

Society, Spirit & Ritual: Morphic Resonance and the Collective Unconscious
Part III
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This is the third in our series of essays by Rupert Sheldrake on the implications of his hypothesis of Formative Causation for the psychology of C. G. Jung. The intense controversy this hypothesis generated with the publication of his first book, *A New Science of Life* (1981), has stimulated a number of international competitions for evaluating his ideas via experimental investigations. The results of these experimental tests are reported in his new book, *The Presence of the Past* (1988) wherein he writes:

In this book, which is less technical in style, I place the hypothesis of formative causation in its broad historical, philosophical, and scientific contexts, summarize its main chemical and biological implications, and explore its consequences in the realms of psychology, society, and culture. I show how it points towards a new and radically evolutionary understanding of ourselves and the world we live in, an understanding which I believe is in harmony with the modern idea that all nature is evolutionary.

The hypothesis of formative causation proposes that memory is inherent in nature. In doing so, it conflicts with a number of orthodox scientific theories. These theories grew up in the context of the pre-evolutionary cosmology, predominant until the 1960s, in which both nature and the laws of nature were believed to be eternal. Throughout this book, I contrast the interpretations provided by the hypothesis of formative causation with the conventional scientific interpretations, and show how these approaches can be tested against each other by a wide variety of experiments. Sheldrake begins this essay with an interesting insight regarding the evolution of Jung's and Freud's conceptions of the unconscious out of the previous world view of Soul. He then explores a number of provocative ideas about "mind extended in time and space" that give us fresh perspectives on power, prayer, and consciousness.

We've all been brought up with the 17th century Cartesian view that our minds are located inside our brains. In this view, our minds are completely portable and can be carried around wherever we go, packaged as they are inside our skulls. Our minds, therefore, are essentially private entities associated with the physiology of each of our nervous tissues. This idea of the contracted mind, a mind which is not only rooted in the brain but actually located in the brain, is an idea that is so pervasive in our culture that most of us acquire it at an early age. It is not just a philosophical theory (although, of course, it is that); it is an integral part of the materialistic view of reality.

SOUL, MIND, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Our understanding of the concepts of mind and soul is actually a question of how we define the word consciousness. I prefer to view the attribute of consciousness as being restricted to human beings and, perhaps, some of the higher order of animals in which one could say there was some kind of self consciousness. Much of the behavior which we consider to be mentally organized, however, actually arises out of unconscious processes. Riding bicycles with great skill, for example, does not involve

conscious memory; it does not involve conscious thought. Bike riding utilizes a body memory that involves a great deal of unconscious action and doing. We acquire many complex skills on an unconscious level skiing, swimming, piano playing, and so on.

Such learning is notoriously difficult to describe in words because it does not involve conscious thought in the normal pattern of thought as a directed intellectual activity. A more useful concept that is difficult for us to use nowadays because its meaning is obscure to most people is the concept of the soul. In Aristotle's system, animals and plants had their own kind of soul, as did nature as a whole. This was the animistic view: the idea that there was an "anima" or soul in all living things. (Inanimate matter did not have a soul.) The very word animal, of course, comes from the word anima, meaning soul: animals are beings with soul. Actually, prior to the 17th century, it was believed that all of nature, and the earth as a whole, had a soul; the planets all had a soul. But the concept of soul was banished by 17th century mechanistic science.

The older view of soul is, I think, a better concept than that of consciousness. The word closest to it in modern usage is mind. The modern usage of mind, however, is almost identical with the word consciousness; mind incorrectly implies consciousness. We then have to use the term, unconscious mind, as Jung and Freud did. This usage has appeared to be a contradiction in terms to the academic world, so they have tended to reject it (and Jung's and Freud's conceptions of it, as well). The concept of soul, however, does not necessarily imply consciousness. The vegetative soul, which is the kind of soul that organizes the embryo and the growth of plants, was not viewed as functioning on a conscious level. When we grow as embryos, we don't have any memory of the process. We don't consciously think out, "the heart comes here, and I know I'll develop a limb out there, teeth here," and so forth. These things just seem to happen in a way that is tacit, implicit, or unconscious but yet soul like in the way they are organized.

