

## Tarot (dis)contents: past/present/future

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### *Tarot and Carl Jung's archetypal images*

Psychologist Carl Jung's biographer Laurens van der Post, in his introduction to Sallie Nichols' book "Jung and Tarot: an Archetypal Journey" (Nichols 1980), notices the contribution to analytical psychology made by "Nichols, in her profound investigation of Tarot, and her illuminated exegesis of its pattern as an authentic attempt at enlargement of possibilities of human perceptions" (1980: xv). Andrew Samuels mentions "systems such as that of the *I Ching*, Tarot and astrology" (1985: 123) as possible resources in analysis and quotes Jung writing in 1945: "I found the *I Ching* very interesting. ...I have not used it for more than two years now, feeling that one must learn to walk in the dark, or try to discover (as when one is learning to swim) whether the water will carry one. (quoted in Jaffe 1979)" (Samuels 1985: 123). Irene Gad (1994) has connected Tarot cards with the process of individuation and considered their archetypal images "to be ...trigger symbols, appearing and disappearing throughout history in times of transition and need" (1994: xxxiv).

The essential identity of human experiences reflected in worldwide myths and folklore led Jung to postulate the existence of the collective unconscious or *objective* psyche that manifests itself through archetypal, symbolic and latent, images and is shared at a deeper level by all members of the humankind (Jung 1959). The collective unconscious is a symbolic "home" for the archetypes that transcend cultural or temporal barriers. Symbolic meanings of experience are "always grounded in the unconscious archetype, but their manifest forms are moulded by the ideas acquired by the conscious mind. The archetypes [as] ...structural elements of the psyche ...possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the conscious mind, those contents which are better suited to themselves" (Jung CW 5, 232). The contents in question are of the paradoxical character (hence, the reference to (dis)contents in the title of my paper): the nature of the relationship between the collective unconscious and the personal consciousness was of the utmost importance for Jung and he came to "the paradoxical conclusion that there is no conscious content that is not in some other respect unconscious" (quoted in Hillman 1979: 12-13). Thus, the purpose of Jungian psychology (and of Tarot readings) is to integrate the unconscious aspects of the mind into consciousness thus enabling the process of individuation and human development. Archetype is a symbol of transformation, and symbols –like those represented by the tarot imagery – act as transformers capable of raising the unconscious contents to the level of consciousness: the implicit meanings become explicit by virtue of "becoming conscious and by being perceived" (Jung in Pauli 1994: 159).

For Jung, the profound relationship between the soul of the world, *Anima Mundi*, and an individual human consciousness remained a great mystery. He did not distinguish between the *psyche* and the material world: they represent two different aspects of the *unus mundus*, or one world. Archetype is seen by Jung as a skeletal pattern, filled in with imagery and motifs that are "mediated to us by the unconscious" (CW 8, 417), the variable contents of which form different *archetypal images*. The

archetypal images are the vehicles for/of information embedded in the collective unconscious, and the unconscious is capable of spontaneously producing images “irrespective of wishes and fears of the conscious mind” (Jung CW 11, 745). The archetypal images are “endowed with a generative power; ... [the image] is psychically compelling” (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut 1986: 73). Contemporary post-Jungians consider the archetypes to be both the structuring patterns of the psyche and the dynamical units of information (cf. Semetsky 2008a; 2008b) implicit in the contents of collective unconscious. Hillman called for the rescue of images without which there are no symbols, and Jung was adamant that the “symbolic process is an experience *in images and of images*” (Jung CW 8i, 82).

### ***The symbolic “language” of Tarot and synchronicity***

The true means of communication between the conscious mind and the unconscious is a language of symbols: “symbols act as *transformers*, their function being to convert libido from a ‘lower’ into a ‘higher’ form” (Jung CW 5, 344). *It is the Tarot symbolism – the universal language of signs* (Semetsky 2006a) – *that establishes such an unorthodox communicative link*. The importance of connection is paramount: “in Jung’s language, psychotherapy achieves its ultimate goal in the wholeness of the conjunction” (Hillman 1972: 293). The meanings of the symbols embedded in pictures are not arbitrary but accord with *grammar* of this universal language above and beyond verbal expressions of the conscious mind: “it is not the personal human being who is making the statement, but the archetype speaking through him” (Jung 1963: 352). In the “Four Archetypes” Jung says:

You need not be insane to hear his voice. On the contrary, it is the simplest and most natural thing imaginable. ...You can describe it as mere ‘associating’ ... or as a ‘meditation’ [and] a real colloquy becomes possible when the ego acknowledges the existence of a partner to the discussion (CW 9, 236-237).

*An expert reader transforms such an apparent (yet only implicit) colloquy into an explicit dialogue when she functions as a “bilingual” interpreter converting the pictorial language of the unconscious into verbal expressions thus facilitating the transformation of in-formation into consciousness.* What takes place is an indirect, mediated, connection akin to the acting principle of synchronicity posited by Jung in collaboration with famous physicist and Nobel laureate Wolfgang Pauli. Synchronicity addresses the problematic of meaningful patterns generated both in nature and in human experience, linking the concept of the unconscious to the notion of “‘field’ in physics [and extending] the old narrow idea of ‘causality’ ...to a more general form of ‘connections’ in nature” (Pauli 1994: 164). Pauli envisaged the development of theories of the unconscious as overgrowing their solely therapeutic applications by being eventually assimilated into natural sciences “as applied to vital phenomena” (1994: 164). In his 1952 letter to Jung, Pauli expressed his belief in the gradual discovery of a new, what he called “neutral”, language that functions symbolically to describe the psychic reality of the archetypes and would be capable of crossing over the psycho-physical dualism[fn1]. *Such a connective bridge is established during the Tarot readings.*

Let me at this point employ a computer metaphor[fn2] borrowed from Nobel Prize laureate Herbert Simon:

Computers were originally invented to process patterns denoting numbers, but they are not limited to that use. The patterns stored in them can denote numbers, or words, or lizards, or thunderstorms, or the idea of justice. If you open a computer and look inside, you will not find numbers (or bits, for that matter); you will find patterns of electromagnetism (Simon 1995: 31).

