

## Networks of Life: A Jungian reading about aging and death

*Redes da vida: uma leitura junguiana sobre o envelhecimento e a morte*

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**ABSTRACT:** This work aims at proposing an approach of the stages of aging and dying within the individuation process, starting from the symbolic amplification of images of these phases of life in light of Analytical Psychology. For the purpose of correlating these images with the stages of human development, particularly with the phases of the end of maturity and closing of the life cycle, a study on imagery and bibliography of aging and dying was conducted based on the theoretical framework of Analytical Psychology and of Post-Jungian authors. To that effect, the symbolic amplification of images taken from the plastic arts, literature, religion and mythology was made. The results of the study indicated that the death-related images bear a relationship with the individuation process, which points out to the need to explore this topic – which is a taboo in contemporary society – in a creative and significant manner; something that was synthesized by Jung himself in the expression “to die with life”.

**Keywords:** Individuation Process; Aging; Death; Analytical Psychology; Symbolic Amplification.

**RESUMO:** *O presente trabalho se propõe a abordar as fases do envelhecimento e morte dentro do processo de individuação a partir da amplificação simbólica de imagens destas etapas da vida à luz da Psicologia Analítica. Com o objetivo de relacionar tais imagens às etapas do desenvolvimento humano, notadamente às fases de fim da maturidade e encerramento do ciclo vital, realizou-se um estudo imagético e bibliográfico do envelhecimento e da morte a partir do referencial teórico da Psicologia Analítica e dos autores pós-junguianos. Para tanto, foi realizada a amplificação simbólica de imagens oriundas das artes plásticas, literatura, religião e mitologia. Os resultados do estudo indicam que as imagens relacionadas à morte guardam relação com o processo de individuação, sinalizando a necessidade de que este tema – que constitui um tabu na sociedade contemporânea – seja vivenciado de forma criativa e significativa.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Processo de Individuação; Envelhecimento; Morte; Psicologia Analítica; Amplificação Simbólica.*

## **Introduction**

The inevitable idea of finitude has always been a part of human imaginative imagery. It is possible to find its traces in poetry, music and in the plastic arts, regardless of the time. Since the stone ages, when writing had neither been established nor taken over the role of communication medium with posterity, iconography already reflected the idea that human beings were confronted with archetypal images of death: loss, rupture, disintegration, degeneration, but also fascination, seduction, transformation, surrender, rest or relief.

Some thinkers characterize the awareness of finitude as peculiar to man and state that this is the great differential of human species. The development of consciousness brings in itself the certainty of the end and the fears that follow it. Since the first months of life, the infant consciousness perceives the maternal absence as a sensation that can be viewed as a first experience of the idea of death. This first impression, according to Kovács (1992), impinges one of the strongest representations of all times, which is death as absence, loss, separation and the resulting feeling of annihilation and helplessness. The author sustains that, in addition to objective mortality, one of the human traits would be the subjectivity that searches for immortality.

There are different ways of dealing with the inexorability of the end. According to Elias (2001), the end of human life may be mythologized by the idea of another life in Valhala or in Hades, in paradise or in hell. We may try to avoid the idea of death by pushing it as far away from us as possible – or, in other words, by covering or repressing the idea – or adopting an unwavering belief in our own immortality. This “negotiation” with fatality has been translated into images by Ingmar Bergman in the film *The Seventh Seal*, in which Antonius Block, a medieval knight haunted by the Black Death, engages in a battle of chess with death, in hope for salvation. No hero can beat it, though: this is, according to Kovács (1992), the difference that marks the awareness of adult life in contrast to the phantasies of greatness and immortality of early youth.

For all the reasons laid out above, this work intends to investigate the association between the individuation process and the stages of aging and dying from the standpoint of historical, anthropological and psychological perspectives, with an emphasis on the Jungian theory, as well as through the symbolic amplification of image contents present in the plastic arts, in literature and mythology.

### **The faces of death in cultures**

*Life is a short time interval between two great mysteries: birth and death.*  
(Carl Gustav Jung)

Death is a very complex topic and one hard to approach by the different areas of knowledge and by religions. Correspondingly, we noted the difficulties of going through this life cycle in distinct societies.

There is extensive philosophical and religious questioning about the origin and fate of man, and not infrequently each of us, under the influence of our family or cultural tradition, or even for adopting a particular view, will have our own definition of finitude.

Jung (*vol. 8, § 796*) states that death is intertwined with the phases of development, despite the observation that the western culture would rather turn its back on this stage of life, by using intensive mental and scientific efforts to postpone it or even to deny it – which efforts are ultimately useless.

Life is a process of energy like any other, but, in principle, every energy process is irreversible and, as such, is invariably oriented to an objective.

This objective is the state of repose. Deep inside, every process is nothing more than, let us put it this way, the initial disruption of a state of perpetual repose that is always trying to restore itself. Life is teleological *par excellence*, it is the own pursuit of a certain end, nothing else than a system of preset objects intended to be reached (Jung, *vol. 8*, § 798).

Around the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., the Greek had already established contact with the people of Jonia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Phenicia, through the trade and navigation development activities, which enabled them to perceive the contrast between *physis* and *nomos* (Iglesias, 1989).

Iglesias (1989) defines the Greek term *physis* as Physics – although, in a quite different conception of the mechanical physics observed nowadays. The word *physis* stems from the verb *phyéin*, which in Greek means to emerge, to be born, to grow, being used to designate everything that sprouts, and springs up or grows. Therefore, *physis* implies functions that belong to the natural order, that is to say, to the biological order, whereas the term *nomos* means what belongs to human law, and as such represents a reality built by and dependent on man.

*Physis*, or natural order, are the timeless, inexorable, and immutable laws. These are laws that the men can discover, but cannot change; they cover everything that is part of an organic and natural world, such as the phases of human development: childhood, puberty, adulthood, and senescence and death.

Nevertheless, the concept of *nomos* is related to human order, which encompasses written and oral laws, the arts, religion, after all, everything that involves the human, social or cultural order. Therefore, it is supposed that the Greeks were the first ones to perceive the contrast between the organic or biological and the social or cultural, as it is observed that, although the phases of human development are a part of a biological process, the form of experiencing each phase of life, according to anthropology, differs from one culture to the other.

