

By Russell Rose 2024

## Parallel Processing: as a defining feature of nature.

I qualified as a Body Psychotherapist in 1996, and was just beginning to recover from the mind-blowing recognition that my psyche was not simply an aggregate of my various thoughts and behaviours stretching out into the world from a cauldron of unconsciousness, but was instead an embodied affair, manifesting holistically throughout my entire physiological and energetic system. This had been the most extraordinary revelation, probably at least since the day when Little Me asked what the moon was, and thereby had my first stupefying, agoraphobic, dizzying experience of being a very tiny little creature within a very extremely big sky.

Shortly into my post-qualification era I had my next revelation when I discovered the Object Relations theory of Projective/Introjective Identification in a bookshop in London; whereby the psyche of an infant will project unmanageable emotional energy *into* the psyche of mother, whereupon it is ideally felt, managed, modified, and energetically returned to the infant as *a harmonised modification of the unmanageable* along with the somatic mechanisms needed to do so.

At that time Projective Identification wasn't on the Body Psychotherapy curriculum, and so was one of those doors that I hadn't realised needed opening, until it opened. However, although I was intuitively struck by the theory, my strongest feeling was of looking at the outer surface of something beautiful that I couldn't quite feel. I found the theory tormenting as well as liberating, and I spent two afternoons and evenings in the dark corner of a local pub, slowly sipping beer alone and trying to puzzle what it was that this theory was trying to do to my mind.

What became eventually clear to me on that weekend was that this was not a means of communication restricted to the mother-infant dyad, but instead *typical* of human interaction; that we routinely exchange psychological information in an unconscious, expulsive, co-organising and co-regulating dialogue that is intensified in close relationships.

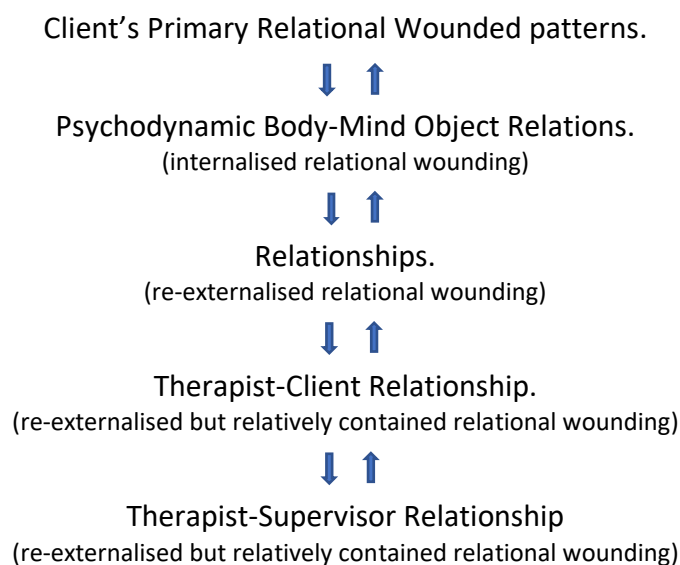
I realised that my sense of separate self hereby became only a very partial truth, as it became obvious that what I *understood* as Self was an intrinsically relational and fluid consideration; a dynamic composite. And I can still recall the moment when the inter-generational realm erupted in my mind: that in addition to all other influences we are

hereby built from our ancestors, a merger of the psyches of our ancestral line passed down through energetic relational interaction. Given that every ancestor is to some large psychological extent always a product of their era and all of its cultural influences, it struck me that just as one's own personal history is ever-present, history itself is too.

Looking back I can see that this was also where began my experience and understanding of the universe as being characterised by fractality, by parallel processes; whereby patterns repeat across space and time. But I hadn't begun to put all that together yet, as I was, and would remain for a fairly long time, more intent upon the spiritual experience and implication of this revelation rather than its dynamic psychological and scientific processes.

This all began to take some practical shape in my supervision with Michael Soth (1996-1999), during which it became apparent through his guidance that an attention to the subtle dynamics between us in sessions revealed a re-telling of my client's story. It had passed down the line: dynamically embodied in the client, played out in the relationship between the client and I, and then played out again in the relationship between myself and Michael.

Time would tell that the more available and attentive to these dynamics we were, and the more containing, experiencing and conceptualising we could be, the more likely it was that our efforts resonated back into the therapeutic relationship and impacted the client's psychic structure accordingly. I was told that this was known as Parallel Process.



The wounded patterns carried by my client, myself, and my supervisor were inter-relating and, most intriguing to me was the thought that they were doing so with purpose. Not haphazardly colliding with their coincidental overlaps and collisions, but seeking and needing each other for their own return to the foreground of consciousness; perhaps in search of reparation rather than simply as defensive spillage.

The psyche perhaps had an inter-subjective dynamic teleology.

In the year after qualifying, I was asked to run some therapeutic workshops for staff teams working in a residential setting with people with disabilities and chronic mental health problems. At first these were generalised groups. Working with Bereavement, Sexuality, Boundaries, Empathy, and the like. But then I was asked by an area manager, Martine, for whom I will always be grateful for the opportunity, if I would work directly with her staff teams, one team at a time, talking specifically about their actual clients. This usually became focused on people who were struggling in one way or another, or who were displaying unusual behaviours.