Until the time of Descartes, three levels of soul were conceived. The vegetative soul contained the form of the body and governed embryology and growth; all animals and plants were viewed as having it. Then there was the animal soul, which concerned movement, behavior, instincts, and so on; all animals as well as humans were seen as having this level soul. Over and above the vegetative and animal soul in human beings was the rational soul, which was experienced as the more intellectual, conscious mind.

Descartes contended that there was no such thing as vegetative or animal souls. All animals and plants were dead, inanimate machines. The body itself was viewed as nothing more than a machine. It did not have an animal soul governing unconscious instincts and patterns. Those processes were entirely mechanical in nature. The only kind of soul human beings had, on the other hand, was the rational, conscious soul: "I think; therefore I am." Thinking thus became the very model of conscious activity or mental activity, and in this way, Descartes restricted the concept of soul or spirit to the conscious, thinking, rational portion of the mind, which reached its highest pinnacle in the proofs of mathematics. Descartes' perspective left us with the idea that the only kind of consciousness worthy of the name was "rational consciousness" especially mathematical, scientific consciousness. In a sense, Descartes created the problem of the unconscious, for within 50 years of his work, people started saying, "Wait a minute, there's more to us than just this conscious mind, because there are things that influence us that we are not conscious of." Thus the idea of the

unconscious mind, which we generally regard as having been invented by Freud, was actually invented again and again and again after Descartes. By defining the mind as solely the conscious part and defining everything else as dead or mechanical, Descartes created a kind of void that demanded the reinvention of the idea of the unconscious side of the mind (which everyone before Descartes had simply taken for granted in the soul concept). (There is an excellent book on this subject by L.L. Whyte called *The Unconscious before Freud*, published by Julian Friedman, London, 1979.)

The problem we are encountering now is that, having eliminated the concept of soul in the 17th century, we are left with concepts such as mind which are not really adequate for what we mean. If we want to get closest to what people meant by soul in the past, the modern concept of field is the most accurate approximation. Prior to Isaac Newton's elucidation of the laws of gravity, gravitational phenomena were explained in terms of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world or universe. The soul of the world supposedly coordinated the movements of the planets and stars and did all the things that gravitation did for Newton. Now from Einstein, we have the idea of space time gravitational fields that organize the universe. In this concept of fields one can see aspects of the *anima mundi* (soul) as being of the universe. Souls were invisible, nonmaterial, organizing principles. Fields, especially morphic fields, are invisible, nonmaterial, organizing principles that do most of the things that souls were believed to do.

MIND EXTENDED IN TIME AND SPACE

In Jean Piaget's book, *The Child's Conception of the World*, he describes how by the age of about ten or eleven, children learn what he calls the "correct view" that thoughts, images, and dreams are invisible "things" located inside the brain. Before that age they have the "incorrect view" (as do so-called primitive people) that thoughts, images, and dreams happen outside the brain.

The Cartesian view of the mind as being located in the brain is so pervasive that all of us are inclined to speak of our minds and brains as if they were interchangeable, synonymous: "It's in my brain," rather than "it's in my mind." In the 20's and 30's, various philosophers and psychologists, particularly Koffka, Uhler, and Wertheimer of the Gestalt school challenged this view.

I want to argue that our minds are extended in several senses. In previous articles, we discussed how our minds are extended in both space and time with other people's minds, and with the group mind or cultural mind by way of their connection to the collective unconscious. Insofar as we tune into archetypal fields or patterns which other people have had, which other social groups have had, and which our own social group has had in the past, our minds are much broader than the "things" inside our brains. They extend out into the past and into social groupings to which we are linked, either by ancestry or by cultural transmissions. Thus, our minds are extended in time, and I believe they are also extended in space.

