

PRECOGNITIVE DREAMWORK AND THE LONG SELF:
INTERPRETING MESSAGES FROM YOUR FUTURE

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Eric Wargo is a science writer with a cause. He wants to persuade us that dream precognition is a common, possibly universal, phenomenon, even if most people are not oriented to look for it or rarely remember dreams of any kind. Declaring himself to be an heir to the remarkable J. W. Dunne, the Anglo-Irish author of *An Experiment with Time* (first published in 1927), he invites us to sign up as “citizen scientists” who will validate dream precognition by keeping and reviewing exact records of our dreams. He promises us that we will find

that our dream journals become “space–time ships”. And he offers a theory of how, as four-dimensional beings, we are able to see the future.

I have kept a detailed dream journal for 35 years, and part of my everyday practice—in studying my own dreams and those of others—is to ask, of any dream content, “Is it remotely possible that any part of this will manifest, literally or symbolically, in the future?” I tag likely suspects as “PC” and watch for how waking incidents may catch up with the dream later on. For example:

I dream that a silly little dog decked out in fake antlers runs out onto a road and is killed. He is magically revived by a bizarre character who does not conform to human norms.

I had no strong feelings about the dream. It felt like watching a movie. I entered the report in my journal and rushed to the airport to catch an early flight. I missed my connection and ended up on a different plane with a completely different itinerary. I was carrying a copy of my book *Conscious Dreaming* (Moss, 1996), then newly published, and the woman author seated beside me asked to see it. With our pleasant conversation on hold, I looked up at the screen where the in-flight movie was playing. I watched a silly little dog decked out in fake antlers for a Christmas pageant run out on a road. He was killed but magically revived by a bizarre character, the archangel Michael portrayed by John Travolta in the movie of the same name.

If it is possible to dream about something as trivial as the in-flight movie on the wrong plane ahead of time, then surely it is possible to dream of bigger things. This is indeed what you are likely to find if you keep a dream journal and review your entries later to see whether they match subsequent incidents in waking life. I am with Wargo when he appeals to us to follow this practice. However, he doesn’t offer a format for a journal of this kind, or a list of markers that a dream may contain precognitive material, or a clear, comprehensive exposition of the many reasons why even the most assiduous tracker of dream messages of the future may miss or misread dream content. I provide all three in my book *Dreaming True* (Moss, 2000), which Wargo cites only skimpily,¹ although he presumes to give his own reductionist reading of a dream of a possible future that I believe saved my life from death on a certain road.

Wargo includes some of his own dreams in his book (never trust the author of a dream book who doesn’t) but the most vivid examples of likely precognitive dreaming come from a woman friend in Colorado he identifies as Tobi. He cites some documented examples of apparent dream precognition in history, including one I had found in Gennady Barabtalov’s introduction to *Insomnia Dreams*, his edition of Vladimir Nabokov’s dream reports from a Dunne-inspired experiment. In 1917, aged seventeen, Nabokov dreamed that his dead

¹The skimpy source notes to *Precognitive Dreamwork and the Long Self* are mostly just book titles without page references. No copy editor I have worked with would have allowed this.

uncle Basil, who had left him a great fortune, told him “I shall come back to you as Harry and Kuvyrkin.” The following year, Nabokov lost his inheritance in the revolution. Forty-two years later, he regained a fortune when Harry and Kubrick Pictures (sounds like “Harry and Kuvyrkrin”) paid him a handsome sum for the film rights to *Lolita* (Nabokov, 2018, pp. 25–26).

Wargo sets out to demonstrate that leading figures in Western psychology misled their followers by their dismissal of dream precognition. The most famous of all the dreams Freud analyzed was one of his own, the Irma Dream. Freud gives a lengthy account of this 1895 dream and his work with it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In the dream, he inspects the mouth of a patient, Anna Hammerschlag (called Irma in his book), and discusses her condition with several doctors. His work with this dream, by Freud’s own account, led him to invent psychoanalysis (Freud, 1965, pp. 138–151).

