connection to some independent thing like an archetype? Speaking of “archetypes” could turn out to be a useful shorthand of sorts, but the real explanatory power would seem to lie in the meaningfulness that defines and powers the archetypes.

In fact, Storm does seem to allow that meaningfulness and affect modulate how an archetype constellates (i.e., manifests) in a particular case. He allows, for example, that two crossed lines might influence the synchronistic or psi experiences of a religious person, for whom it would evoke the archetype of the crucifix (p. 163), but that it probably won’t activate this archetype for others. If this is the case, though, is the archetype really doing the work, or is it the individual’s emotional resonance with the idea? Presumably, Storm sees both as necessary, but it’s very unclear what the independent contribution of the archetype is supposed to be and what determines it.

That is my primary critique of Storm’s book: the unnecessary complication of his archetypal understanding of synchronicity. But I had a few other concerns as well. One of the elements that sometimes made Storm’s book difficult to follow was his lack of precision in expressing his ideas. For instance, on p. 93, he writes, “In science, including parapsychology, there is a burgeoning need for the concept

of causality; it does not suffice to find evidence of an effect without knowing what caused the effect.” This was a very confusing pronouncement to hear from someone who had already repeatedly stated that parapsychology needed to adopt an *acausal* conception of psi. After reading a bit further, I realized that what Storm meant to say was, “In science, including parapsychology, there is a burgeoning *felt* need for the concept of causality.” Precise language makes all the difference between a book that’s easy to follow and one that’s not, and while some of Storm’s passages are quite clear, the frequency of imprecisions like this is high enough to be irksome.

More troubling on a philosophical level was the fact that Storm seems to have a rather primitive understanding of causality, which makes it difficult to judge the value of his arguments about the acausal nature of synchronicity. He writes that “testing archetypes in the lab may ... be possible, but that will not make causes of them because they do not function like causes—put simply, they do not always deliver” (p. 96). But there are in fact very few “causes” that “always deliver”—very few causes that are *sufficient* causes, to use the philosopher’s preferred terminology. Most causes deliver a particular effect only in a certain set of circumstances. For instance, striking a match may generally cause a flame, but only if the match is dry, if there is sufficient oxygen present in the surrounding air, etc. Causation involves the mutual interaction and influence of a large number of events and conditions, and the more complex these interactions, the more difficult it is to pin down the individual contributions of each variable and reliably produce a desired effect. The complexity of the affair doesn’t mean, however, that causality is not at work.

In the end, while I agree with Storm that it makes sense to conceptualize psi and synchronicity as a single phenomenon, I don’t think it’s particularly helpful to characterize that phenomenon as “acausal.” I think it’s more useful to speak in terms of *nonlocal* causality—perhaps even *extra-temporal* or *teleological* causality. If we believe it’s possible to investigate how psi and synchronicity work, it’s because we believe there *is* a how, that there is a method, a structural framework to these phenomena, and I would call that “causal,” even if it’s a causality rooted in the spatially and temporally nonlocal influence of meaning. This may, to some extent, be a semantic disagreement, but semantics is terribly important when one is striving to make a case for an unpopular and little-understood view, and Storm could have done a better job defining and defending his proposal with regard to the subject of causality, or the lack thereof.

Storm's book concludes with a chapter on quantum mechanics and its relationship to consciousness. I appreciated that Storm considered some of the meatier issues of interpreting quantum mechanical experiments—and corrected a prevalent misapprehension about the precise nature of the quantum experiments that have actually been conducted. It was a little hard to discern exactly how Storm's discussion of quantum mechanics related to the book's larger thesis, but ultimately his goal seemed to be to show that, while quantum phenomena may offer us some justified precedent for thinking about reality nonlocally, quantum mechanics alone does not solve the deepest puzzles about the nature of consciousness and doesn't involve any role for meaning or affect, which experience has shown to be central to the operation of both psi and synchronicity. Storm therefore concludes that, while quantum mechanics certainly adds importantly to our understanding of the world, an adequate theory of psi requires something more.

As will be clear by now, Storm identifies that something more as the meaningful, numinous, affect-laden constellation of archetypes that he sees demonstrated in the operation of synchronicity. While I'm doubtful that we need to invoke archetypes instead of focusing directly on the role that meaning and affect play in the nonlocal causal structure of our world—for the reasons I've given

above—I'm nevertheless open to further exploration of the idea. And further exploration we will have, as Storm's follow-on volume, *A New Approach to Synchronicity*, is due out in March 2025.

## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> At the same time, Storm does think there is volition in synchronicity, that it is not merely impersonal teleology or "fate" at work (p. 143).

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