Throughout this article, I want to make a simple point that is a very radical departure from traditional theory. The traditional theory of perception is that light rays reflected from objects travel through electromagnetic fields, are focused by the lens of the retina, and thereby produce an image on the retina. This triggers off electrical changes in the receptor cells of the retina leading to nerve impulses going up the optic nerve into the cerebral cortex. An image of an object somehow springs

into being inside my cerebral cortex, and something or someone inside sees it. A "little man in my brain" somehow sees this image in the cerebral cortex and falsely imagines that the image is "out there," when, in fact, it is "in here."

Personally, I find this explanation extremely implausible. In my experience, my image of an object is right where it seems to be: outside of me. If I look out the window, my perceptual field is not inside me but outside me. That is, the objects are indeed outside me, and my perception of them is also outside me. I'm suggesting that in our perceptual experience, the perceptual fields extend all around us. While, as the traditional view holds, there is an inward flow of light impulses which eventually lead up to the brain, I also experience an outward projection of the images from my mind. The images are projected out, and in normal perception, the projection out and the flow in coincide, so that I see an image of an object where the object really is located.

In hallucinatory types of perception, I can see images whether they are there, in fact, or not. Consider "psychic blindness": people can be hypnotized so that they no longer see objects which are actually in their view. In such a case of "psychic blindness," the inward flow is present but not the outward projection. More normally, the movement out and the movement in coincide with each other as part of a coordinated process, creating a perceptual field that embraces both the observer and the object.

This idea of the extended mind is a matter of common belief in ancient and traditional societies. If this concept were true, it would mean that we could influence things or people just by looking at them. In India, for example, it is believed that a person who either looks on a holy man, or is himself looked on by the holy man, receives a great blessing. In many parts of the world, including India, Greece, and the Middle East, it is believed that if you look upon something with the eye of envy - the "evil eye" - you therefore blight it. People in many cultures still take great precautions against this so-called evil eye. In India, it is considered to be extremely unlucky for a childless woman to admire a baby who belongs to another woman (whereas in our society, this is merely good manners). This is because she is assumed to be envious of the baby. Once a childless woman breaks this taboo, rituals must be performed (such as making a circle of salt around the baby and reciting various mantras) to exorcise the harmful influence.

When new buildings go up in India, scarecrows are fixed on the buildings; similarly, when there is a good crop of wheat or rice, scarecrows are placed in the field. These scarecrows are not intended to "scare away crows" literally, but rather to attract the evil eye of people who might otherwise blight the crop by looking upon it with envy. The scarecrows act as "lightning conductors" because anything with a human figure attracts the eye. The Indian people also put out round pots with huge white spots stuck on sticks; the eyes are drawn to the pots because the white spots look like eyes. For similar reasons, people throughout the Middle East wear talismans which contain eyes; in Egypt, the eye of Horus serves a similar function. All this is done to protect against the evil eye.

If we do affect things or people by looking at them, then can people perceive when they are being looked at, even when they cannot actually see someone looking at them. In both realms of fictional literature and real-life experience, many people claim to have had the experience of knowing they were being watched and then turning round and seeing someone staring at them. As undergraduates at

Cambridge, some of us had read a Rosicrucian advertisement about the power of the mind. It said something about, "Try this simple experiment: look at the back of someone's neck and see if they will turn round after a few minutes." During boring lectures we acted as suggested, and it often worked; we found that we could fix our attention on the back of someone's neck and after a minute or two, the person often looked uncomfortable and turned round.

Although there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that people sense when they are being watched, there is almost no scientific investigation of this phenomenon. The entire world literature on the subject that I've been able to find consists of three papers: one written in 1896, the next one in 1910, and a final paper in 1953. Two of the papers show positive effects, although they were both done on very small subject populations.