The contrast between the biological and the cultural is not spontaneously perceived by any society. For the people not to question, not to exercise critical thinking, the laws and social customs begin to be perceived as so inexorable as the natural laws – the former and the latter grounded on the sacred, created by the divine will – and it was precisely the desacralization of Greek society that, starting in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., enabled some philosophers to reflect about the origin of the *nomos*. The contact with other cultures

uncovered to the Greeks the diversity of values, laws, customs and rules of conduct that govern human societies. They realized that the *nomos* or the “culture” is not a natural event, but the product of a convention of men.

Considering religion, under the perspective of anthropology, as an aspect of culture, we observed the existence of endless forms of approaching the phenomenon of death; it is indisputable, however, that one way or another, all beliefs, according to their presuppositions, will point out to the continuity of life after the biological functions fade away, as is the case of Christianity, Islamism, Judaism, Buddhism, and in Indian and African beliefs.

Whereas Catholicism advocates the existence of a heaven, a hell and an intermediate space for expiation of sins – the purgatory – Protestantism denies the existence of the latter, by accepting the existence of a place designed to receive those who lived their lives in a fair way, in fear of God, and another space, also called hell, reserved for heretics and sinners.

In the Spiritism codified by Allan Kardec, it is proposed that, in the detachment from the body, the spirit has a period of existence on another plane, after which it shall reincarnate as many times as necessary for the purpose of reaching perfection or, in other words, to respond to any injuries it has caused to itself or to another, as well as to work toward its own intellectual and moral improvement. After death, it is the psyche affinity that will assign to the spirit a good or bad home hereafter: there are spiritual colonies that resemble learning schools, as well as places where the souls go through hardship in expiation of their sins – the *umbræ* – where they direct themselves to by synchronism of energy.

Among Jews and Christians, the renunciation of one’s own life is viewed as a sin that stirs the wrath of God, so suicides cannot be administered the sacraments. This example is given for us to observe the differences between the laws and rules of conduct for each society and, therefore, to cast a different eye on suicide.

Laraia (2004) comments that in Japan, for instance, not only is the insolvent debtor allowed to commit *Harakiri* in the New Year’s Eve, but he is also encouraged to that practice. It is believed that through the ritualistic suicide, this man will be able to honor his debts with blood and also clear his family’s name vis-à-vis society. *Harakiri* used to be a frequent practice among Samurais, and any such renunciation of life on behalf of a greater good as is the honor to the family or to the homeland was crucial to the appearance of the *Kamikaze* pilots who, faced with the target to be destroyed, threw their airplanes against the ships – an attitude seen as heroic by the Japanese in the Second World War. Likewise, the suicide bombers in some Islamic cultures imply the idea of death in honor of a noble cause, for which the bomber is rewarded with eternal life in heaven (Weisstub *apud* Kimbles, 1989).

The perception each society has not only of suicide, but also of aging and dying, also deserves mention. In the western culture, we witness a great valuation of youth, whereas other aspects relating to late adulthood and finitude are usually neglected, although in other societies the elderly stand for experience and wisdom.

Laraia (2004) argues that, in the Eskimo villages, the children of elderly parents conducted them to the frozen plains and abandoned them there to be devoured by bears. This is warranted by the belief that, when the animal would be hunted down and killed to feed the community, their genitors would be reincorporated into the group.

Although the abandonment of their old parents amidst the icy landscape might arouse feelings of uneasiness in many of us, westerners, this act represented the valuation of the elderly, as it is believed that the elder's wisdom and virtues would be internalized by those that ate the meat of the animal that devoured him.

Anthropophagy was performed by extinct Indian settlements, such as the Tupinambás. Castro (2002) comments that, during conflicts and wars with other tribes, the bold and wise warrior, when captured, was held prisoner by the winners during a certain period, when they were granted honors and privileges like the company of a woman and plentiful food. Once this period of advantages was over, the warrior was killed by the Indians and his body was devoured by the village members. The anthropophagic rituals were supported by the belief that, in the process, the qualities and knowledge of the enemy warrior would be internalized by the individuals of that group. A special emphasis is to be given to the confrontation of the enemy warrior with his own sacrifice: upon the threat of death, this man held on to his firmness and austerity, once again demonstrating his relentless bravery. Nevertheless, the Europeans' reaction to the anthropophagy of Indian communities of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the newly found land did not compare to the attitudes of native Indian warriors, as observed in Hans Staden's report: once captured by the Indians and knowing that he would be killed and eaten by the tribe members in a magic and religious ritual, he displayed signs of anxiety, by shivering, sweating and urinating, which provoked reactions of disgust and feelings of revolt against the Indians during the anthropophagy ceremonies (Laraia, 2002).

Although the habits of these Indians cause displeasure among us, civilized westerners, it should be reminded that our culture also promotes symbolic anthropophagic rituals, such as the catholic communion, in which the host or the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ.

In view of the cultural diversity, "it is as if each society contemplated the world through its own lenses" (Laraia, 2002, p.67). Therefore, for anthropology, each culture has its

own rituals and myths to assign meaning to the stages of development, such as birth, childhood, puberty, sexual initiation, adult life, aging and dying, and do embrace distinct forms of worshipping their deities.

Analytical Psychology, however, understands that, despite the diverse views of the world, different cultures share an archetypal common base, which remains stable irrespective of the time, although it is always experienced in accordance with the historical circumstances where they manifest themselves.

### **Relationship with death throughout the times**

Since the most archaic rituals that date back to the principle of human cultural manifestations, we observe procedures that allow us to understand how the relationship between men and death works. These rituals, practices and beliefs provide an indication that this relationship went through gradual transformation before acquiring the features we know today in the contemporary western society.

We learned that, in the Upper Paleolithic, i.e., between 63,000 and 48,000 years ago, there were burials of a ritualistic character. The mysteries of death and birth appear to have the greatest impact on the mentality of these people, and they surely blended with each other. The form of burial showed that the dead body was prepared to live in another world after death (Guandalini, 2010). Death implied, therefore, continuity or rebirth.

Among the people of Ancient times, the certainty of a continued existence in dimensions from beyond the grave prevailed. In Ancient Egypt, it is possible to ascertain the presence of the most meticulous rituals ever heard, with detailed preparations of the body and effects of the dead, so that they would be enjoyed in future life. Life, for the ancient Egyptians, was a sort of an antechamber to death, which might mean salvation or timeless agony. Canticles, rituals, prayers and oaths helped the deceased's passage to the new world.

