

Trance of everyday life and dream paths: the art of oracle

Abstract

The authors practice and teach oracle reading in our culture. That enables them to share experiences about quality criteria and the bandwidth of possible applications. They see oracle reading as tool of navigation for a self-determined course between trance of everyday life and dream paths, between reason and dream.

This article deals with the cowrie shell-oracle from the Dagara culture in Burkina Faso/West Africa. Its reality construction has a lot of similarities with the holistic processual thinking and acting of system and of chaos theory. The Dagara world model portrays interactions, which can be described by our dialectical and intuitive systems thinking. In the spread of shells the force field of the “Now“ becomes visible, which is pervading everything what lives like a mobile. In distinction from that the view of man as “crown of creation“ is separating us from all what is alive and is adjusting us on the exploitation of nature.

System theory and cybernetics expose, that a solution of ecological crisis as well needs another conception of the human being, different from “economic man“, as e.g. “Each person is his own central metaphor” (Mary Catherine Bateson). This approach has a lot in common with the indigenous view of world and man.

Oracle reading is listening and seeing into the still unshaped invisible world, to find clues for salutary action, which is balancing again, what has lost equilibrium.

*“Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the does?
Can you number the months that they fulfill,
and do you know the time when they give birth?“*

Hiob, 39,1-2

1. Conversations with the invisible world or what we are able to see

Already decades ago the authoress and the author of this article were drawn into indigenous cultures:



our paths crossed in Peru and in West Africa both of us were seized by the West African cowrie shell-oracle, as we learned it in the Dagara culture in Burkina Faso. In West Africa the cowries lay on the ground, in the oracle as adapted by Malidoma Patrice Somé for the West they lay on a cloth, on which the 5 elements of the Dagara cosmology are painted multiply. With the cowries there is piled up a big variety of items, stones, rings and symbols of any kind in front of the oracle reader - according to his/her individuality different ones as well. He or she calls immaterial partners

into the space of the ritual of divination¹⁾, then he or she may invite the client to concentrate on a topic

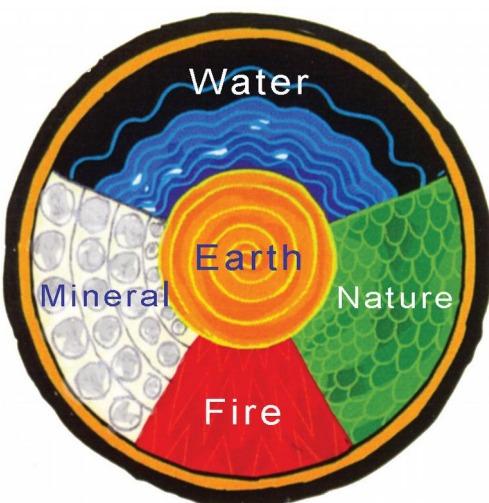
1) Divination (derived from Latin *divinum* = the divine) denotes the sensing of the sacred in natural phenomena and mundane incidents with the use of analogue media and/or by “deep seeing“. Deep seeing, sensing or imagining describes one of the 4 modes of consciousness: thinking - feeling and perceiving - sensing (C.G.Jung)

or not, to speak out or not. Then the client starts to spread all these items by turning them around with one hand. The turning ends by itself or on request of the diviner. An image or spread has been formed, which can come about in this form only once - and it was not formed by somebody else, no - the client him- or herself has done it, seeking advice. Accordingly his or her attentiveness is sized for all what is to follow. It is a seeing or listening, during which the oracle reader often is checking back with his immaterial partners, if the image “fits“ (is not influenced by his own wishes and wants) and if it makes sense, to share it with the client.

Invited by Malidoma Somé, Helga Weule accompanied together with him people from Europe for several years, to learn this art. She writes about her experiences in her book:

“Oracle reading nowadays means to me to sense truths alongside of good questions, to listen to the still unshaped invisible world, to *see*, what “normal” eyes are not able to see and to share many a bit of it with others, who are asking good questions. Oracle can give healing impulses.

As I am active as paintress as well, this helps me to describe this a bit on the basis of the other way of *seeing*. The “normal“ seeing in everyday life usually works very fast via “symbol matching“ using our language terms - I see, what I know in language, cognition, reason, e.g. houses, people, bank account statements, but on an immaterial level as well as gravity, virtual assets and bad or good relationships. The artistic deeper *seeing* mostly works beyond the constraints of language via the contradictions, which I perceive within a system or “field” with all senses, e.g. close-distant, light-dark, pleasant-unpleasant, loud-silent etc. I need this artistic *seeing* in order to be able to draw portraits or nude portraits, in general: “nature“



I drift into this artistic seeing as well, when I *see* into the oracle. The Dagara cosmology of elements offers the “field“ for that. It is like coming into view of something invisible, of relationships and relations, a wordless conversation with emotions and images, a lucid dreaming²⁾ with open eyes, a sensing and giving in into body impulses and the entire environment. The ritual, di-vination is embedded in, enables me to leave the reality of consent³⁾ and provides protection for other but possible realities, still unshaped in the Now.