The tragic irony is that in all his work on this dream, Freud may have missed a health warning that could have saved his life. Dr. José Schavelzon, an Argentine cancer surgeon (Wargo turns him into a Brazilian, p.74) who is also a psychoanalyst, concluded, after careful review of Freud’s personal medical records, that the Irma Dream contained an amazingly exact preview of precise symptoms of the oral cancer that killed Freud 28 years later (Moss, 2008, pp. 46–49).

Wargo likes Freud’s practice of free association and love of puns, and recommends that we should consider our first associations and “visual gags” after recording a dream, which I agree is good practice (Moss, 1996, pp. 57–59). However, he really has it in for Jung. Wargo asserts that, while Jung has inspired many to connect the inner and the outer, his “acausal” theory of synchronicity “has caused dreamers to overlook or minimize their own role in bringing about these alignments” (p.10). Wargo makes the astonishing statement that “Synchronicity is nothing but your own precognitive nature that you have until now failed to recognize or own” (p. 268), peremptorily dismissing all we have learned about mind–matter interaction in an animate universe and so much more.

Wargo revisits the most famous story of synchronicity in Jung’s biography, which we may call The Scarab at the Window. Jung had virtually despaired in his treatment of a patient who had left two previous therapists when she started telling him a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. At that instant, Jung noticed a green-gold flying beetle at his window. It was a rose chafer, the closest thing to a scarab you will find in Europe. He caught the beetle and presented it to his patient, saying, “Here is your scarab”. This took him and his patient out of their stuck place, and the analysis went forward (Jung, 1973, p. 22).

We now know the name and background of Jung’s patient, thanks to Vicente de Moura (2014), a curator at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich. Her maiden name was Madeleine Quarles van Ufford; her aristocratic family called her Maggy. She spent her infancy in Batavia (modern-day Indonesia) and carried for Jung some of the mystery of the East. We know, from Jung’s lengthy description of her case (without the name) in “The Realities of Practical Psychotherapy”, a

paper only published after his death, that she had a vivid dream and fantasy life, and extraordinary psychosomatic symptoms that Jung could not initially understand (Jung, 1985, pp. 327–337).

What analysts call transference and counter-transference seem to have come into play. Wargo turns this into “a kind of precognitive seduction by Maggy, via her doctor’s reading habits” (p. 128). He suggests that her “precog brain” latched on to future events—from the beetle at the window to the books Jung would read in the future—to allow her to present her doctor with dreams that would capture his attention.

This steamy suggestion of oneiric seduction is intriguing, but the precognitive bit is hard to buy outside a fantasy story. I have experienced and reported cases where my students picked up what I was reading overnight in dreams they shared with me the next morning. On one such occasion three students shared dreams at the breakfast table that matched three key passages in an ethnographic account of the Cayuga Rites of Midwinter that I had been reading between 3 and 4 a.m. This suggested clairvoyance or telepathy rather than precognition. In the case of Maggy, it seems like Jung was following her into some of the mythic territory. Maggy’s dreams drove him East until he discovered Kundalini yoga in *The Serpent Power*. Only then did he feel he was starting to understand her, “Learning from the Patient”, as in the title of de Moura’s article.

Now Wargo comes to Jung’s influence on what he describes as “the remarkable but sadly misframed dream life of Wolfgang Pauli” (p. 133). He borrows my detective work on the case of Pauli’s “Chinese Woman” (and is welcome to do so). He uses it to press the argument that Jung’s constant search for the anima and for archetypes misguided those he counselled, including the pioneer quantum physicist. In Pauli’s case, unfortunately, this seems to be what happened. Jung encouraged Pauli to tag the mysterious, sexy woman who reappeared in his dreams as his “anima” (Meier, 2001). In dreams, she shook his world. Then a Chinese woman in regular life, a physicist named Chien Shiung Wu, shook Pauli’s intellectual world by staging an experiment that demonstrated that, contrary to his fervent belief, the universe is not perfectly symmetrical (Moss, 2008, pp. 227–230).