The topic of death was also a part of the daily life in Ancient Times of the western civilization: in Greek philosophy, "nothingness" was an inconceivable notion; considerations on death, therefore, raised speculations on what would expect man in his afterlife. In Greek mythology, it was Hades, an underground world and the last destination of man. Among the Romans, the spectacles where hundreds of thousands of gladiators fought each other to death and Christians were tormented have brought the matter to the agenda of the day. According to Elias (2001), to watch people being eaten up alive, bite by bite, by hungry tigers and lions, or gladiators mutually hurting and killing each other would barely be considered

entertainment today, but it was so for the Roman senators or the Roman people. Gladiators greeted the senators when entering the arenas with an emblematic sentence: *morituri te salutant*, “those who will die salute you”. Also in accordance with Elias, the possibility of saying this to the dominators requires a broader awareness of death than we today have, besides more acceptance of the fact that human species is a community of mortals.

In the Middle Ages, watching public murders continued to be a habit: it was a kind of “Sunday entertainment”, in the words of Elias (2001), the attendance at hanging, drawing and quartering, and torture in the breaking wheel. In his important work *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident: du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Ariès (1977) conveys this idea that this sort of “intimacy with death” experienced by medieval people caused the end of life to be experienced with more calmness and serenity. For the author, only in present times things would be different. Elias (2001) makes important critical considerations Ariès’ view, which he considers “romantic”.

Ariès (1977) advocates that people have died smoothly for centuries or millennia: the attitude before death was familiar, close and softened – which contrasts to the form we face the matter today. Elias (2001) counters that line of reasoning. According to him, when compared to life in highly industrialized Nation-States, life in the medieval feudal world was passionate, violent and, therefore, “uncertain, brief and wild”. Dying might mean, indeed, torment and suffering, and in the days of yore people had less possibilities of relieving that pain, as medicine was still rudimentary and was not accessible to the majority of people.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that people would die acceptingly vis-à-vis the scaring scenario of the Black Death. Since the middle of the year 1000, the popular imaginative imagery had already been impregnated by the fear of unknown diseases, such as “*mal des ardents*” or “Saint Anthony’s fire” – which today is known to have been caused by the ingestion of an ergot fungus present in the rye meal. The terror caused by the disease was overwhelming: chroniclers described it as a fire that burns the members and separate them from the body (Duby, 1998). Nothing, however, compares to the Black Death that wiped out European populations in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Duby (1998), the Black Death was an exotic disease that had been carried from Asia aboard trade route ships and was transmitted by parasites, particularly fleas and rats. It spread out uncontrollably, and it is estimated that, during the summer of 1348, one third of the entire European population had succumbed to the epidemic. Corpses were a routine view and no one knew where to dump them. There was no wood left to make coffins. The author reports that the psychological consequences of this turmoil were visible: the



macabre invaded literature and the arts, which became permeated by tragic images, such as the thematic skeleton and the macabre dance. Death was all around.

Medieval life, therefore, was unstable: violence was commonplace; wars were the rule, and peace, the exception; epidemics wiped away entire populations; deficient crops led to the scarcity of bread to the poor. The medieval landscape was manned by millions of beggars and cripples. People were capable of showing great kindness, but also barbarian cruelty, delight in the torment of others and complete indifference to suffering. In summary, as Elias puts forward (2001), life was shorter; the threats, less controllable; death, often more painful; the feeling of guilt and the fear of the afterlife, the official doctrine. Nevertheless, the participation of others in the death of an individual was much more common than today, and the dying sick persons passed away assisted by their families and close to their dear ones. There was no way to negate or control the idea of death, and in general terms, an unresisting resignation of those in the threshold of life could be noted.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of Romanticism, death begins to be seen as something “beautiful”, the “sublime repose”, eternity or even the possibility of union with the beloved (the “death” of the beloved woman was one of the most recurrent themes among romantic poets). The end of life turns out to be something even “envisaged”, in that it represents the possibility of evasion, release, a flight to a world beyond – although it also meant an unbearable rupture and separation. The strong belief in a future life, which has been present since Ancient Times, predominated: this is the time of the outbreak and dissemination of Spiritism, the doctrine that preaches the possibility of mediation with the dead, communication with spirits and reincarnation. In France, the studies began with Allan Kardec and Flammarion, in 1854. In the United States, in 1882, *The Society for Physical Research* was founded to foster scientific studies on the issue of death and of the natural phenomena (Kovács, 1992b).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century operates an inversion of values in the form of addressing the matter. In comparison to the Middle Ages, when death was less concealed, more present and more familiar, a certain aseptic distance is kept from the dying, which is unprecedented in history, and that caused them to be banished to the backstage of social life. According to Elias (2001), never before were the corpses delivered to the grave in such an inodorous condition and with the utmost technical perfection from the deathbed to the tomb.

With the advent of Capitalism, the social control mechanisms used to normalize the daily life of individuals arise. These mechanisms are the powering engine of a number of institutions – *inter alia*, medicine. These institutions, operating in silence, redesigned the

family and perpetuated social values and behaviors. Donzelot (1986) suggests that different strategies were made available by the State and by medicine for the purpose of interfering with social classes on a biopolitical level. This sort of “family police”, as the author terms it, names the set of political technologies that had been propagated since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and will influence the body, the health, the forms of eating and living, and the living conditions of people. The sanitation and normalization practices included the creation of specific sites for aging, sickening and dying. The elderly were confined to institutions; the diseased, to hospitals, and death ceased to be a familiar event.

In the words of Kovács (1992b), the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceals death, the shameful death transformed into a taboo, just how it used to be in the Victorian Age. Society expelled death to protect life. According to Elias (2001), our current “stage of civilization” constrains us in an absolute lack of spontaneity in the expression of feelings in critical situations, as are those involving death. We should learn to suffer and to manifest our emotions with self-control. As emphasized by Freitas (1992), wakes and funerals have been deprived of their rite of passage characteristics and are now devoid of their basic psychological meaning, which is the experience of mourning over those who depart and the transformation of those who stay. The mourning time has been shortened and the living will soon resume their daily activities as usual.