The practice of oracle reading reveals more and more to me, how difficult it is for people of our culture, to accept another reality construction than that one dictated

2) Lucid dreaming is conscious dreaming. Compare Paul Tholey and Kaleb Utecht, *Schöpferisch träumen. Der Klartraum als Lebenshilfe (Creative dreaming. Clear dreaming as counseling.)*

3) Reality of consent or everyday life trance means the unconscious background agreement of a culture, what is real and valid. Goethe says in Faust: „*Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heißt, das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist, in dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.*“ (J.W. Goethe, Faust I, lines 577 ff.) “What you call the spirit of an age, that is at root the spirit of the mighty ones, in which a time is mirroring itself”.

by the “Zeitgeist“ (spirit of our age). Often it is possible to see and and to feel other realities, but our mind refuses to accept these perceptions. Tales told by our culture about oracle mostly tell us, that oracle statements mostly are very unclear and ambiguous, that tricks and manipulation are part of it and that such statements intervene very dangerously into the fate of the involved people. The myth of Oedipus, known by Freud's psychoanalysis, may show us.

I do not know either, what King Laios asked the oracle, but at those times oracles were asked in all cultures, in order to get important alignments of life. Because a child should be born to Laios, he contacted the oracle, that was natural. There he received the statement: “Some day your son will kill you.” Assumed, the father accepts this statement, is courageous and directs further inquiries to the oracle like: When and where my son will kill me? Can I do something preventing that? Etc. In this case he would have received answers. But we know, that he did not ask further questions. To the contrary: out of fear of death King Laios tries to invalidate the oracle's statement and gives the order, to kill his son. He does not figure out the oracle's statement, but tries to make it effectless, to cheat it, to invert it.

As you know you cannot escape your fate. This is especially so, if one refuses to fill it with consciousness. Thus it is only consequential, that in the myth finally the bereaved son Oedipus becomes a blind seer, becomes an “oracle“ or simply that, what his father Laios tried to kill, to cheat and to invalidate.

The consequences of those oracle statements for our present culture seem to be: “what I don't know, won't hurt me“ and “our unconscious is a trash bin anyway, we would prefer not to look into“. We prefer to leave that to paid experts like “headshrinkers“ or counselors. If we look at the appearance of increasing environmental pollution, we can realize, that it is holding up a mirror to our soul very clearly: we are producing more and more garbage according to the motto “after us the deluge“. And what are we doing day-to-day with our cultural trash? In the last end it is finishing up in the sea, the source of all life. The giant deep sea, for the most part still unexplored - as large as our unconscious, as the unknown - becomes the big recycling place of our cultural trash.

The fact, that on the other side our unconscious is abundant with biodiversity, treasures and old knowledge (and that one could put up wonderful new small works of art from trash) - is attracting negative sanctions from, is distorted, concealed, ridiculed or simply disregarded by our “Zeitgeist (spirit of our age) predominantly. Or economy may make a new profitable business out of it. Every single one, all of us deprive ourselves of many possibilities, to use all our resources, to discover our hidden treasures and to dispose our personal trash self-responsibly. That means, that we deprive ourselves of the possibility to put something into shape with all our sides, as well with the unconscious ones, thus walking more healthy and tall and maintaining our course with and in a community.

Again and again the oracle is teaching me, to become more open for impulses of community on small

scale (organism, family, environment, ...) as well as of community on large scale (life project, survival unit⁵), nature etc.), wherein unfolds what is lively in us as individuals; it is teaching me as well to stay connected, to find good questions and to listen to answers. To put it briefly, it is teaching me to practice most consequently what is meant essentially by “holistic, process-like thinking and acting“. ⁶

2. About the benefit of different ways of thinking

Aletheia is a term in ancient Greek and means truth, literally translated “the non-dark“ (A-letheia), in everyday language that, what is known, conscious and recognized.⁷ It is faced with the giant realm of the unknown and unconscious, not yet perceived, which we may realize sensually every night looking into the vast starlit sky. In Dagara there is an appropriate term for the dark or unknown: “*Yielbongura*“ = “*what cannot be eaten up by knowledge*“. ⁸ *Oracle* denotes in Latin a place “where the gods give mysterious prophecies“. ⁹

Just from these descriptions it becomes clear that since the classical Greek culture (on which we rest upon) we carry with us a severe misunderstanding: the devaluation of mythical, “dark, mysterious” resp. multilayered thinking versus the “bright”, unambiguous, linear, logical thinking. Manfred Weule gives a description in his book “Ancestral soil ...“:

“Our Western thinking is familiar with the logical-hierarchical thinking. It is a **thinking in the one**, a thinking of separation: either something is right or it is wrong, all further possibilities - that e.g. somebody may be as well in favor of conflicts as reconciliatory - are excluded by logical axioms (theorems). It contains rules of drawing conclusions as well, according to which it is allowed to reason from the universally valid to the particular, but not in the same way from the particular to the universal. It is well appropriate to generate out of insights projects ripe for implementation. His fathers are Parmenides und Aristotle.

Thinking in the two exists in the West as *dialectical thinking*. Dialectic means in ancient Greek “doctrine of the two“ and it is a process thinking of “as well ... as”, promoting processes of development out of the interaction of two opposed impacts (hypothesis and antithesis) in a way, that a new state of balance (synthesis, homoeostasis) can be achieved. His fathers are Heraclitus, Hegel and Marx.