Jung was indeed reluctant to accept precognition or even talk about it. Nonetheless, he noted that “dreams are often anticipatory” in an important 1931 essay, “The Practical Use of Dream-Analysis”. He went on to report the dream of a keen mountaineer who was elated when he reached a summit where he felt he could “mount right into space”—and actually did so, waking in “sheer ecstasy”. Jung saw a serious warning. He noted the literal possibility that it could play out. He sternly counselled the dreamer not to go climbing without guides and to follow their directions. Three months later the dreamer went up a mountain without guides. A spectator saw him “literally step out into the air” and fall to his death (Jung, 1985, pp. 150–151). At least on this occasion Jung was willing to recognize that dreams can show the future, and sought to change a possible future for the better.

Wargo flatly denies that this is possible. “Banish from your mind, once and for all, the notion that dreams show us possible or probable futures” (p. 163). “Free will is a Western hang up,” he declaims (p. 181). You can see the future, but you can’t change it. Get used to it.

Wargo follows an old tradition by turning time into a kind of space. Dunne was here before him, and Jorge Luis Borges summarized the effect with lapidary elegance in his essay “Time and J. W. Dunne”:

Dunne is an illustrious victim of that bad intellectual habit—denounced by Bergson—of conceiving time as a fourth dimension of space. He postulates that the future towards which we must move already exists, but this postulate merely converts it into space and requires a second time (also conceived in spatial form, in the form of a line or river) and then a third and a millionth (Borges, 2001, p. 219).

The long self² starts to feel like a coffin if we are denied the power to choose our life paths. Wargo insists it’s all there at once, from birth to grave. No chance of getting off the “world line” we are on—no parallel universes allowed, despite the Many Worlds hypothesis in physics, and the fascinating alternate lives long-term dream journal keepers often come to notice they are leading as they record serial dreams.

Wargo becomes hortatory, even missionary, as he insists that dream precognition within the “long self” or “block universe” of space–time is the key to everything. Wargo admits that his approach has become “a little bit like personal religion” (p. 235). Indeed, as we read on it seems more and more determinist, even a form of secular Calvinism. Where is the joy in knowing the future if we can’t do anything about it? Wargo says it gives him highs: “Every precognition dream is a bit like a hit from a kind of psychedelic drug” (p. 236).

I concede I get a little *frisson* when a dream starts to play out in ordinary reality. The morning I started writing this review, I dreamed of leading an Eastern blessing ritual. When I checked my email after recording my dream, I saw that an academic site had sent me a link to an article titled “The Blessing Ritual in Assam”. It was a tiny “Dunnean” moment of getting some news ahead of time, and it gave me a tiny moment of pleasure.

But when I survey Wargo’s broader case, I find myself crying out, “What’s the point?” I agree with Jung that it is less important to ask “Why?” about a dream than “What for?” (Jung, 1985, p.143). If we can’t change a future event we perceive, we can at least use the information to arrive at it better prepared. However, I want to reach further. If I see a future event I don’t like I want to explore whether I can use the information to design a better outcome. This may involve re-entering the dream—a mode of shamanic lucid dreaming that I teach

²Wargo offers an analogy, rather than a definition, for what he calls the “long self”, by which I understand him to mean the habitat of a four-dimensional being: “Think of a video editing program, with our life as a ribbon of frames that your consciousness scrolls across from left to right. Your whole life, birth to death, is speaking to and through your narrow, conscious ‘cursor self’ right now” (p.12).

and practise—to clarify the details and see whether the plot can be changed inside the dreamscape or requires physical action, or both.

Wargo wants to banish the idea that we can change the future. However, I am quite certain that acting on dreams of a probable, not predetermined, future has saved my life from death on the road on at least three occasions. Here's a brief account of one of these episodes:

I dreamed I was driving up a hill in Troy, New York, heading east on Route 2. As I approached a fork in the road everything stopped. I then entered a series of new scenes in extraordinary locales, and became aware that I was traveling through a series of afterlife transitions. When I came out of the dream, I knew I had to take special note of the place—near the fork in the road—where the action stopped, because (in my personal mode of dreaming) entry into afterlife situations in this way is a signal that literal death is a possibility.