According to Elias (2001), a mark of our times is the inability to give to those dying the help and affection they need the most when they say farewell to others, precisely because the death of another is a reminder of our own death. The view of someone dying disturbs our fantasies of immortality.

At present, death has lost its connotation of a natural closure, typical of the life cycle, to gain a connotation of failure, impotence, or malpractice – so it should be concealed. The triumph of medicalization lies precisely in keeping the disease and death in ignorance and in silence. Most people do not watch their relatives die: hospitals are the proper place, as they hide repugnance and the sordid aspects related to the illness. The family is also kept at a distance to prevent disruption of the hospital silence. In this manner, they do not interfere with the doctors’ work and do not reveal the presence of death by moaning, weeping or questioning (Kovács, 1992b).

According to Kovács (1992b), in our times, the period of separation of the body and the soul has changed, being prolonged indefinitely: death has been divided into cerebral, biological and cellular. There are a number of appliances intended to extend life. The time of

death often ceases to be a natural event to become an agreement between the family and the attending physician.

Old age, the image of which alludes to the proximity of death, is equally euphemized to prevent us from evoking the inexorable end of us all. As asserted by Stevens (1993), at this point of time, when a much higher number of people reach the age of eighty, there is a trend of social statisticians to postpone the time of life when old age is known to begin. The word “old” has become a pejorative adjective. According to the author, in this phase of life, what used to be simple forewarning notices of mortality become visible signs of reality. Disease and death happen in an ever-growing number and, when the closest people disappear successively, the awareness that life should be lived from that point on based on the perspective of the imminent death is achieved.

In general terms, old age is conceived only in its outer aspects, i.e., isolation and physical infirmity are underscored – many times combined with helplessness and despair (typical of a society that turns its back on to the elderly) – the bodily impairments and the loss of productivity. According to Kovács (1992), one of the strongest views of death is old age, represented by an old woman, stiff and wrinkled, bony thin and toothless. It is an image that causes repulsion and terror.

In this connection, it is worth observing, as a cultural counterpoint, the form how the elderly are treated in some Indian settlements, as the *Wayampi*, present in the state of Amapá, Brazilian Amazonia. In this community, the elderly have the role of guardians and disseminators of the traditions, customs and wisdom of the tribe. For illustration purposes, we cite the ritual of preparing the *caxixi*, a typical drink crafted by the elderly women of the tribe, who, after chewing the cassava, spit out the liquid into a recipient and, after the necessary time for fermentation has elapsed, they serve it to the community members and visitors. Although the preparation process of *caxixi* seems nauseating to aliens, the ritual evidences the importance of old women as keepers of the tribe’s wisdom, as the *wayampis* believe that, by drinking this liquid, they will incorporate their qualities.

Western culture, however, appears to have lost contact with the deepest sense of age, as well as to have relinquished the vivid and transforming meanings of death, relegating them to a simple biological event. The closing of the life cycle is no longer conceived as a purpose and *telos* of human life or, in other words, the last act of a process of development and consummation of the existence, to be understood only in its external aspect – which, clearly, will be much more stressed in a materialistic culture. In this culture, death can never be associated with anything with a transcendental or greater meaning, being defined only on the

physical level as the complete and final cessation of the vital functions of an organism, with the disappearance of functional coherence and the progressive destruction of tissue and cell units (Kovács, 1992). As Hillman describes it,

Our emphasis on physical death corresponds with our emphasis on the physical body, not on the subtle one; on physical life, not psychic life, on the literal and not on the metaphorical ... We easily lose contact with the subtle forms of death. For us, pollution, decomposition and cancer have become just physical (1979, p.64).

It is necessary, therefore, to retrieve the symbolic meanings of death. In other words: it is necessary to find a way to “reconcile” with this inexorable truth, by understanding it as part of the existence, with which we should relate ourselves in a conscious and creative manner. After all, as advocated by Jung, the purpose of the life cycle is to close its ends, to make a full turn and render it complete:

The teleological impulse of life does not cease when maturity and the zenith of biological life are reached. Life now rolls down on the other side of the mountain, with the same intensity and irresistibility that it climbed up the first side before midlife, as the target is not in the apex, but in the valley where the journey upwards began. The curve of life is like the parable of a projectile that returns to the state of repose after having been disturbed in its initial state of repose (Jung, *vol. 8/2*, §. 798).

### **Aging from the perspective of analytical psychology**

Although Jung did not deny the existence of physical decline in the aging process, he stressed that old age, as other stages of existence, has a purpose that would not be senility, but wisdom (Stevens, 1993).

Seen from its outer aspect of physical degeneration, old age may mean a time of agony, unless the truth of this situation is faced and overcome with all the honesty and creativity, as argued by Stevens (1993). Based on Jung, the author states that the inner figures, in this stage of life, become more important than in any other period: as someone loses his beloved persons in the outer world, he will need more and more of Himself. It is common

that, in this stage, people will begin to suffer from isolation, and then sound relations with the inner world become indispensable.

It is this contact with the outer world that is capable of causing individuation, in the last stage of life, to take place at an accelerated pace. According to Stevens (1993), the fact that there are a few outer objectives to be achieved means that life has now become a process to be *experienced*: for many individuals, for the first time this *in anima* becomes now a practical possibility.

Thus, Stevens (1993) presents three strategies that can be embraced by people to experience old age: they can be so disturbed by the implications of old age that they become depressed; they may begin to *deny* immortality, losing contact with the meaning of things and finding a refuge in the daily routine or, as a third alternative, they can manage to remain aware of their own condition and reach a point where they are ready to “die with life”. In this manner, in the stage of personal evolution that goes from ego to Oneself, old age is, at the same time, a preparation to the *ultimate* transition to death and an opportunity to accept the own existence as a part of the supreme will of the cosmos.

According to Freitas (1992), in old age contemplation and the inner images, fantasies, dreams and ideas that come up are anticipatory events, exercises in preparation for death. The form how the individual accepts and construes these images may signify a healthy or pathological state, sense of life or unendurable emptiness. The suffering that accompanies the losses that occur in this stage of life moves psychic energy, thereby creating a favorable condition to the archetypal action and restructuring of personality.

