

MYSTICAL TIME

‘*Qi*’ is the romanization of two very different words in Chinese. One – which has become familiar, if often poorly understood in the West – means ‘breath’, or ‘the movement of vital energy’. The other means ‘strange, wonderful, rare, extraordinary’, and also ‘odd, single, surplus, orphan’. It refers to the bit left over, the fractional remainder, the anomaly that defies reduction into man-made maps of reality. As Leonard Cohen so beautifully phrased it, ‘There is a crack in everything – that’s how the light gets in’.

There are secret Taoist practices aimed at entering the *qi men*, the ‘wondrous door’ to *dun jia*, the ‘hidden time’. *Dun jia* also means ‘simultaneous time’. Hidden and simultaneous: this is what Jung called synchronicity.

Shamans everywhere and always have sought times of hiatus, of non-action, in which the hidden gestation of ordinary reality unfolds. Legends of every culture contain references to a mythical land, a ‘faery world’, visited for what seems like a day or a year, but from which one returns to find that centuries of ordinary time have passed.

Aboriginal cultures, who live embedded in the direct experience of natural processes, tend to have a different relationship with time. The Hopi Indians, for example, have no word for time; their concept of time does not include past or future, but only that which ‘is beginning to manifest’ and ‘that which is manifest’, like rocks and objects. Both

that which *is*, and that which is *coming into being*, are recognized as real.

For indigenous Australians, the past is still alive and vital today, and will remain so into the future. Ancestor spirits and their powers are present in the forms of their ‘dreaming’.

The traditional Maori model of time has humans moving *backward* into the future; everything else comprises the present, and there is no concept of the past.

This blurring of what we neatly categorize as past, present, and future, flies in the face of linear thinking, which is widely assumed to be the bedrock of modern science. But in the vanguard of modern science, we find the radically non-linear field of quantum physics, and one of the pioneers of quantum physics, David Bohm, evoked something very similar to the *dun jia*. He described the ‘explicate order’ – which is to say, ‘ordinary’ reality – as a projection from higher dimensional levels of reality, and said that the apparent stability and solidity of the objects and entities composing ordinary reality are generated and sustained by a ceaseless process of enfoldment and unfoldment, as subatomic particles constantly dissolve into the implicate order (the ‘hidden’ reality) and then recrystallize.

And this, after all, brings us back to the first meaning of *qi* – the breathing, in and out, of the universe: the interplay of *yin* and *yang* that gives rise to all the awesome complexity of life.

The past and future are both stories we tell, of that which was, or is not yet. The gap between them is where possibility resides.

Perhaps it is the present moment that is *dun jia*, the hidden time, 'written thinly on the void'. Anyone who has ever attempted to 'be here now' knows how elusive it is. When we arrive 'here' and 'now', at the deepest level of direct experience, it turns out to be 'everywhere' and 'always', an encounter with the universality and wholeness that lie behind the infinitely varied transformations.

It is in this numinous space-time that the *gua*, the 64 linear figures of the I Ching exist, as nascent images of archetypal patterns which are not yet manifest in material reality, but are 'coming into being'. When we consult the I Ching, it is to reveal the hidden present which gives birth to the future.