There is a third style, the **thinking in plenty**, the *intuitive or systems thinking*, which looks at complex system realities (with many variables and circuits of causality) like at a mobile and tries to seize the patterns of relationship between the elements of the system in the inward and in the outward by linking of sensual data and visual associations. In ancient China his father is Dschuang Dsi (Zhuāngzǐ),

5) Survival unit is for Gregory Bateson that section of natural and social environment, which I need in order to be able to survive. Compare Gregory Bateson, Form, substance and difference. Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) was anthropologist, consciousness researcher, cyberneticist and “grandfather“ of systemic family therapy.

6) Helga Weule, *Traveling in different worlds*, p.116 ff. (Translated into English for this article by MW)

7) Heinz von Foerster, *Lethology. A theory of learning and knowing vis-à-vis undeterminables, undecidibles, unknowables*.

8) Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Vom Geist Afrikas*, p. 19

9) Duden Etymological dictionary of German language, p.481

in many other cultures his fathers or mothers remained anonymous, especially in those cultures, who decided to avoid written records.

The Dagara's world view describes interactions, which may be comprehended as well with the dialectical as with the intuitive or systems thinking. The pattern of life itself appears in it. Nothing comes from itself alone. Everything comes from the interaction with something else. The woman is associated with the mystery of life and birth, but she does not come from herself. The man as designer in the outward does not come from himself, both are lively out of their inter-relation and life procreates itself out of their confluence: out of two originates three.¹⁰⁾

The cosmological wheel of 5 elements - their world model - is based on two. “In the interior of each element operates a female antipole in a man and a male antipole in a woman. “As well in the exterior, between any two polar or complementary elements of the medicine wheel, the two is at work.



Fire and water is the first polarity between male and female, between fire - manly confronting - and water - womanly compensating and flowing round. Their interplay bears fruit in the earth. To be able to nourish the vegetation, earth needs light and warmth as well as water.

The second polarity is between **mineral and nature**. Mineral stands for knowledge, continuity and structure. Nature for the antipole play, change and transformation.

The interplay mineral - nature bears fruit in a third as well: in the earth. Earth is humus, which has to align the nutrients of mineral with the “hunger“ of nature's wilderness. Here is earth a biotope of diversity of the unique.

In the Dagara wheel of elements we see a static model of two pairs of antipoles, the interplay of which condenses in the quality of the center - earth -, which has to be brought in balance again and again.¹¹⁾ Four elements are linked with each other in pairs. Looking at it more precisely it is a system of 4+1 elements. Two pairs of elements (fire-water and mineral-nature) condense in the quality of their relationship in the fifth element, earth in the center, at a time. And reversely a disbalance of earth in the center reacts to the pairs of elements. Without an antipole an element would not be able to develop and to become efficient, but would destroy itself: fire would burn itself, water would congeal or va-

10) We can compare that with the interrelationship between chicken, egg and rooster. One cannot say, which one was the first one and which one was the last one. You need all three, so that all three exist.“ Heinz von Foerster, Cybernetics of cybernetics (German version), p.85

11) However the Chinese wheel of 5 elements which is the basis of traditional Chinese medicine, is a process or cycle model of process phases or seasons merging into each other with the qualities water - wood (≈ nature) – fire – earth - metal (≈ mineral).

porize, the knowledge of mineral would abandon like a library without users, the magical play of nature would get lost ending in itself without sense, earth would become inanimate and infertile at a time.^{“12)}

3. Old and modern cosmologies or: what we believe in

In oracle reading the cosmology of 5 elements shows itself in the realms of small, medium and large. It enables us to see a holistic and very complex image, wherein the ratios of power of the “now” can show themselves. Cosmologies mostly are effective invisibly from the background, as power of belief. It is the merit of a bridge builder between old and modern cultures, Malidoma Patrice Somé, who described this cosmology, made it visible and comprehensible for our modern world. Therefore we may use it in the oracle system to get answers for complex questions and to have conversations with the big unknown.

Since a long time our culture has the view, that “man is the crown of creation“. You find this in science, which is still separating “humane discipline“ and “natural science“, i.e. looks at mind and nature separately. In this view man is “final product” of evolution, its highest form, something special and ingenious. This conception of human being shows itself quite obviously in daily business and action: the human beings subdue the world, i.e. subjugate stones, plants, animals, water, fire, air to their purposes and their control, exploit them and look at them as mindless “raw materials“. Thus this image of humanity becomes a world model, a cosmology, a reality construction, on base of which we act.

This world model places us outside the evolution, is separating us from everything, makes us lonesome and strange and opens hell for us: it is making us anxious, because it is locking up the “dark“ = all what is not perceivable or has not been perceived yet, thus becoming an urge for destructive action: predatory exploitation of nature, fundamentalism and terrorism - as well in the small realm, as in the middle and large.

Heinz v. Foerster, physicist and modern system theorist, describes this in form of two undecidable questions: a) *Am I separated from the universe? I.e. whenever I look, do I look like through a keyhole on the unfolding galaxy? Or b) Am I part of the universe? I.e., whenever I act, I change myself and the universe with me?*^{“13)} In relation with the conception of the human being and with mind the undecidable question is: am I as ingenious man surrounded by a mindless world, a mindless universe? These alternatives show, that we decide ourselves for a world model, also called cosmology - it is our system of belief, which carries our reality construction.