In Jung’s own life experience, old age was one of the most fertile and prolific periods. He became severely ill at the age of 68, and the subsequent recovery uncovered a phase of great psychic development, which consisted in the most intellectually productive time of his life. We emphasize that, always attentive to oniric images, Jung interpreted a dream he had years before his death: he received a notice that “his house on the other side of the lake” was already finished. This image had been analyzed as a forewarning of finitude (Gambini, 2011). During this period, Jung leaned over topics that ensured the most distinctive trait of his psychology: alchemy and religion. His dreams began to confirm not only his belief in the primacy of the Self, but also his conviction that the best possible life is that lived *sub specie aeternitatis* (in the dimension of eternity). Jung proposed that only by relating ourselves with something “infinite”, greater than the egoic existence, will we be able to set our mind in futilities and targets of not so real importance. To our author, we are worth something only to

the extent that we incarnate something “essential”, otherwise our life is rendered useless (Stevens, 1993).

Old age would consist, therefore, in a time of reflection, assimilation of the past, search for meaning and progress toward wholeness. As proposed by Stevens (1993), if we want to succeed in the last years of our existence, we have to learn how to face the process of aging with equanimity, to come to terms with the idea of death and to experience the coexistence of the entire creation. Religiosity, in our view, may contribute much to this effect, as it connects the individual with something greater and transcendental. In the case of Christianity and Buddhism, for instance, the meaning of life is consummated in death. As reminded by Freitas (1992), not infrequently did Jung criticize the fact that religions, ever since the Illuminism, have been transformed into philosophical systems or, in other words, something produced “by the head”. He suggests that one should think with the heart instead, to the extent that religious symbols always have a revealing nature of spontaneous creation, which establishes the connection with a complete wisdom that cannot be reached only through the intellect.

The acceptance of finitude consists in understanding death as a teleological imperative. In the case of Jung, we noted that aging was not conceived as the simple shortening of existence, but consisted in a sort of “polishing” and improvement, whereby he sharpened his perception of the *essential*. In the shadow of death, the amazement and the miracle of life become more perceptible, and the recognition of the brevity of our existence is what gives dimension to the infinite.

### **Symbolic perspectives of death**

Freitas (1992) argues that the need of mythologizing about death has always been underscored by Jung, as any objective statement about it would be impossible. Thus, the problem should never be transformed into an intellectual issue, as it calls for distinctive attention and boldness to outline another conception, as the unconscious affords us with communications and metaphorical allusions. This is why our reading here will refer to the symbology present in mythology.

The route travelled by the sun in its daily itinerary is compared by Jung to our life cycle. The sun rises on the horizon, shines fully at noon, and then begins a descending movement until, late in the afternoon, it sets down on the opposite side, which it will bathe

during our night. Freitas (1992) reminds us that, for Jung, life would follow the same rhythm and draw the same parabolic curve. The time at noon, midday, or half-life, corresponds to what Jung calls *metanoia*, the hour when consciousness should be open to the other side and, feeling strengthened, might reconsider the creative value of the unconscious and turn to what is left to be developed.

Thus, at noon of life death is born, to the extent that it begins to occupy a fundamental place in consciousness, and as such shall indeed constitute the main center of interest in aging. When sunset begins on the horizon, by analogy, the body starts to decline, too. Consciousness, however, should continue to be expanded (Freitas, 1992).

According to Freitas (1992), it is common that, in childhood, the healthy ego experiences a sensation of having tamed the dragon. In reality, however, it is impossible to tame it, as the dragon stands for the unconscious. In children's histories, the monster uses to be frozen or banned to a distant territory, which means that the ego is a bit soothed to ensure its survival. Conscience goes on becoming stronger and building its structure, alternating times of inflation, when its wholeness is identified, and others when it feels small and fragile. In *metanoia*, the inversion of values resembles a type of feeling of death of the ego. This is illustrated in the myths in which the hero himself should die, in an experience of sacrifice, death and rebirth. The sensation is often one of lack of sense in life. Old references of consciousness do not fit their purposes and should, therefore, be sacrificed.

The fear of death, so present in the contemporary society, exceeds, therefore, objective death and leads to the fear of the intimate and final confrontation with the Self. In Mythology, this image is expressed in the Egyptian *The Book of the Dead*, where the court presided by Osiris, the dead's heart (symbol of consciousness) was compared to the ostrich feather of Maat goddess (symbol of justice). Were the heart overloaded by bad actions, it would weigh to the feather's side, which would mean the dead's sentence to damnation (Von Franz, *apud* Magalhães & Serbena, 2011).

The encounter of ego with the unconscious – that is to say, with the experience of wholeness – is always experienced by the ego as a painful defeat, which the alchemy expresses through the use of symbols of death, mutilation or poisoning. The alchemic *nigredo* belongs to the operation called *mortificatio*, or *putrefactio*, which is related to darkness, defeat, mutilation, death and rotting. Nevertheless, according to the law of the opposites, as the ego admits death, life constellates in the depths (Freitas, 1992). A sacrifice of personal perspectives is necessary at each step forward, and this is always be experienced as a death.

The own process of analysis may be experienced as a form of death. In Jungian psychotherapy, the encounter of the individual with the unconscious aspects in the shadow and the integration of these obscure contents favor the constellation of the transcendental function. Based on Jung, Magalhães (2009) states that this concept does not carry any metaphysical or mysterious content, but that it simply derives from a mathematical operation: an equation between real and imaginary numbers that produces a new integer – as occurs in the combination of conscious and unconscious aspects of the personality – that favors a change in attitude.

At this point, we can refer to the myth of Eros and Psyche, as reported by Brandão (2002). In order to seduce her beloved, Psyche accepts highly complex tasks imposed by Aphrodite, Eros' mother. In her journey of provocation, Psyche had to go down to Hades to fetch Persephone's box. For this task, she relied on the help of the Tower, who, among other directives, instructed the girl to carry two coins of gold to be given to the boatman Charon, in payment for ferrying her across the river to the world of the dead and back. Boechat (1995) associates the mythical character Charon to the figure of the analyst, who induces the encounter of the individual with the demons of the shadow and helps him through in his return, being remunerated for this work. For the reasons set out above, we note, in the process of analysis, death and rebirth, a new attitude of the individual vis-à-vis life.