Although it wasn't my prior intention to work in this way, it quickly became clear that my experience of parallel processing in my 1-1 supervision was being replicated in this group-work: in that, it was an awareness and examination of the group dynamics that tended to bring into focus the story and the struggle of the client in question. We experienced significant results, some of which are available as articles: For examples:

- [Forced Feeding. 1999:](#)
- [Bobbing on the Surface. 2003:](#)

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The diagram presented on page 2 is linear and simplistic, of course, neat and tidy. If we add in to the mix the therapist's and the supervisor's respective primary relational wounded patterns, their respective psychodynamic body-mind object-relations, and all of these additional interactions, we would need many more bi-directional arrows.

To go further, each transference and counter-transference is expressed through many estuaries. Attitude, narrative, behaviour, body-language, prosody, respiratory patterns, energetic presence and so on; each in themselves another parallel re-presentation of a wounded pattern. By the time we add in all of the inter-generational dynamics and all of the object-internalisations, we will have a complex system whose now incalculable spaghetti of bi-directional arrows are still simply a relatively bland abstraction of a beautifully interwoven system of self-similar relationships bound and defined by multi-dimensional feedback-loops that bridge space and time.

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In the shape of the epic Allan Schore, neuroscience has described how it is that through right-brain to right-brain resonance, encoded patterns of trauma and wounding are transmitted and constellate in subsequent relationships. This is the neurological basis of Enactment Theory, which has itself sought to unify and integrate different modalities, all of whose knowledge is needed if we are to develop a nuanced picture of how it is that the psyche appears organised to reveal itself in similar patterns and across relationships.

In the absence of Object Relations, Psychodynamics, CBT, IFS, Trauma Therapy, Neuroscience, Body Psychotherapy, et al, the basics of Enactment Theory are diminished and incomplete. We need to know how we internalise our experience, how we express it, subjectively and inter-subjectively, and we need to know the extent to which this occurs on a subtle body-mind-energetic level.

This integration of modalities offers a relief to any psychotherapeutic mind left uncomfortable by the, at-times, unhelpful split between psychological paradigms, with each extolling their own virtue whilst discounting or diminishing the significance of its assumed-contraries, and failing to recognise the possibility that in the object or subject that we deride lies our own shadow or blindspot.

Of more significance to me though, Enactment Theory tends towards substantiating the radical principle of psychological teleology, that there is a purpose to this dynamic paralleling rather than it just being pathological and defensive. The psyche seeks to parallel its patterns *in search of a re-wounding* that can be re-experienced, contained, known, integrated, and now finally fundamentally transformed.

- [Enactment in a nutshell. 2021:](#)

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Returning briefly to the subject of neuroscience, mirror neurones *categorically* parallel, in that these brain cells fire identically when we perform an action as they do when we observe it being performed. This is believed to be the basis of empathy, whereby observation of non-verbal gestures and cues presents an internalised simulation of experience, a paralleling that allows us to feel what another feels.

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Plato discussed The Forms, the perfect primordial images from which all creation is imperfectly formed; the templates of life. The human, the horse, the fly, knowledge, love, beauty, and so on.

The earthly a close parallel of the heavenly.

The inspiration for, or at least correlation with, Jung's collective-unconscious and archetypes is obvious, though Jung's conceptualisation, some two thousand five hundred years later, was far more complex, and evidenced from innumerable sources, from very many cultures old, current, imagined and rumoured. The Archetypes were Jung's primordial images, but unlike with Plato's Forms they were not uni-directional but bi. They fed and were fed by the dynamics of the human story, known and unknown, in a feedback-loop of continual paralleling.

Staying with Jung: *synchronicity* is the revealing of a psychologically significant thematic link between seemingly distinct events. Each event is at its essence a parallel of the others: nature paralleling psyche paralleling nature.

And staying with the Jungian, Erich Neumann is one of many who have detailed how it is that the human consciousness evolves through stages in a person's life by re-manifesting patterns and characteristics first formed in the history of cultural consciousness:

*"The individual has in his own life to follow the road that humanity has trod before him..."*

**Erich Neumann: The origins and history of consciousness. 1954**

- [Ken Wilber's Structures of Consciousness. 2019:](#)

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Rather than the human psyche being inclined towards paralleling, perhaps under intense conflict, we can entertain the idea that the reflex to parallel, to present in repeated patterns across time and space, is a *defining* characteristic. After all, the containment and energetic-charge of the therapeutic-encounter intensifies what is happening anyway, rather than in itself creating novel patterns; and therefore this impulse to parallel should be visible and defined in other disciplines. If it happens in therapy it happens in life.