As long as we are not dominated by a monoculture, as long the choice is ours: Taoism, Buddhism, different native American and African cosmologies do not know a god or spirit “distinct from world“, it

12) A comprehensive description of Dagara cosmology from the view of water is in Malidoma Patrice Somé, “The healing wisdom of Africa“. Another one from the view of fire gives Manfred Weule in “Ancestral soil ...“.

13) Heinz von Foerster, Ethics and second-order-cybernetics (German version), p.75 f.

is living and working through everything surrounding us. There are rather monotheistic religions, associated with the exclusive claim to truth like Christianity and Islam, which have systems of belief separating God from the world – and hereby in the end from mankind –, seeing human beings as “crown of creation“ and crusading those, who believe something different.

In contrast to this, Dagara cosmology shows in the symbol of its cosmological wheel an innovative get-together of different material and spiritual forces. “We made the experience, that the medicine wheel gives as well a weaving pattern of possible creative diversity and tension in groups, communities or “villages”, which we in the West are lacking so much. The variety of male and female elemental “gifts” and of its specific angle of view results in 2x5 “truths”, which can come into conflict with each other in life spontaneously. Because it is hard for us human beings to imagine, that there are angles of view different from our own one and assume first of all automatically, that others must have the same perspective as we ourselves.

As soon as we notice, that somebody has a view completely different from our own one, we often assess that as negative (e.g. as critique, devaluation, rejection or even as attack) and come under stress. We request others to be insightful, but what we mean, is, that they should share our own insight.

To discover different views physically, emotionally and mentally inside ourselves, to make the most out of them and to reenact them, is a major subject in “school of life“ as well as in the education and development of people working with people, be it as peacemaker, manager, counselor, healer, physician or shaman. How does somebody want to bring about peace, inside of whom a war of unconcillable contradictions is raging?

What could be a better setting for such a learning process than a group of women and men of all five elements? As soon as their numerical proportion comes close to the ratio visible in the graphic of the wheel, it will be easier to balance the tension between antipoles and to make creative use of it. Group or community does not stand for a group of regulars, a coffee party, teams or followers of an authority. It stands for groups of people, who join their efforts to avert an emergency, because they realized, that neither they alone nor external authorities have the ability to do that.¹⁴⁾ This might be e.g. interdisciplinary teams of counselors in the small realm, project groups making a vision real in the middle and the 'occupy movement' in the large.

4. Letting oneself in for the unknown

Our culture mostly shines a light on all that, what it knows, what it can and what it controls. That's why everywhere electrical lights have to be on at night. Would it be dark, we could see at the starlit sky and one glimpse would be enough to sense the greatness and beauty of the unknown and our interwovenness.

14) Manfred Weule, “Ancestral soil...“, p.48 (Translated into English for this article by MW)

Like the intuitive systems thinking dating back to Chinese taoism the world view of Dagara culture assumes at the outset, that we are surrounded and pervaded by what is unrecognizable or partially still unknown. By mind. What we are not able to recognize or only may recognize in part, we are not able to control either. Therefore conditions of balance are only transitionally stable and in complex contexts we can make only approximate statements about actions supporting balance.

“In Dagara cosmology any element is a gateway into the world of the unknown and of mystery. *Fire* to the world of ancestors from own families of origin and from „families“ of animals, wells, mountains, trees a.o.; *water* to the world of mind, of non-ancestral spirits. Kontomblés live in mountains and caves, Ginies¹⁵⁾ in the wilderness. But these are names only. Without an empty openness for new experience they mean nothing.

The Dagara world model sees balancing as multiplication by **three**.¹⁶⁾ “Since things fell apart and separation came up, it confirmed itself, that a force, which pushed the world out of its balance, has to be confronted by a force as triple as strong“ Somé’s mentor Guisso says. You may hold in balance the polarity of fire and water, of man and woman, as soon as there is triple as much water than fire. 6 (water) is three times of 2 (fire). According to that in the wheel of elements the water sector is painted three times as big than the fire sector. That may teach us something about the fiery-destructive situation of our world.

For the other elements this numerical relation of the triple antipole does not (yet?) exist. Therefore more is required in order to balance and to innovate the entire system: knowledge from the unconscious and unknown; the intervention of allies in the invisible world. They are called for their support in ritual, when things do not go on any more.“

This is also the case in the ritual of **cowrie shell divination** (oracle reading). The distinctive spread “turned“ by a person seeking advice, is “read“ by the diviner; he or she has the responsibility, to show the client ways how to retrieve balance and healing in a way understandable for him/her. On the divination set (see photo) you find the reference system of 5 elements three times: as symbols outside, in the inner circle under the shells as sectors (“cake slices“) of the painted medicine wheel and finally as movable symbols in the pile of shells. In the pattern being formed by the turning of the movable items of the set, the outer “world of 1 000 things“ is mirrored in the moment of the reading.¹⁷⁾

5. Expected and unexpected patterns: the dance of the old with the new

According to Gregory Bateson we all think with “patterns, which connect“. He sees processes of mind

15) Kontomblés are earth spirits helpful to human beings and similar to the dwarfs of our fairy-tales. See the description of an experience with a Kontomblé in M. Weule, *Ancestral soil ...*, German edition, p. 34 ff. About Ginies or Dschinns (the “spirit in the bottle“ in fairy-tales) see Helga Weule, *Traveling in different worlds* p.48 ff.