I've done some simple preliminary experiments over the last few months in workshops. The way we conducted the experiment was very simple. Four people volunteered and sat at one end of the room, with their backs turned toward the audience. We put each person's name on his or her back by way of identifying them. Then, in a series of trials, I would hold up cards in a random sequence containing the name of the person the audience was to watch. For example, if I had selected "Tom," I would hold up a card reading, "Trial 1, Tom," and everyone in the audience would stare at the back of Tom's neck for fifteen seconds. At the end of each trial, all four subjects would write down whether or not they thought they were being looked at during that time period. At the end of the series of trials, we compared when the volunteers thought they were being looked at, with whether or not they really were being observed.

My results so far indicate that people vary tremendously in their degree of sensitivity to being watched. In one workshop I conducted in Amsterdam, there was a woman who was 100 percent accurate; she knew each time she was being watched. She was the best subject I've encountered. When I asked if she knew why she had done so well, she said that as a child she used to play this game with her brothers and sisters. They practiced and she got very good at it; she had volunteered because she was sure she'd still be able to do it, even though she hadn't done it for 20 or 30 years.

A friend of mine has been conducting this experiment in one-on-one trials with friends and colleagues. In over 600 trials ping 65 - 70% of the time, which is statistically significant. indicate that there is an outgoing influence from the eyes or from the mind; perhaps mental influence does extend beyond the boundaries of the physical body. It has been suggested that this might be a telepathic rather than a visual influence. There is a simple method of checking that out. In some trials, the people doing the looking could turn around so that they are facing away from the volunteers and just think about the designated volunteer rather than look at him or her. If there was greater effect when the volunteers were actually being looked at than when they were being thought about, then one could be type was functioning.

A variation of this experiment is to examine the effect of distance on the perception of the subjects. Have the person being looked at located at a considerable distance from those looking at him (binoculars could be used) and then see if the effect still works. If it does, then set up trials using video or closed circuit television. Imagine an experiment in which there were four people in a studio (or even in different studios), with cameras running continuously, and a randomized switching device so

that the person being looked at in each trial is randomly determined. Imagine a typical television audience of millions of viewers. Now, what if the subjects could distinguish when they were being looked at by other people over television. There one would have a massive, large-scale demonstration of extended mind in a way that could be conclusive.

This format, too, could be extended. You could have people looking at subjects in the Soviet Union via satellite linkups; one could elaborate this pattern indefinitely. What happens to actresses and actors, to prominent political figures, when they are looked at by millions of people? Are they affected by being in people's minds?

Large-scale experiments to test hypotheses could do more to bring about a paradigm shift than any amount of lecturing about the limitations of the mechanistic theory. Our perceptual fields may reach far beyond our physical brains; when we look at the stars, our minds may literally reach to the stars. There may be almost no limit on how far this process can extend.

GEOMANCY: THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF PLACES

If we are willing to consider morphic fields for minds and societies and animals and plants, it would also seem sensible to think of fields for ecosystems, or even for particular places. In fact, there is a "science of places," geomancy, which is concerned with just this kind of field. Geomancy is an ancient system for exploring the interrelationship of places and features of places; for locating power spots for building cathedrals and churches and temples, and for avoiding unsuitable places which have harmful influences. In ancient Europe there is no doubt that stone circles such as Stonehenge (and other places of ritual importance) were chosen geomantically, in relation to the lay of the land, the flow of water, the direction of wind, the vegetation, and the orientation to the sun. There is also no doubt that cathedrals and churches in medieval Europe were built on sacred places which had been geomantically located; on places of power, sometimes sacred wells or sacred graves, sometimes places which manifested a powerful relationship to other features of their environment.

The Chinese system of geomancy, which is still very much in use today, is a system of understanding the flow of energy in places. It involves underground water, the slope of lands, the way water flows when it rains, wind direction, and orientation to the sun. No traditional Chinese would choose a place for the graves of ancestors, or a house to live in, or a place in which to conduct business, without taking into account the properties of the place, the balance of energies, and the flow of "chi" (as they call this energy). Geomancers flourish in modern Hong Kong; no businessman, however "modern," would undertake an enterprise without geomantic advice. If things go wrong, people call in geomancers to find out how they can restore the balance of energy.