Of most significance is the introduction of the term *Fractal* in 1975 by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. A fractal is a form that displays self-similarity at increasingly small scales. For example, taking a magnified view of a snowflake reveals the same basic shape repeating itself endlessly. The branches and twigs of a tree show a fractal pattern of repeating self-similarity, as with lightning, clouds, rivers, coastlines, ferns, human neurones, the circulatory system, and the lungs - which also resemble the patterns of tree and foliage, both requiring oxygen. The swirl of a hurricane resembles the swirl of a galaxy, at one end of the scale, and the swirl of a seashell, towards the other. Even the dynamics of the stock market and of wealth distribution exhibit fractal patterns, rather than simple linearity or randomness. And so on.

Fractals, self-similarity and parallels suggest systemic inter-relatedness, between people, between people and nature, and between eras. For these reasons perhaps they can feel comfortingly familiar, and so fractal patterns appear in mandalas, in Christian Art, Hindu Temples and Islamic Mosques; offering an implication of the divine whole in the fractal part.

I don't really feel equipped to speak in any detail of other religions, but certainly Christianity is rife with fractality, whether we see this in a literal or a metaphorical sense. Jesus was for them the parallel embodiment of God, and his logos understood first as a universal truth; creation itself a material embodiment of God; and Jesus the template for mankind.

The Gnostics believe that in every human exists a shard of the divine, and that it is therefore through inner contemplation rather than outward prayer that we might become enlightened, a notion shared by Hinduism and Buddhism, all understanding that the microcosm is the macrocosm.

Certainly in psychotherapy we recognise, in a paraphrasing of the Gnostic experience, that a shard of a dynamic pattern can reveal the whole, in that an attention to it can open up a far more complex process or memory than the shard on its own might seem to represent. So many times in the therapeutic encounter, I've been blown-away by how it is that a seemingly mundane transference or counter-transference, a subtle somatic expression, such as even just a tone of voice, an unusual phrase, a respiratory pattern, an intuition, an image, and so on, can become a gateway to a client's story; then to elaborate into the story of the client's parents, sometimes the grandparents too, can find parallel in my own story, and even find parallel in the thematic stories of different clients on the same day.

Accepting that a part can lead to a whole is not necessarily a particularly challenging premise, perhaps in fact no more so than imagining that a door can lead to a corridor that can lead to a room that can open onto a garden that can reveal a landscape. Harder to digest is the notion that *each part contains the whole*, that the door *is* the corridor, the room, the garden and the landscape. This is the premise of the hologram, most famous in the *holographic photograph* that can be cut into pieces yet each piece miraculously exhibiting the entire original image.

Karl Pribram was a neuroscientist and a psychologist known for his holographic theory of the brain, whose premise is that memories are encoded across a landscape of neurones rather than in a specific location, with each *aspect* of the encoding contains the entirety of the memory.

He was in part inspired by the work of physicist David Bohm, with whom he collaborated. Bohm achieved some controversial notoriety by suggesting that the quantum world may not display the randomness defined by Niels Bohr et al of The Copenhagen Interpretation, but

instead have an underlying order beneath the level that is explicit to our perception and capacity to measure.

He studied plasma, in which electrons and ions appear to behave collectively, both separate and of each other, forming a vast interconnectedness that Bohm believed to be the microcosm of a dynamic universe. He formulated the theory of the *implicate order*, a unified primal holographic wholeness from which manifests a materiality in which each part carries the imprint of the (implicate) whole. This could mean, for example, that every atom of our being carries access to the universe, access to the history of time, and access to God.

The nature of the universe is dynamically holographic for Bohm. Holograms lead to fractals whose parts parallel the whole. And fractals take us back to parallel processing in psychotherapy, in which the parts both parallel and contain the whole.

A concrete example of interconnectedness can be seen in Quantum Entanglement, whereby two sub-atomic particles apparently distinct, if previously connected, will continue to respond to each other's dynamics despite any degree of spatial separation, at a speed faster than that of the movement of light, which is thought to be impossible; implying that they are *as though one* despite their apparent distinction and separateness.

Quantum Entanglement is significant to Bohm's Implicate Order, as it is also to String Theory; a mathematically rigorous formulation that believes information in space to be fundamentally encoded at its boundary, in a holistic and holographic underlying reality.

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Although I've been thinking about this subject in one context or another for several decades now, I still don't really quite know where I'm at with it. I think that principally this is because I have to move my attention between the relatively-detached observational analysis of it, with which I have little conflict, and a surrender to its experience, which has at its heart an experiential paradigm-shift that would profoundly effect the way in which I feel myself in the world, and feel the world in me.

However attractive to me this inter-connected world and universe might seem to my imagination, nevertheless an ego brought up with assumptions of fundamental reductionist



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distinction struggles to entirely relinquish its grip on this more familiar, if not especially comforting, sense of fragmented reality that is far more commonly shared.

I'm grateful every day for the opportunity that my profession affords me (through both the fragility and the robustness of its therapeutic container) to surrender to my participation in this paralleling *and* to stand back, observe, and assess its meaning. I'm required to be inclined towards both positions necessarily if I'm to do my job, and it's the tension between these two positions that I hope will continue to open up my mind to this phenomenon and to my own deeper levels of personal transformation that are implied by it.