16) About the quality of natural numbers see Marie-Louise von Franz, *Zahl und Zeit*. Psychologische Überlegungen zu einer Annäherung von Tiefenpsychologie und Physik (Number and time. Considerations about a convergence of depth psychology and physics)

17) Manfred Weule, *Ancestral soil ...*, p.45 ff.

essentially as formation and insights of patterns or “patterns of patterns“. “But these patterns are not static, but patterns in time, i.e. “tales“.“¹⁸⁾ In order to illustrate this, we now contrast qualities of a modern rationalist world view and of an indigenous holistic view.

Our rationalist world model deduces expectable pattern formations from regularities presumed as generally valid and designs a plan of action. When an event occurs in accordance with the laws of nature and the plan deduced from them, security is created. We rationalists are focussed on **the expected pattern**. When the occurring event deviates from the expected pattern, we see that as mistake, strive to correct and to exclude it.

Holistic action however defines a target and strives to reach it by navigation relating to the situation. It takes deviations as hints for the fine tuning of navigation. When something unexpected occurs, people of indigenous cultures direct all their attention on the “reading“ of these events. Archaic man “asks for specific reasons, when **the unexpected** occurs.“ “He does not attach importance (...) on the clean relationships of causality, but on the confusing and perplexed decussions of causal chains, which are called coincidences.“ (C.G.Jung)

“The law of group formation or series formation of coincidence justifies, what we ... call superstition, because it is probable indeed, that unusual events coincide in time and space.” “It would never come to our minds seriously, to see the following series of events as coherent: in the morning a bird flies into the room, one hour later one is witness of a road accident, in the afternoon a close relative dies, at night the cook lets fall the soup tureen and coming home late at night one finds out, that the house key is lost.“ For the carefully observing “savage” already the first or second event shows, that this is “an ominous day, unfavorable for action.”¹⁹⁾ In our world this would be superstition, but in the wilderness appropriate intelligence, because one should not risk too many coincidences there.



“Let us not forget, that our experience betrays us a bit. We observe insufficiently, because we are at-tuned differently“, Jung remarks. Indigenous observers of nature simply watch and adopt the attitude: Aha, *one* deviation is already there, let us see, how it will combine to a pattern with a following event. This attitude is awake and activates all senses.

The underlying **indigenous world model** is similar to the world model of system theory and of chaos theory: one can describe it as **mobile** or as fragile system of relationships out of many single elements. Anything is connected with anything; as soon as an element of a mobile is slightly touched, the entire system starts to swing: the disturbance communicates itself to the the other elements and returns as reinforcement to the triggering element. Waiting and doing nothing, until the rise of vibration faded

18) Fritz B.Simon/Helm Stierlin, Die Sprache der Familientherapie. Ein Vokabular. (Language of family therapy. A vocabulary, keyword pattern, German edition p. 245 f.). Compare also Gregory Bateson, Mind and nature. A necessary unit
19) C.G.Jung, *Der archaische Mensch*, p.67-90 (Archaic man, translated into English for this article by MW)

away, therefore is no superstition, but is utterly reasonable. Assumed, the mobile would stand for an obstacle on the path, e.g. an impenetrable jungle zone. Nobody wanting to pass there would seriously consider, to pass there inattentively and absentmindedly, thereby risking to amplify the turbulences of this system. On the contrary, he will wait until the system calmed down, in order to be able to “dance through” the less swinging elements of this mobile more easily.

Reality is a tissue, which is composed of expected and stable issues on one side and of unexpected and unstable ones on the other. We oracle readers look at the pattern of shells and symbols, which the client has created under his or her turning hand. **We look at deviations and relations, it is there where meaning is.** The disturbance carries meaning, it is moving. It has a dynamic side, which prevents, that the entire system falls asleep in its habits. But if this dynamic is not understood, in order to derive action supporting balance or acts of omission (non-action), that may cause escalation of illness and destruction.

We see: there are not two separated worlds excluding each other, but two interconnected poles. Both may change into habits and freeze. How says Wilhelm Busch? “Nothing is more difficult to stand than a series of good days“. Watzlawick quotes an old Japanese proverb approvingly : “Nothing worse than a fulfilled desire.“ When we have a good time, it's soon boring; when something goes wrong and we feel bad, we are at home and complain. As soon as we take a new look on both poles at a time, when we encounter them, we find the take-off energy to stay with our desire. Let us conclusively contrast both poles compact:

The dance of the expected and unexpected

<p>Expected formation of patterns, causality</p> <p>Focus: repetition of known patterns</p>	<p>Unexpected formation of patterns, “coincidence“</p> <p>Focus: deviation from a pattern</p>
<p>Dispositions, experiences, preferences, standards, values, conclusions, prejudices lead to formation of patterns. Creates safety and order, consolidates capabilities and actions, enables repetition, tests, security.</p> <p>But: restrains perception, limits purposefully the range of attention and makes it thus more shapeable, consolidates habits, promotes attack and defense, stimulates bumps (if a bump shall stay, I have to keep hitting my head again and again), leads either to stiffness or to dissolution of a pattern.</p>	<p>Unforeseen or unforeseeable events determine deviation from a pattern, change or interrupt the pattern or even dissolve it, enable something new, uniqueness.</p> <p>But: They make anxious, but enable to take a new look, create free space or play space between analysis and assessment, generate formation of patterns by repetition.</p>
<p>Suitable for routine situations, reduction of complexity. Suitable for practical implementation (operationalization) of insights.</p> <p>Cognitive tools of this sphere (analytics, project management) blind out the acting system: “Find the <i>right</i> tool and use it” resp. “How can the asking individual use the tool in the <i>right</i> way?”</p>	<p>Suitable for complex resp. tricky situations.</p> <p>“Group formation of coincidence: it is probable that unusual things coincide in time and space“. (Jung)</p> <p>Symbol systems include acting system and environments and focus alignment of action or omission:</p> <p>Which alignment and which tool needs the hand of the asking individual?</p>