In the process of psychic treatment, the dialectic relationship logically induces the patient to the confrontation with his "shadow", this obscure half of his soul (...) The confrontation with the obscure half of the personality, with the shadow, is produced spontaneously in every treatment of greater or lesser depth (Jung, *vol. 12*, § 36-37).

The shadow expresses what the Greeks called the *synopados*, "that who follows behind us", a feeling that is a live and inapprehensible presence and, for this reason, the souls of the dead were also called shadows (Jung, *vol. 8*, § 665).

Nevertheless, the contemporary western society, in cultivating a *persona* of eternal youth, in its unbridled search for painless solutions to suffering, tends to avoid the slow and painful process of the encounter with obscure aspects of the unconscious, thereby being deprived of the symbolic experience of death and rebirth, which could be experienced here.

Presently, the search for the immediate solutions to the process of psychic illness is materialized into another pathology, as is observed in the exaggerated use of drugs (which,



most often, just serve the purpose of silencing the symptoms for some time) and in the preference for brief psychotherapies, which promise the relief of psychic pain within an unbelievably short time interval, and as such reinforce immediacy. These habits uncover the difficulty of the contemporary man in coping with losses, surrenders, the shadow and the complexity of time – metaphorized in the myths of Chronos and Kairos. Handling these issues would inevitably put the individual in contact with the obscure aspects underlying his persona, thereby favoring the individuation process and establishing contact with the broader personality:

In analyzing the *persona*, we wiped away the mask and found out that, despite its individual appearance, down the bottom it is collective; in other words, the *persona* is nothing more than a mask of collective psyche. In fact, it has nothing real; it represents a commitment between the individual and society on what someone seems to be: name, title, occupation. To a certain extent, these data are real, but in relation to the person's essential individuality, they are just a secondary aspect, in that they result from the commitment in which others may have a greater share than the individual in question. The *persona* is an appearance, a bi-dimensional reality – as it might be ironically designated (Jung, *vol.7*, § 246).

Departing from the analysis experience, a functional *persona* might be created, consistent with the personality as a whole, as well as to build a new personality center between the ego and the Self. The unconscious may then be seen not as a threatening dragon any longer, but as a potential friend. The sacrifice of the ego opens room for a fertile transformation that uses to be symbolized as a death and subsequent rebirth, thus enabling the Individuation Process.

The centaur Chiron is worth reminding at this point: hit by Hercules's poisoned arrow, in excruciating pain, instead of searching for the cure of Apollo, enters into an agreement with Zeus and exchanges his immortality with Prometheus, making him immortal. Freed from his pain, Chiron was able to die smoothly, being transformed into the Sagittarius constellation, i.e., having gained an inextinguishable glow. Why hasn't Chiron tried to heal himself?

According to Alvarenga (2011), suffering is intolerable as long as it is alien to the own identity, as a foreign body. Pain starts to be tolerable when it can be elaborated, being transformed into a structuring symbol and becoming a part of the identity as a reality integrated to the wholeness of the individual. When this phenomenon takes place, we die to

the condition of having pain and revive to the condition of being with pain. The injured Chiron's death enabled the rebirth of the celestial Chiron, another being, now renewed. Therefore, the phenomenon of death and dying accompanies, symbolically and literally, all the moments of great psychic transformation.

In psyche, death, in its several representations, may appear as extinction, annihilation, denial and termination (negative aspects that are well emphasized in western society), as well as a deep and meaningful transformation, revelation, rebirth, rite of passage, and *mysterium coniunctionis* (Hillman; Welman & Faber *apud* Magalhães & Serbena, 2011). These authors conceive individuation as the archetype that governs human life, with life and death being the supplemental duality that represents it. Those who are not capable of facing and accepting their own mortality are equally incapable of advancing toward their self-development or individuation.

According to Edinger and Jung (*apud* Magalhães & Serbena, 2011), the dynamics interaction between these opposite, compensatory and complementary facets, through the symbolic mechanism, enables the actuation of the transcendental function that restores wholeness by integrating contraries with an eye to driving the fulfillment of the original, potential personality. To Magalhães and Serbena (2011), this fulfillment would be a result from the activation of the individuation archetype, in which the person is driven to the complete achievement of its innate potentialities, toward her intimate core (Self) and to become herself, as an entire and indivisible being, distinct from other persons. The search is for harmony with the own essence of the individual, by way of actions directed to the development of personality.

We ascertained, therefore, that the symbolic image of death, in the psyche, should not be understood only by means of negative connotations. *Transformation* is the element that joins it in different mythologies, together with the possibility of positive rebirth. Some illustrative examples are found in some of the tarot arcana.

In tarot, arcane XIII (The Death) is related to great transmutations and new space for fulfillment, closure of some cycle, abandonment of old habits, intellectual penetration, metaphysical thinking, stringent discretion, drastic wisdom, resignation and disposition to face difficult situations. In the mental realm, the tarot card suggests a renewal of ideas. According to Godo (2001), the card is the symbol that the time has come for a true transformation, in the sense of spiritual regeneration, after the recognition of the futility of reality.

Card XVI (The Tower or The House of God) suggests, according to Godo (2011), a paradox, as although the divine house is classified as a place of rest and tranquility, the image shown on the card is that of a construction stricken by lightning. The allegory suggests the *hybris* or the sin of pride of man, who, in an attempt to be elevated to the highest level of the physical and material world, is victimized by his own vanity and is exposed even more to the ruin represented by divine lightning – a metaphor for the devastating force of the shadow. Despite the painful character associated with fatality, this card also represents the take-over of consciousness, the clarification, the release – or, in other words, the possibility of transformation of the individual.

The idea of transformation – that is to say, the destruction that engenders the outbreak of something new – can also be found in the fragments of Heraclitus of Ephesus, a Pre-Socratic philosopher known as “the Obscure”, who developed a deep and rich thought system, yet hard to apprehend (Iglesias, 1989). One of the most outstanding aspects of his philosophy is the mutability of things, that is to say, the idea of the world as a relentless flow in constant transformation. His epigraph reads: “Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the ones living the others’ death and dying the others’ life” (Heraclitus *apud* Brun, 1965). This quote of “the Obscure” philosopher enables us to make a correlation with the human development process contemplated by analytical psychology, as if something is life, the movement of life takes it to death, and if there is death, there is the possibility of the appearance of some form of life.

