

2021 Missouri Department of Mental Health's Spring Training
Institute

“When heroic force fails:
trickster stories show the way”

by
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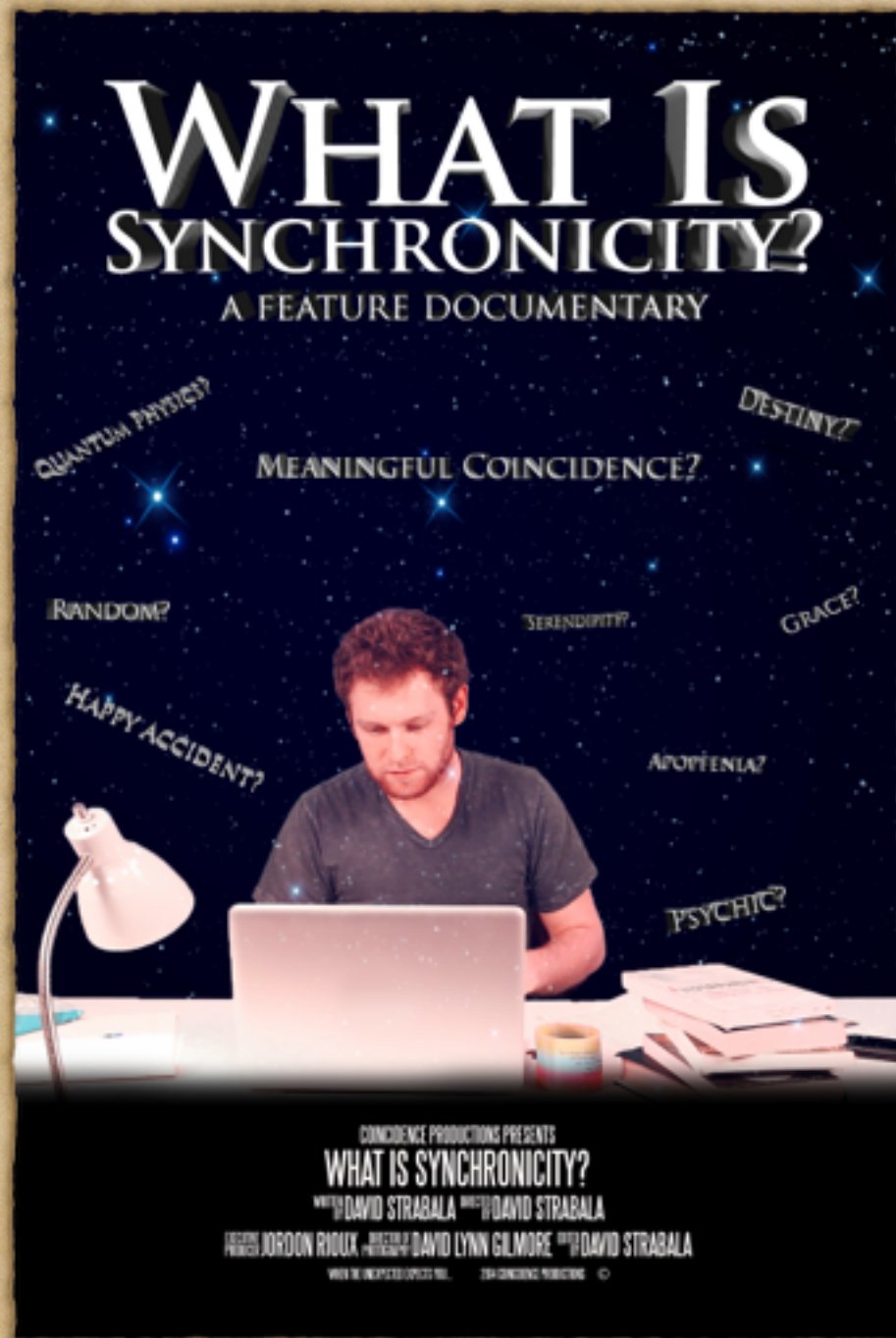
Examples of trickster tales:

-Astronaut returning from space

-Nasreddin: looking for his key

-Nasreddin: The moon is greater than the sun

* Director of the documentary film, "What Is Synchronicity?" (2015)



About David Strabala:

* An "only child" in a family of 13.

* LCSW since 1994; Iowa MSW graduate, 1991.

* Worked in community mental health, especially youth.

* Storyteller since 1997, often using an African drum.

* Retreats for veterans and first-responders.

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Def: a cunning and deceptive character appearing in various forms in the folklore of many cultures.

Trickster as Archetype: Instinctive patterns of humans, reflecting roles, events, processes, etc. Other species have their patterns...

Trickster traits: boundary-crosser, skilled communicator, liar, cheat, mischievous, amoral, no shame, unconscious, greedy-voracious appetite, but also vulnerable to tricks.

C.G. Jung on the trickster figure:

“He is a forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness.” (From The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.)

Trickster examples

Raven

Fox

Coyote

Rabbit

Spider

Hermes

Mercury

Prometheus

The Fool

Court jester

Joker

Comic entertainers

Artists

The Oracle

Sales/Con man

Problem: How can we make space for the "amoral" trickster?

Because the trickster plays unconsciously in the spaces between good and bad, appearing like the joker in a deck of cards, it is more suited to a polytheistic setting, not Western monotheism, with only god and the devil.

“If the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.”

Result: Not knowing how to connect with amorality, we often shape the trickster into the devil; thus we miss the meaningful role it offers through nuanced experience.

Source for more information:
Trickster Makes This World, by Lewis Hyde (1998, 2010)

Example: How much is too much?