Reality as object separated from the observer	Reality as network of relationships including the observer
Origin in the scientific thinking of civilization	Developed by tribal cultures close to nature, partially taken up and further developed by system theory, chaos and consciousness research (intuition and creativity), therapy and counseling

6. A new image of humanity: Each person is his own central metaphor¹⁹⁾

It is the merit of quite a few scientists and scholars of many disciplines working since the beginning of the 1950s about system theory and cybernetics as interdisciplinary science of processes of 'circuit causality', to have (re)discovered, that a solution of the ecological crisis demands a new definition of the individual. 1968 took place a conference about the topic "Effects of conscious purpose on the human adaptation", which was prepared by Gregory Bateson and was accompanied and documented by his daughter Mary Catherine Bateson.²⁰⁾

Gregory Bateson defines in his memorandum consciousness as important part of the "coupling of three cybernetic or homoeostatic systems: the individual human organism, the human society and the larger ecosystem". He gives the hypothesis, that it could be "well possible", "that consciousness contains systematic contortions of view, which can destroy the balance between man, his society and his ecosystem, as soon as they are translated into modern technology".

On basis of the insights of the conference Mary Catherine Bateson gives the following statements about individual, diversity and cosmos.²¹⁾

"We had been moving in many ways (in this conference) toward a sense that a solution to the ecological crisis would demand a new definition of the individual, a definition by which the arguments of "economic man" would cease to be relevant, one that would retain a sense of the vividness of persons

19) Metaphor (from ancient Greek 'transfer') is a picturesque vivid expression, which induces imagination, because many eidetic elements are part of it, e.g. tree crown instead of tree top.

20) Mary Catherine Bateson (born 1939), daughter of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, is anthropologist and linguist and inspired Gregory Bateson's character 'daughter' in his metalogues like "Papa, what is an instinct" (Gregory Bateson, *Ecology of mind*). Among others she is editor of *Approaches to Semiotics* (The Hague 1964), authoress of *Structural continuity in poetry* (Paris 1970) and coauthor of "Angels fear. Towards an epistemology of the sacred", New York 1987. German edition... *wo Engel zögern. Unterwegs zu einer Epistemologie des Heiligen*. (Frankfurt 1993), of which the writings, which Gregory Bateson left behind, are part of. She organized the conference "Effects of conscious purpose on the human adaptation", which took place with a grant of the Wenner-Gren-Foundation at the Austrian castle Burg Wartenstein 1968 (!).

Gregory Bateson wrote a memorandum about the topic of the conference which is part of his reader "Ecology of mind" under the title "Effects of conscious purpose on the human adaptation". In this interdisciplinary conference took part besides GB and MCB 12 further persons, whose contributions and position papers are partially reproduced in "Our own Metaphor": Frederick Atneave, psychologist (1919-1991), Barry Commoner, biologist (1917-2012), Gertrude Hendrix, mathematician (1905-2008), Anatol W. Holt, mathematician (1927-2010), W.T.Jones, philosopher, Bert Kaplan, psychologist (1899-2006), Peter H.Klopfer, ethologist and ecologist (born 1930), Warren S. McCulloch, neurologist and early spokesman of cybernetics (1898-1969), Horst Mittelstädt, zoocyberneticist (born 1923), Gordon Pask, cyberneticist (1928-1996), Bernhard Raxlen, psychiatrist and Theodore Schwartz, anthropologist.

21) From: Mary Catherine Bateson, *Our Own Metaphor*, p.285-289. Her statements which are quoted here in extracts were an essential contribution to the 7-days-conference, to come closer to a preliminary common conclusion. She received the consent of all participants to write a detailed personal report about the conference. We never read such a varied conference report including the affectivity of the observer. It is very regrettable, that this book never has been translated into German.

and at the same time allow each person to identify with natural process. To learn to love, we would need to recognize ourselves as systems, the beloved as systemic, similar and lovely in complexity, and to see ourselves in the same time as merged in a single system with the beloved. I thought of a sentence and, in a trance of thought and feeling combined, I found it in a range of meanings and and interlocking of different levels.“ This sentence is “*Each person is his own central metaphor*“. M.C. Bateson interprets it in four different ways.

“The **first thing** that I want to mean by that has to do with perception and coding. Any kind of representation within a person of something outside depends on there being sufficient diversity within him to reflect the relationships in what he perceives, as it depends on coding of some kind. (...)