You cannot bathe twice in the same river, nor is it possible to touch a perishable substance twice in so far as its state is concerned, as it breaks down and restores itself again, through the speed of change or, more clearly stated, neither again nor after, but at the same time as it comes up and vanishes away (Heráclito, fragment 91, *apud* Bornheim, 1977).

A number of religions also refer to the constant movement, the “timeless and endless flow”. In Christianity, we observe the history of Jesus, which metaphorizes the birth, passion, sacrifice, death, ascension, and resurrection.

Hinduism, in broad terms, also considers the idea of transformation, as observed in the image of the vedic *Trimurti*. *Trimurti* means literally, “having three forms” and refers to the three manners whereby the divine energy manifests in the cosmos: Brahma (the divine aspect responsible for the creation of the world), Vishnu (responsible for maintenance), and Shiva

(responsible for the destruction at the end of each cosmic cycle). In other words, destruction is an inextricable part of the vital process, according to the Vedas' teachings.

According to Alves (1992), the same demi-god gathers several complementary aspects: Shiva presents himself as *Rudra*, the master of destructive functions and, at the same time, as *Pashupati*, the master of creation. In the account of myths, it is said that once upon a time Earth was becoming desolate, and Vishnu was asked to pour on the planet the cosmic river Ganga to restore its life. As the power of this river was enormous and would put Earth at risk, Shiva held the river up on his head, and the water that ran through his hair gave rise to the veins of the River Ganga (Ganges) – hence the regenerating and purifying power of this river. Shiva is also known as *Nataraja*, the “Master of Dance”, who also combines destructive and creative aspects. The dance performed by Shiva in his home (on the top of Mount Kailasa, in the Himalayas) causes the snow shaken under his feet to melt down and form a narrow thread of water that flows down the mountain and then transforms itself into the River Ganga.

Therefore, destruction and creation appear as indissociable images in the Hindu mythology, just as the life-death dyad, which stands for the archetype of individuation. We can understand how Shiva images, as truly archetypal images, with their great transcendence, have turned out to be one of the most popular forms of religion in India.

The goddess Kali (“The Dark”), Shiva spouse, also represents destruction – in a more terrifying manner. Kali is worshipped in India as the darkness, the time that swallows everything, the Mistress with a crown of bones from the kingdom of skulls. She is also known as Durga (the “Inaccessible” or “Dangerous”), or Parvati (“Daughter of the Mountain” – i.e., the Himalaya). The rituals to honor this goddess call for an animal blood offering, which is why many animals are beheaded in her temple and the heads are left there as trophies. This deadly ritual, however, is performed for the ultimate purpose of preserving the existence: the goddess demands the blood from sacrifice to give life, in a continuous process of generating new forms, in its manifestation of clemency (*sundara-mûrti*), as the World’s Mother (*jagad-ambâ*), so that, as the world’s wet nurse, it can breastfeed creatures and offer them the *anna-pûrna*, “which is full of nutrition” (Neumann, 1997).

Also in Kali is the transforming nature of death, as the sacrificial blood is converted into nourishment from her breast to the living creatures. The sacrifice is rewarded with life and renewal of consciousness. The goddess is one of the maternal archetype personifications, an image formed from the numinous energy in the contact with consciousness.

The “mysteries of death” belong, according to Neumann (1997), to the domain of the Feminine. The author calls “mysteries” not only the concrete celebrations and historically determined of mystic ceremonies (such as the mysteries of Eleusis), but also, in a broader sense, in the psychic realm common to the entire humanity, centered around an archetype that encompasses an entire network of unconscious inter-related symbols that are externalized in rites, beliefs, customs, and so on.

According to Neumann (1997), the mysteries of death comprise all the mourning customs and symbols related to funerals and to the care of the dead, as well as all the sacrifices that lead to death, such as the fecundation of earth by blood, as happens in the rituals offered to Kali. The mysteries of death are considered mysteries of the Terrible Mother, in that they are supported by her devouring-imprisoning function, which, at the same time as it grants, it also takes back the individual’s life to herself. The womb, in this case, becomes the voracious mandible, and the symbols related to the quartering of the body, to annihilation, rotting and decomposition, find here a favorable environment. The tomb correlates symbolically with the devouring uterus. If we take into account that we live in a mostly patriarchal society, identified by manly values, where the feminine has been obliterated and deprived of legitimacy, it is possible to understand how death has become, to us, so frightening, and why it has been necessary to push it down the underground of the unconscious.

## **Final Considerations**

This purpose of this work has been to address the stages of aging and dying within the Individuation process, by way of the symbolic amplification of images of this stage of life in light of Analytical Psychology.

Boechat (2006) argues that “the matters of spirituality, awareness of finitude and individuation process, as conceived by Jung, are intertwined in human life”, which has motivated us to use the “life networks” metaphor as a title for this text, in that analytical psychology considers all the stages of human development not as isolated, separate and dissociated stages, but as phases related to each other, interlocked with each other, thereby suggesting an idea of a continuous and transforming process. Like Heraclitus, Jung advocates that birth and death are parts of an indivisible whole, “as the feathers of a bird” (Monteiro, 2006).

The western society, however, prefers to focus on the hedonism and youth as targets to be achieved, as an obligation of every human being, in which reflections and suffering are despised, as is ascertained based on the relentless search for “magic pills”, for instance, antidepressants that relieve the symptoms arising from mourning and losses – or otherwise, according to Léo Pessini (2011), the religious Trinity is replaced by the pharmacological Trinity to free us from all evil. This way, *Prozac* frees us from sadness, *Viagra*, from the failure of erectile dysfunction, and *Xenical*, from social marginalization of not adjusting to the standard of beauty imposed by the media.

Therefore, as commented by José Saramago in the movie *Window to the Soul*, of João Jardim and Walter Carvalho (2001), contemporaneity approaches us to Plato’s Cave Myth, where, alienated from our most particular and deepest dimension, we pursue to exhaustion the world of external appearances conveyed by the culture of youthfulness, of the ephemeral, the consumption and the disposability.

Jung views life and death not as opponents, but as complementary aspects of human life crossing, which are summarized in the hero’s journey, in the daily “losses and gains”, in the rites of passage and other symbols for the metaphor of death as the representation of finitude and revival.

