

Uschi's Dream of Death (2009)

Depth-Psychological Introduction

1. Jung's model of the psyche (according to M.-L. von Franz)

→ *Psyche Model*

This diagram shows Jung's concept of the psyche. Jung himself never had the idea to graphically display his image of the psyche; he was not a systematic thinker. His student, Marie-Louise von Franz made this later. The model is informative; it shows the depth-psychological basis of the distinction between the conscious and unconscious areas of the psyche, whose centers Jung called the "ego" and the "Self" respectively. The ego is, from an evolutionary perspective, younger than the Self, and is largely influenced by the Zeitgeist. The Self, however, embodies our nature, our genes.

To accept this depth-psychological concept of the psyche is to say that "psyche" means something different than what our ancestors understood by "soul". Science has proved that the psyche did not arise from a mythical act of creation thousands of years ago, in which - as the Bible says - an otherworldly being breathed divine breath into a clay figure to revive and animate it. According to the present state of human knowledge, the psyche is a cognitive system that has developed slowly over billions of years of biological evolution.

2. The evolution of the human psyche

→ *Diagram*

The first spatially ordered entities became atoms. After that molecules formed, ranging from simple H₂O to complex protein molecules comprising thousands of atoms. Each new form was a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts.

In a gigantic evolutionary step, molecules became spontaneously active, capable of cognition and centralized data processing. This was the spark of what we call life. Over time this adopted increasingly complex forms. Creative cognitive systems - even plants - can, according to their given programs, process information and react spontaneously to regulate themselves, propagate, and further develop their genome.

In mammals, consciousness developed, again imperceptibly slowly. With time this became increasingly differentiated, especially in the primate homo sapiens with his verbal language, which raised the level of consciousness. The ego is now so far advanced in psychologically mature people that we may say, with Jung, their psyche has two governing bodies: the ego and the Self. Compared to the Self, the ego is a newcomer that will always be the new kid on the block, but its importance is forever increasing and there is no end to its development in sight.

Jung called the ego the subjective spirit of man, and the Self the objective spirit of nature. If the ego can be compared to the departmental manager of a major corporation, the Self in the same analogy would be the CEO over all. The departmental manager is ambitious; he wants to be in charge of everything.

Evolution gropes its way forward as a giant contest of ideas, in which each winner decides the struggle for existence for himself.

Homo sapiens has been incredibly successful, having multiplied enormously in the last centuries and decades. But now his future prospects have darkened, and the value of his stock declined rapidly. If he wants to survive, he must come up with something.

He must first of all become more natural again. This could be done by turning inward: the feedback of ego and Self.

3. Feedback of ego and Self

M.-L. von Franz called the feedback between the ego and the Self the "pressure balance" between the two governing bodies. The surest way to this is the careful observation of dreams. According to Sigmund Freud, dreams form the *via regia* to the unconscious region of the psyche. Jung's student Erich Neumann called the connection between ego and Self the "ego-Self" axis, which is activated in, among other contexts, our dream life.

A "pressure balance" between Self and ego may thus manifest in a dream with the Self advising the dreamer (the ego) to adapt to the age-old patterns of behavior stored in the genes for dealing with death.

Such was the dream of Uschi, which we will discuss today with each other.

In sleep the unconscious makes contact with the ego by elucidating itself in the form of images. In this way the ego will be made aware of processes in the unconscious region of the psyche. The information takes place during the REM stage of sleep, during which "**Rapid Eye Movement**" is observable in the sleeper. With the help of dreams, the Self extends the ego's knowledge of the unconscious part of the psyche. Dreams expand consciousness, without drugs. In the dream the ego is only half asleep: while its contact with the outside world is switched off, it is captivated by the images that the Self displays to it like a slide show.

It is a truism, though we like to overlook it because of our ego-inflation: our ego does not invent our dreams, but finds them. The creator, director and producer of these picture stories is the Self. The ego does not make the inner images, but only becomes aware of them. Dreams are internal perceptions.

Before we look at Uschi's dream, I would like to say two more things: something about the dream as inner perception, and something about dealing with death.

4. Dreams as internal perceptions

The ancients took their dreams seriously. I quote Bishop Synesius of Cyrene (370-417AD):

"Many people owed to their dreams the discovery of a treasure.
Others went to bed with a problem, and the dream showed them the solution.
To others a danger was revealed that they had hitherto overlooked.
The sick saw in a dream the cure that made him healthy.
But it is most wonderful when we experience the intimacy of God in a dream.
When we are awake, others teach us; when we sleep, God teaches us."

The Bible also ascribes a central importance to dreams. In the Book of Numbers, Chapter 12, Verse 6 Yahweh the Lord says that he reveals himself to his prophets in visions and talks with them in dreams. Joseph made a career in Egypt because he could interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh, and according to Acts, Chapter 16, Christianity came to Europe because of a dream.

In ancient times dreams were understood differently than today: they were taken to be messages from the other side. Depth psychology has taught us to understand them as information from the Self to the ego. The supposedly really existing "beyond" of the ancients was thus turned into a psychological "beyond-consciousness". What the ancients received from the beyond, we receive today from the unconscious depths of our soul. Whoever takes their dreams seriously expands their consciousness of themselves; they learn things about themselves that no one else can tell them. Sometimes this is embarrassing, but very often it is inspiring, as Uschi's dream will show.