Stories of greed, hunger and excess.

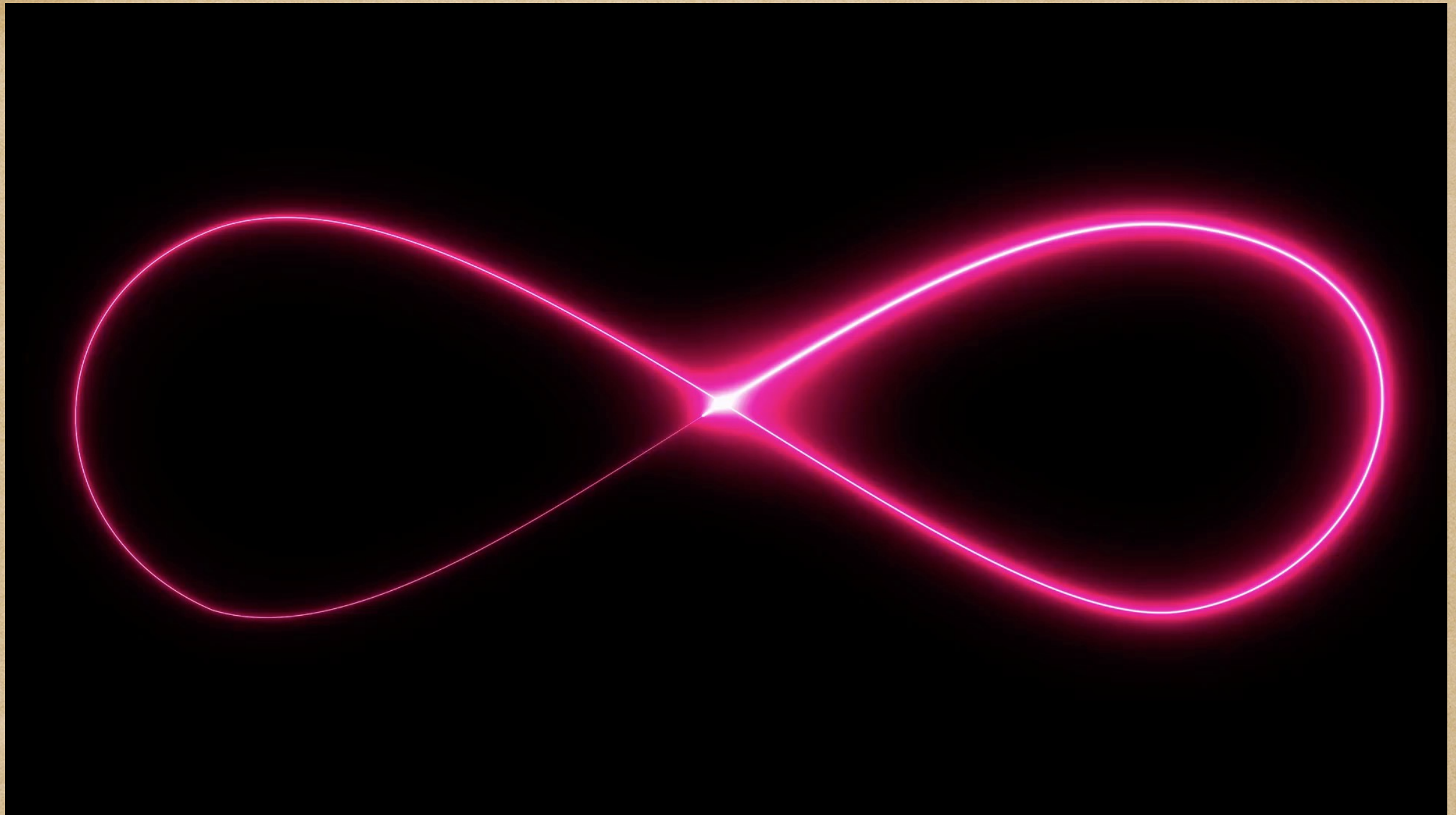
Comparing trickster and hero:
What is heroism and how does it fail?

Hero's Journey Stages: Separation, ordeal, return (reborn).

“Loyalty in action, regardless obstacles or challenges, to one's most cherished values — this is the essence of moral rectitude — and it is the foundation of heroism.” Andrew Bernstein

-Eshu and the hat

What if the hero becomes too black & white (either/or)?



Enantiodromia-the tendency of things to become their opposite.

“A fool who persists in his folly will become wise.” William Blake

Enantiodromia today

How might the use of heroic force or habitual consciousness backfire today-examples?

Yellowstone Park and Wolves

The Serengeti Rules, by Sean B. Carroll (2016)



Story: The Snake Prince

From "The Human Shadow and What Stories Do We Need?" by Robert Bly (audio)

Bringing hero and trickster together:

Summary: The hero can go too far in a straight, forceful line with dogged loyalty, falling victim to enantiodromia and traps set by trickster.

Meanwhile, trickster lacks the consciousness of the hero and loyalty to something beyond its hunger.

-Story: Dealing with drug dealers knocking at your door (you know, by mistake!)

Are fairy tales “true?” Or, “Can we handle the truth?”

“If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they will kill you.” —George Bernard Shaw

-The Independent Bird (gift and wound-tragic comedy)

Book by Angus Fletcher: Wonderworks: The 25 most Powerful Inventions in the History of Literature
(see pp 341-352 in relation to healing trauma.)

The ultimate trick?

-Story of god hiding

“If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you don't bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.” Gospel of Thomas

Summary and discussion of the objectives

Discuss how stories better connect us to self/world

Discuss insights/creativity from stories

Discuss non-violent conflict resolution through story