Now, we've talked here about the fact that there are lots of different kinds of representations - that is, the relationships within this system that is me can be used to reflect or to map other relationships in a very large number of ways. At this level of abstraction, to the extent that the two relationships are the same, there are not two different things in two places. There's only one relationship and they're both it. If we're going to talk about relationships instead of about things, then all our talk about about what exists, what's prior to what, and so on, just has to be rethought completely. I mean this first interpretation of this statement of mine to relate to many of the things we've said about how errors get in, since the way in which something is coded determines the kind of errors you can get. We can't relate to anything unless we can express its complexity through the diversity that is ourselves.“ We err through a mismatch between ourselves and the other, and all our falsehoods are falsehoods about ourselves as well.“

That supports our hypothesis that the coding of a distinctive spread of shells within the context of a cosmology allows to map a comprehensible diversity and therefore is able to open us an access to the diversity inside ourselves.

“The **second thing** that I want to mean by my sentence, brings us to the edge of a lot more anthropological and psychoanalytic ideas. See, most of the ways in which we mutilate the environment and muck up systems have to do with things we dislike about ourselves. Like death.“ (...) “Most important, I keep feeling that one of the most crucial moral questions that is around, made more urgent because of medical developments, is the question of willingness to die. The human willingness or unwillingness to die has a tremendous amount to do with how we define life and where we feel we can cut into natural cycles. So that is (...) my second meaning of 'Each person is his own central metaphor'. Of all the cycles we deny and distort, the denial of our own return to the soil, when we extrapolate ourselves into eternity, sets us most at odds with our turning world.“

When we assign ourselves to impermanence, we become open for creativity and the new.

“The **third thing** that I mean by 'Each person is his own central metaphor' is theological. I object passionately to a representation of the Christian view that says that at a *point* in time something happened, that the Christ event is a point. The life of a person is a process; Jesus lived a life that had birth at the beginning and death at the end of it. The potential usefulness of talking about that person - the way in which our feelings about that person can influence the way we treat other persons or the ecosystem or society - has to do with how much person we are willing to let into our metaphor, because we need religion to make us aware of process. If we can tolerate our humanness, we can tolerate his humanness, and vice versa. (Hardly anyone does, they paint pictures which imply that he didn't sweat. If he didn't sweat, he's no use to us!) He can become a projection of the degree to which we refuse to look at our own humanness as a way of relating, or he can become an insistent parable that says to me that the only thing that I am is my whole life, a person - that directs me to go on looking back at the whole life of persons, including the motion of the cells. So this is the third thing that I want to mean when I say 'Each person is his own central metaphor', as giving us a basis for extending that metaphor in wider and wider ways.”

Everybody lives an own myth or: a myth tells more than 1 000 words.

„Now (**fourthly**) the question of consciousness brings up the fact that we have incomplete access to the complexity that we are. We've blocked a great deal of it out. In a Freudian sense, we've blocked it out by rejecting it. We also - it eludes us, it's too fine-grained, we're just not organized to be aware of it. One reason why poetry is important for finding out about the world is because in poetry a set of relationships get mapped onto a level of diversity in us that we don't ordinarily have access to. We bring it out in poetry. We can give to each other in poetry the access to a set of relationships in the other person and in the world that we're not usually conscious of in ourselves. So we need poetry as knowledge about the world and about ourselves, because of this mapping from complexity to complexity.“

What Mary Catherine Bateson says about the ability of poetry and art, to map complexity, describes, why oracle reading is an art as well.

7. Trance of everyday life and dream paths: about the modern use of cowrie shell oracle

After the initiation of our oracle reading with this tool, the time of practicing and research began. For a long time Helga turned the shells and stones every morning, mostly with the more general question: what is moving me today? Or as required with concrete current questions of the day. Manfred did at first not feel especially attracted by this tool. But one night he woke up and felt the clear impulse, to take out his divination set immediately and to open it. He felt seized by the beauty of these items and then it was clear, that he as well would go the path of divination. He started to practice and to “play“.

After this time of practicing very fast came up the challenging situation, to see into the oracle for people wanting a divination in the presence of Malidoma Somé - the master passed on to his pupils by throwing them unexpectedly into the cold water of being the mainly responsible oracle reader - for a time Malidoma Somé retreated from his divination activity. The next challenge started for us by teaching this art to others, who felt attracted by the cowrie shell oracle. That's what we do since 2005 and we made quite a few valuable experiences. Some of them we want to describe now.

Linkage with immaterial forces - the ancestors give us stability

It was an important experience from many divinations, that the current relationship to a male or female ancestor, to a force or being, appearing in dreams, or to a place gives many people security, confidence and stability. This vivid system of reference in form of a place in the surrounding landscape then slowly becomes a stable system of connection for divination and community.

This (not only) African view is salutary, that we are able to form vivid relationships to our ancestors and that they support us, to clear up our lives and to live our life purpose²²⁾. This “indigenous method of constellation“ very often gives precise hints, how to live that in everyday life. In our oracle practice we discovered as well, that nearly everybody lives in confident relationships with immaterial forces - often they are just simply not conscious. Salutary impulses come from the oracle here as well. Key elements on the path of the emergent oracle reader are confidence-building steps, giving proof of the reliability and quality of the answers questioned from ancestors.

Working with powerful forces needs modesty

When I call forces bigger than myself for my intention to win inspiration and deeper insight, then my interventions and activities become more powerful on one side, but on the other side they are much more on trial. As well in oracle reading the experience of counseling is valid, that clients contact us with topics, which bring us to the limit what we are still just able to understand and to accompany. On the other side the temptation is growing, to see oneself as especially magnificent. But just then - but also in other situations - it might easily happen, that the diviner gets his/her wires crossed, that is without connection to own sources of inspiration, and - if he/she is working alone - in the worst case has to cancel the session, if it stays like that.