This kind of geomantic consciousness is still present in most traditional cultures. In India no one would consider building a temple on a piece of land simply because there happened to be a convenient vacant lot. First, the potential builder would check to see that it was in the right place and had the right balance of forces. American Indians, too, have places of power which are considered sacred and significant in various ways. This whole sense of the particularity of place and the balance of energy within it is an environmental factor which traditional societies have taken into serious account.

Our own society is in a terrible state of geomantic amnesia. These principles have been forgotten by most of us, and we assume that one location is just the same as every other location. None of us fully believes this is so, but it is the accepted public posture. I think that geomantic amnesia arose partly because of the Protestant Reformation, which abolished the idea of the sacredness of the earth and the sacredness of place, and partly because of mechanistic science, which emphasizes the universality of the laws of nature and implies that the laws of nature are exactly the same everywhere and at all times. This attitude, this paradigm, blinds us to the particularity of place and time. Traditional cultures have emphasized that time, too, has qualities. Days are not just the same as other days. Christmas has a different quality than Thanksgiving, which has a different quality from Easter or Halloween; each has a different quality. The seasonal occurrences of the great festivals of the year relate to this particularity of time: certain things can happen more easily at certain times than at others. And, of course, ancient sciences such as astrology are explicitly concerned with the particularity and uniqueness of time.

If we start thinking geomantically, a huge paradigm shift occurs in our experience of the environment. What if the quality of place does influence what happens there? What if what goes on in certain places is influenced by a balance of forces and energies, which in our society we've forgotten about? For example, Americans have forgotten that Washington, D.C., the power center not only of America but of the modern world, was geomantically designed. The entire city was laid out by Freemasons, who were aware of these ancient principles of geomancy.

When I was in Washington a few summers ago, I thought that, in light of geomantic principles, I ought to investigate the building of the Pentagon. The site selected in 1941 was originally known as the Devil's Hollow, and there was a great deal of controversy as to whether it was a suitable site. It would be very interesting to research the newspaper reports of that time period to see just what issues were involved in this controversy. The Pentagon is five-sided, as the name implies, and it has five corridors on each floor and five floors on each side. At the heart of power in the Pentagon are the five-star generals, who wear five-pointed stars which have pentagon-shaped centers. The in-house newspaper is called the Pentagram. Interestingly, the sign of Soviet military might is also none other than the five-pointed star, a red star painted on all Soviet missiles and tanks.

So what is going on here? It would seem of some historical interest to investigate the process by which the location for and design of the Pentagon was chosen. Who was the architect? Was he a Freemason? Why did he adopt this five-fold symbolism? What system of symbolism was he tuning into, consciously or unconsciously? What archetypal patterns were at work at that time in him? Such a research project might shed a different light on some of the questions of peace and war. A similar analysis of the Kremlin, the ancient center of power in Russia, would be equally informative.

What would we discover if we investigated the geomancy of Silicon Valley? What is it about that location that makes it the world center of computer innovation? What about the geomancy of Los Alamos, part of which is located on an ancient sacred Indian site? The site was chosen by Oppenheimer who knew the area well, because there is a mesa shaped like a human being; he located the Los Alamos laboratories on the part of the mesa that formed the "head." What about the geomancy of Hollywood, the center of the world's fantasy industry? It is enclosed by hills with a north-south flow of energy and water, which is very fortuitous in geomantic terms.

Since places are frequently named after spirits, what about the paternal or maternal spirits of such places? In the Christian tradition the "spirit" is presented in the form of a saint or holy figure such as the Virgin Mary or the Angels. What is the role of Our Lady of the Angels, obviously a form of the celestial goddess, who is the patroness of Los Angeles?