In the Self, that emerged from biological evolution, is also programmed a more natural way of dealing with death which plants and animals have acquired over countless millions of years. Death is no stranger to the Self. It is only the ego, the inexperienced newcomer of evolution, which finds it difficult to deal with.

5. Dealing with death naturally

Where does death come from? It is not "the wages of sin", as Paul set forth in his letter to the Romans (Romans 5_{12 ff.}). Death did not come to be because Adam and Eve sinned, but rather as a result of the higher development of life, which was prone to failure due to its increasing complexity. But at the same time as death came into being, so too did the transmission of genetic inheritance: love, sex, and nurturing. In this way the process of evolution continued despite the death of individuals.

"Love is as strong as death", it says in the Song of Solomon (8₆). That love and death are siblings is an ancient wisdom. Together they bring forth the evolution.

Our Self saves itself from death as it devotes itself to love and physically propagates. Our ego, however, cannot physically escape over into the next generation. It appears only after our birth, and disappears every night in deep sleep and finally in death. It can only live on in the mind of others. Without death of the ego, culture would stagnate because we old people - I count myself among them - like to fossilize. Therefore the old people must make way for the younger generation.

Paradoxically, those who accept their mortality remain inwardly young and flexible. That is in the Bible: "Teach us to count how few days we have and so gain wisdom of heart", it says in Psalm 90, 12th verse.

So death is good. And nature often soothes our fear of death itself, blessing us with near-death experiences - what a comforting phenomenon!

The individual has a twofold mission in life: they must take care of themselves, but also ensure the preservation of their kind. We contribute to the conservation of our species not only by begetting and raising our descendants, but also by being involved in building the future. Sustainable actions bring gratification and make stepping down from the stage of this world at the end somewhat easier, in the sense that one has fulfilled one's task and has lived a meaningful life.

Unfortunately the modern ego often is disconnected from the Self, and thus people no longer follow the ancient patterns of behavior in the face of death. Moreover, high-tech medicine contributes to an unnatural way of dealing with death. As a suicide companion at Exit I experience this often. We do everything in our power, and use every means available, to chase away death when it is already standing ready at the door.

Previously we could not postpone death as successful as we can today. It was widely present and was not repressed. Therefore the ancients mastered the *Ars moriendi*, the art of dying. Today there is not much of that left, and we need to retrieve it.

Dreams help us to be more natural in dealing with death. With their help, the ego can connect with the blueprint stored in the unconscious plan for mental maturation.

About this plan: Developmental psychology worked out in detail the steps on the path to maturity in the first half of life, from infancy through the puberty to adulthood. These individual stages are common knowledge today.

What follows, and how emotional maturation continues in adult life, is less well known. It is the achievement of Jung to have discovered the phases of development of the second half of life, and described them, including a contemporary *Ars moriendi*.

This is what Uschi's dream is about.

I hope that I succeeded in my introduction to acquaint you with this theme.

Uschi, may I ask you to tell us your dream?

Encounter with death at Pembroke Castle (dream of Uschi, 2009)

(1) «At the invitation of the Countess, I am in the medieval Pembroke castle. The hostess leads me into a wonderful room with high, stained-glass windows that look out onto a park planted with old trees. One of the windows, about four meters away from me, is located in an alcove with two seats made of dark wood with thick blue cushions. On one of them sits a black-clad figure with a hood, whose face I cannot see. I wonder who it could be. It must be the guest that the Countess told me previously was expecting me here.

There is a great silence in the room. This is interrupted by the figure, who says to me: "I greet you, Uschi. Come closer!" I take a step towards him. "Closer still", he says. I do not know his voice; he is friendly but firm. Now I can see his face, and instantly recognize death.

(2) Without fear, I examine him closely. He is thin and has long, dark brown hair under the hood; his eyes, with long black eyelashes, are also dark brown. There is something captivating about his gaze, which comes from a great depth. A fascinating man! He says, "It's nice that you're here, Uschi, I've been expecting you. Most people are afraid of me, they want nothing to do with me, not even the slightest thing. That makes me very sad." He looks at me for a long time.

(3) "I understand you," I reply, "but would like to know if you came to take me with you." He laughs. It is a charming laugh. "No, no, no, that won't be for a long time! When the time comes for me to take you, you will not see me, but Christ, your inner guiding authority."

(4) „But now I want to try an experiment with you: Are you willing to embrace me? Nobody loves me. No one is happy when I appear, although I deliver many people from tragic diseases and terrible circumstances. I'm lonely, very lonely. I should not even exist. I will always be marginalized, even though everyone knows that I am omnipresent. Life and death are closely linked with each other. People accept that all creatures must die; only they themselves, they think, are immortal. This makes me sad. Can you understand that?" I reply: "Of course I understand you! I really can empathize with you."

With these words, I hug him tightly so that he can feel that I like him. He does not smell of death, but like a very well-groomed person. It's a wonderful feeling. Then I end the embrace.

(5) He is happy: "I thank you for your great openness, it is unique. Now we both are invited by the Countess to conclude with a beautiful dinner and a glass of good wine."

I look forward to the evening. I will never forget this encounter.
With the feeling of a great gratitude I wake up.»

The individual acts of the inner drama:

Act 1, introducing the topic: "Death."

Act 2, starting point: Death is sad.

Act 3, interlude: "Do you want to take *me*?"

Act 4, climax: the "experiment".

Act 5, resolution: a happy ending.

→ **Diskussion**