Here it became necessary for us to remind the (not only) African tradition, that several oracle readers cooperate in one session - one is mainly responsible, one or several more are in a supporting function.

22) The authors found reenforcement from the Dagara culture and the US-American therapist James Hillman for their experience, that every human being carries an unique life purpose and the gifts necessary to fulfill it in him-/herself. Hunger and desire, irritations in situations of transition etc. guide on its trace. This is the purpose of their seminar process “Leitbild“ (Image of life purpose) since 24 years.

In modern consulting of organizations it was realized, that “*one consultant is no consultant*“, because complex questions and tasks of consulting need more than one view, therefore teams²³). Hereby appear new situations offering chances to learn, demonstrating again and again to the diviners, that they deal with different views and perspectives and that there is not one “right“ and several “wrong“ perceptions.

That brought up annual meetings of active diviners for sharing experiences, intervision and processes of self reflection about current topics and not least to give each other divinations about themes of own development. This helps to keep up quality in our activities and by reflecting of own power aspirations (“I am right and want, that others see that in the same way”) it protects against guru affectations and megalomania - it makes us more modest.

Similarly helpful is, that oracle reading in traditional Africa is a “village issue“, which means, that clients may bring along people of their confidence as witnesses, allowing them to receive hints from them as well and to have dialogue partners to talk about the reading and to deepen its understanding afterwards.

About the benefit and harm of powerful enactments

Anybody who sees the oracle tool and the ritual of oracle for the first time, may sense the power of this tool already just as a tool. That may seduce diviners to use guru-like presentations; that may cause anxiety in clients, that may bring clients into a reverential attitude. This is one side of this oracle. Its other side is however, that if clients overcome this anxiety and dive into that power field themselves, they become able to *see* themselves, which impulses and answers the oracle is giving. The symbol system of the oracle activates unconscious resources in all those, who let themselves into it. Then it works like a commonly contemplated symbol (system), out of which one can *read*. Good diviners sense that in their clients and may invite them, to perceive their own images from the unconscious and to take them serious, to trust them.

Without question no answer - learning the art of asking questions

On the path of oracle reading there are continuous companions like doubt and stage-fright. Who as oracle reader feels very safe at the beginning of a session, would do well to ask especially carefully questions, to verify the quality of his/her insights. And doubt wants to molt to a qualified inner voice, to formulate questions from other viewing angels and to check them. The method of circular asking from the field of systemic therapy and counseling is here especially helpful just for several reasons:

23) Peter Heintel, Lässt sich Beratung erlernen? (Is it possible to learn consulting?)

At first the review of images and insights needs closed questions; these are questions which can be answered by the asked immaterial counterpart with the media of cowrie shells with Yes or No and therefore needs new ideas of asking questions and counter-questions continuously. Furthermore we are children of our culture and its language: as soon as we want to convey images and insights with the media of our oral language and its grammar, we hereby capture patterns of causality, relationship, subject and object, which may guide us on wrong ways, as Mary Catherine Bateson describes them above.

Finally our questions may help the client, to put his/her own liveliness and diversity into play and this is owed to a paradox qualification of the oracle reader: to be able to connect with the client and his/her readiness and capability, to set salutary actions for him-/herself, and to “deliver“ in the same time strange and crazy approaches - crazy= suitable to shift some of the client's views - and to keep both in balance, so that the unknown, oracle reader and client finally shaped or co-constructed a common image.

Differences, contradictions and layers

All too easily appears in the attitude of asking counterchecking questions a ranking, which adjudicates an asked ancestor more meaning than the capability and readiness of the client, to go or not to go certain healing steps. But as one can easily see, one thing is the “salt in the soup“ of oracle reading: that is the readiness of the client to set actions, to bring lopsided relationships into balance again: that is the reason, why he/she came. And therefore it is the key responsibility of the diviner, to act in a way, which is enabling the client to reach the realm of wholesome action instead to fall into (in some circumstances far to deep) holes, excavated by the diviner's drive to research (or his/her preference for a favourite concept of counseling). A magical question can be here: is it really necessary that we know more about this topic?

The art of a diviner manifests as well in the way, how he/she can bring the insights and accesses of the oracle reading from different perspectives in always new spiral curves into language. Hereby it can be important to tag carefully the change of roles from oracle reader to advisor or counselor (what is easier in a team), when the different “onion skins“ of the topic of a session call for that. This might be especially the case, when the “client“ is no individual, but a couple, a group, a social entity or a landscape.

Trance of everyday life and dream paths

Oracles are consulted, when human beings are not able to reach desired necessary changes with conventional means. Then they come to the oracle with big, small, psychic, physical, spiritual problems

and topics. In oracle reading we experience, witness, sense and realize more and more obviously, that in a protected ritual space we support and call the clients to build up a trustful relationship with the (future) unknown, to enter unknown territory in everyday life as well. The impulses given by the oracle sometimes seem to be “crazy actions“, which may irritate the trance of everyday life resp. old unpleasant and sick-making habits in such a way, that clients may walk light-footed, but grounded on their own dream paths.

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