When we begin to ask these kinds of questions, the world begins to look very different, for we realize that there may be a particularity of place and of time to which our minds are linked. If our minds are actually extended, as I am suggesting, then our minds must interact with the environmental fields and the qualities of place and time in which we exist. This Would mean that our "selves" - which we usually think of as "portable" and "miniaturized" inside our brains - would no longer be quite as contained and bounded as we previously thought. Everyone listening to me lecture, for example, would be connected just by being in the field of the place. At one and the same time, they would also be connected in an extended way back to the place where they live. If there is this kind of field connection - like filaments of people's morphic fields - then when we get on jet planes to travel from one place to another, we would be connected through the flight lanes to great airdromes. If we think of these morphic filaments as elastic bands attaching us to places, then "jet lag" would occur because we're connected by a kind of elastic band to the place we've just left.

If we are to have a new, more beneficent understanding of our environment, then I think we need to develop a kind of psycho-geomantic sense. Our minds are not just in our skulls; they are connected to our environment. This view also reframes the whole notion of ecology and conservation, of pilgrimage and sacred place and sacred time. The concept of the extended mind enables us to understand many traditional systems, including traditions of our own culture, much better than when we are in the "modern" framework with its limited notion that the mind is simply a private phenomenon inside the brain, completely portable and transportable.

A NEW VIEW OF PRAYER

The concept of the extended mind could also lead to a new understanding of the power of prayer. The traditional belief in prayer is that praying for people who are in distant places, or praying about the weather, or any kind of intercessory or petitionary prayer - can actually have an effect, by whatever means, at a distance. The "modern" view of prayer is that there are a few chemical and electrical changes going on inside the brain that may benefit the person praying, through a comforting illusion that the prayer will have a positive effect in the world. According to this view, if I pray for a sick friend in England, for example, the electrical impulses of my praying activity would be so weak that they would barely be detectable in the next room, let alone reach my bedridden friend in England. But if prayer functions in a manner that it is believed to function, then it must involve action that takes place at a distance, either an action of the mind via its extension, as I've suggested, or an action of a spiritual agency. It may be that we are connected with everybody we think about and all the places we are attached to through our extended minds. Our minds, in fact, may be vast, far-reaching spatially extended networks of connection in space and time - networks of immense scope in which the brains inside our heads are but a portion.

THE GLOBAL MIND

This whole topic of the extended mind becomes particularly important at the present time when there is a tremendous interest in the idea of connecting up large numbers of human minds. Peter Russell presented this concept in his book, *The Global Brain*. More recently, we have actually linked billions of people by satellite for projects such as "Live Aid," or the international peace meditation held in December 1986, or the two days of Harmonic Convergence observed in the middle of August 1987. Then there are the full-moon peace meditations which many people practice at the exact instant of the full moon all around the world. All of these convocations are based on the idea that the mind is extended, that it can "link up" with other minds, and that simultaneity is particularly important in creating a kind of group mind phenomenon. None of us has a clue as to what is going on when billions of people are linked up via viewing the same image on satellite television; no one knows, and no traditional system of psychology can tell us. Ordinary academic cognitive psychology cannot illuminate this area for us because it lies beyond the scope of laboratories and behavioristic experimentation, the way they are currently practiced.

At present we are moving into a world in which the notion of the extended mind in its various forms - the extended mind in social groups, the extended mind in space, the extended mind in time - is becoming increasingly important: But we do not yet have a clear, lucid way of thinking about it or conceiving of it. Jung's view of the "collective unconscious" is just one aspect of the extended mind; the geomantic aspect of it, and the connection to time and place, is another. The concept of the extended mind as a morphic field, though a new paradigm which is not yet fully formulated, enables us to glimpse bits of a new world-view. And it is very, very different world view from the one we currently hold, in which our minds are conceived to be entirely private affairs inside the privacy of the nervous tissue within our brains.