Revival is one of the oldest propositions of mankind. All the propositions referring to the supernatural, transcendental and metaphysical are, ultimately, determined by the archetype and, for this reason, it is not surprising that we come across concurrent statements about renaissance of the most diversified people (...). We can distinguish, in particular, two types of experience: first, the transcendence of life, and second, the self-transformation experience (Jung, vol. 9/1, § 200-207).

Von Franz (1994) associates the unconscious to death and analyzes the revelations of the unconscious through the dreams vis-à-vis the approaching death. According to his view, the individuation dreams are very similar to the dreams of death, as in both the image of clocks that do not continue to set the hour, bridges, long paths, intersections, and other symbols is a recurring feature.

Death is inserted in the individuation process, in which the presence of symbols representing the continuity of life is constant in the dreams, the daily messengers of the unconscious. Life and death are intertwined in our

way toward individuation, and the soul has archetypal resonance with death; the psyche ignores death as an end (Monteiro, 2006, p.48).

The proposal of this work has not been, absolutely, to search for euphemisms that would mitigate the painful and shadowy impact of aging and dying, but to approach these topics from a new perspective, that is to say, as phases that, if experienced in their plenitude, can contribute to the individuation process.

It is our view that, as every phase of human development, aging and dying also contains challenges, defeats and victories, and for this very reason, these phases allow us to contemplate the world in a different way, especially by experiencing finitude in its symbolic dimension.

For all these reasons and in view of the ideas and reflections set out on the “networks of life”, in its cycles and in a circular pattern, we once again resort to Jung’s comment included in chapter four, about the need to grasp the world not only with the intellect, but also with “the heart”.

Michaelis (1998) defines the heart as: 1. Hollow and muscular organ, the powering engine of blood circulation; 2. Anterior part of the chest where the pulsation of this organ can be felt; 3. Chest; 4. Supposed seat of human sensibility, passions and feelings; 5. Set of faculties of affection; 6. Love or complete affection; 7. Generosity.

We point out some terms deriving from the word *heart*, such as “know by heart”, and “courage”. The etymological analysis of “to know by heart” indicates knowledge reached by the “heart”, by the “feelings”, whereas “courage” means “a moral force or power face to face with danger”, which also stems from affect (Michaelis, 1998).

Therefore, in order to think about the stages of aging and dying, it is crucial that none of the phases be denied, but that Thanatos and Eros, death and life, finitude and love, be seen and complementary dimensions.

Having laid out these considerations, we leave it to the hands of Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Manuel Bandeira the task of closing this article:

#### **A Parolagem da Vida**

Como a vida muda.  
Como a vida é muda.  
Como a vida é nuda.  
Como a vida é nada.  
Como a vida é tudo.  
Tudo que se perde  
mesmo sem ter ganho.

#### **Life Chatting**

How life changes.  
How life is mute.  
How life is nude.  
How life is nothing.  
How life is all.  
Everything that is lost  
even before it is gained.

Como a vida é senha  
de outra vida nova  
que envelhece antes  
de romper o novo.  
Como a vida é outra  
sempre outra, outra  
não a que é vivida.  
Como a vida é vida  
ainda quando morte  
esculpida em vida  
Como a vida é forte  
em suas algemas.  
Como dói a vida  
quando tira a veste  
de prata celeste.

Como a vida é isto  
misturado àquilo.  
Como a vida é bela  
sendo uma pantera  
de garra quebrada.  
Como a vida é louca  
estúpida, mouca  
e no entanto chama  
a torrar-se em chama.  
Como a vida chora  
de saber que é vida  
e nunca nunca nunca  
leva a sério o homem,  
esse lobisomem.  
Como a vida ri  
a cada manhã  
de seu próprio absurdo  
e a cada momento  
dá de novo a todos  
uma prenda estranha.  
Como a vida joga  
de paz e de guerra  
povoando a terra  
de leis e fantasmas.  
Como a vida toca  
seu gasto realejo  
fazendo da valsa  
um puro Vivaldi.

Como a vida vale  
mais que a própria vida  
sempre renascida  
em flor e formiga  
em seixo rolado  
peito desolado  
coração amante.  
E como se salva  
a uma só palavra  
escrita no sangue  
desde o nascimento:  
amor, vidamor!

How life is a password  
to another, new life  
that ages before  
breaking out the new.  
How life is another  
always another, other  
than that that is lived.  
How life is life  
even when it is death  
sculpted in life  
How life is strong  
in its handcuffs  
How painful is life  
when it takes off the  
celestial silver vest.

How life is this  
mixed with that.  
How life is beautiful  
while being a panther  
with a broken claw.  
How life is crazy  
stupid, foolish  
and despite all that it appeals  
burning into flames.  
How life weeps  
from knowing that it's life  
and never ever never  
takes man seriously,  
this werewolf.  
How life laughs  
each morning  
at its own absurdity  
and at each moment  
gives again to all  
a weird gift.  
How life plays  
peace and war  
populating the land  
with laws and ghosts.  
How life plays  
its worn-out hand organ  
making the waltz  
a true Vivaldi.

How life is worth  
more than life itself  
always reborn  
into a flower and an ant  
into a rolling stone  
a desolate chest  
A loving heart.  
And how it saves itself  
at a single word  
written in blood  
since birth:  
love, lovelife!

*Carlos Drummond de Andrade*



**Consoada**

Quando a Indesejada das gentes chegar  
 (Não sei se dura ou caroável),  
 talvez eu tenha medo.  
 Talvez sorria, ou diga:  
 - Alô, iniludível!  
 O meu dia foi bom, pode a noite descer.  
 (A noite com os seus sortilégios.)  
 Encontrará lavrado o campo, a casa limpa,  
 A mesa posta,  
 Com cada coisa em seu lugar.

**Supper**

When the Unwanted among people arrives  
 (I don't know if hard or soft),  
 maybe I will be afraid.  
 Maybe I smile, or just say:  
 - Hello, undeceivable!  
 I had a good day, the night can come down.  
 (The night with its sortilege.)  
 Will find the field ploughed, the house clean,  
 The table served,  
 Everything where it belongs.

*Manuel Bandeira*

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Received on 01/04/2014

Accepted on 30/05/2014

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