Three weeks later, driving up that hill in Troy, I noticed that a delivery truck parked on the right side of the road had created a blind spot. Remembering the dream, instead of pulling out to pass the van, I slowed almost to a stop. This may have saved my life when an eighteen-wheeler came barrelling down the hill at sixty or seventy miles per hour, hogging the whole road beside the parked van (Moss, 2007, p. 42).

How are such things possible? Wargo's determinist position is that we can see the future because it already exists (and can't be changed). I see other reasons. We may have a natural intuitive radar that scans across space and time and is most active when our bodies are dormant. This is part of our human survival kit. At the very least, it serves a "vigilance function".

There are other ways of understanding dream precognition. The one I like best is the most ancient: that *dreaming is travelling*. On any night, the soul or consciousness may travel across time as well as to other dimensions. "Dreams are the news that is told to us by the souls when they come back," said a Kwakiutl shaman (Boas, 1921, pp. 724–725). In the language of the Makiritare, a shamanic dreaming people of Venezuela, the word for dream is *adekato*, which means "journey of the soul". When I spoke to an Onondaga elder about the dreams in which an ancient Iroquois clan mother instructed me in her ways of seership and healing, he said simply "You made some visits and you received some visitations" (Moss, 2004). Wargo bows out of any discussion of this vital area: "Whether it is possible for the spirit or soul, or what we now usually call consciousness, to detach from the body is hotly debated ... and it is a debate mostly beyond the scope of this book" (p. 243).

There is often a link between dream precognition and contact with the deceased, ignored in Wargo's book apart from a dismissive footnote referring to "spiritualist interpretation" (p. 70n) despite its central importance in Nabokov's dream story. Our departed family and friends, who are not confined to linear time, can show us what lies ahead for us and help us choose the right path. My father played this role for me after his death, as have a number of deceased

friends and colleagues. One of the most gifted precog dreamers I know, Rita Dwyer, literally a rocket scientist, told me that after her life was saved by a colleague's precognitive dream of a laboratory fire, she saw many dream visions of the future—ranging from the eruption of Mt St Helens to a death in the family—and that the most important appeared to her when she found herself in the company of her deceased grandmother (Moss, 2000, pp. 30–35).

Let's return to Wargo's central thesis, which is well expressed in the line he quotes from H. G. Wells' *Time Traveller*: "Scientific people know very well that Time is only a kind of Space." Viewed from the fourth dimension, past, present, and future are in fact simultaneous and only experienced sequentially because of our mental perception of them. For Wargo, as for Wells' Time Traveller, we can travel to the past and future, but we can't change them. Our past, present, and future selves are three-dimensional "cross-sections" of our larger four-dimensional identity, "which is a fixed and unalterable thing."

I find that time travel in dreaming is much more exciting than this. By "dreaming", I mean a whole spectrum of engagement with the larger reality, including sleep dreams, lucid dreams, hypnagogia, and shamanic journeying. We not only travel to past and future; we travel between alternative timelines. We go beyond the block universe of four-dimensional beings—which can seem like a *blocked* universe—into a more generous Now. We may find we can not only see the future but help co-create it. We may learn how the observer effect operates on a human scale. It is well understood that at quantum levels, deep within subatomic space, the act of observation plucks a specific phenomenon out of a bubbling cauldron of possibilities. It may be so in the cauldron of our dreaming: through the act of observation, we select a certain event track that will begin to be manifested in the physical world. By a fresh act of observation, or re-visioning, we can then proceed to alter that event track, or switch to an entirely different one.

Where's the proof? It will be found in those dream journals that Wargo urges "citizen scientists" to keep. As we record and track serial dreams, for example, we may notice that we are assembling first-hand evidence that we are leading parallel lives in which we made different choices. I suspect that the mounting evidence will take us beyond the idea that we are four-dimensional beings, into a view of reality from the fifth dimension (Moss, 2010).

We may find that as a species we have help available in this evolution. In his last book, *Intrusions?*, published posthumously, Dunne revealed something he had kept hidden from the world as soldier, aircraft designer, and investigator of dream precognition (Dunne, 1955). He was guided by inner voices and radiant beings in episodes he called "intrusions" into the human mind by a Universal Mind. So much to learn and explore, on our way to becoming conscious citizens of the multiverse.

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