We do not know what we may find if we ever “open” a human mind and look inside: mind is an intangible “thing” after all. But we may find something if we consider the importance of *projection* in Jungian analysis and the intangible mind as *projected* through the tangible properties of the cards with their picturesque images that embody powerful symbolic meanings. The cards are called Arcana, and the meaning of the word Arcana derives from Latin *arca* as a chest; *arcere* as a verb means to shut or to close; symbolically, Arcanum (singular) is a tightly-shut treasure chest holding a secret. The 22 cards of the Major Arcana encode information that affect human behaviour when this or that archetype is activated, such as The Fool embodies the archetype of the Eternal Child; The Hierophant – Persona ; Sun – The Divine Child; Judgment—the Rebirth, etc. (Fig. 1)[fn3]:



Citing Simon again, “a symbol is simply the pattern, made of any substance whatsoever that is used to denote, or point to, some other symbol, or object or relation between objects. The thing it points to is called its *meaning*” (1995: 31). Full of such implicit (that is, “existing” only in *potentia*) – and in need of mediation – meanings, pictures can be used to make inferences so as to explicate their meanings by creating an *imaginative narrative*[fn4] for the archetypal journey of individuation symbolized by the cards’ archetypal images. Especially if they can denote (as Simon indeed pointed out) the idea of justice – and “Justice” is the major card number XI; or thunderstorm – as portrayed in “The Tower”, the major card number XVI, and so on. Nearly every one of the 78 cards – 22 Major and 56 Minor – has an image of a living being, a human figure situated in different contexts. This figure is not just a physical body but the mind, soul and spirit as well. And while a body goes through life and accomplishes different tasks,

the psyche goes through transformations, as life itself calls for the constant renewal and enlargement of our consciousness. Human experiences cross over the boundaries of an individual consciousness and expand to the level of culture. The journey through the cards' imagery is therapeutic as each new life experience contributes to self-understanding, self-knowledge, spiritual rebirth and, eventually, the individuated Self represented by the last card in the sequence, "The World".

The language of images delivers "the truths of gnosis ...transformed into poetic and mythic language" (Martin 2006: 37). When symbolically represented in Tarot images, the transcendental realm is being brought, so to speak, *down to earth* by virtue of its *embodiment* in the physical reality confirming Jung's insight that "psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing" (Jung CW 8, 418 ). They are united in analysis thus defying the ghost of the dualistic split haunting us since the days of Descartes both in theory and, significantly, in practice. The levels of *praxis* as encompassing human behaviour, decision making or choosing a particular course of action is of utmost significance. Jung was adamant that the general rules of human conduct are

at most provisional solutions, but never lead to those critical decisions which are the turning-points in a man's life. As the author [Erick Neumann] rightly says: "The diversity and complexity of the situation makes it impossible for us to lay down any theoretical rule for ethical behaviour" (Jung 1949/Neumann 1969: 13) [\[fn5\]](#)

Yet, in practice (as complementary to theory) each and every Tarot reading (Semetsky 2005) becomes a step toward the conscious realization of the deepest meaning (*corpus subtile*) of a particular situation; subsequently, the enlargement of consciousness becomes itself a step towards individuation.

### ***The Devil***

Often, the action of the archetypes is such that they can possess the psyche in a guise of the unconscious Shadow. Jung saw how powerfully this archetype worked behind the scenes, implicitly affecting the psyche and explicitly influencing people to behave in a neurotic or compulsive manner. Among Major Arcana, the Shadow archetype corresponds to the card number XV, "The Devil", the fallen angel, the dark archetypal Shadow as a dark precursor in the natural progression, or evolution, toward "The Tower" and then "The Star" (Fig 2):



In the guise of the Shadow, the Devil can easily possess one's psyche and, importantly, the Shadow can often become projected onto the others, and one may very well attribute to significant others those qualities that one is tempted to deny in oneself. The Jungian concept of Shadow describes a cluster of impulses, complexes, shameful and unacknowledged desires, self-indulgences and being a slave to one's own primitive instincts. Sexual compulsion, poor impulse control, or plain old greed are some behavioural patterns that may manifest in real life. It may be a fear, or a superficial complex of superiority when in fact deep inside one feels rather inferior. On the picture, the two naked figures chained to the Devil's throne in the underworld lost the ability of clear judgment and seem helpless. The Devil's heavy chains represent the self-destructive tendencies and weaknesses; bondage and fear. In interpersonal relationships, the Devil can reflect upon co-dependency issues. It may be a deeply engraved fear of breaking free, similar to battered women unable to leave and continuing to stay in the abusive relationship with spouses overwhelmed by submissiveness or sexual/economic dependency. For the reader, several questions immediately arise: What is it that is holding the subject of the reading in bondage? How to overcome the fears of one's own free self? How to get rid of those chains? Is there any particular path to liberation?

One of the most popular spreads is The Celtic Cross, the structure of which is well known to the readers of this article, indeed. Its ten positions have meaningful connotations and thus provide a rich context within which the cards that "fall out" in this or that position are to be interpreted. The Fig. 3 below (with some additional cards, yet in principle the Celtic Cross) is a layout for Lola as one example of several documented readings (Semetsky 2006b). Lola (not her real name) agreed to having had her reading made public; she specified her main reason for the reading as a professional problem connected with creating her own project. She wanted to clarify issues, to focus on solutions and, as she indicated, "to find out what is making me resist and keeping from manifesting this project".

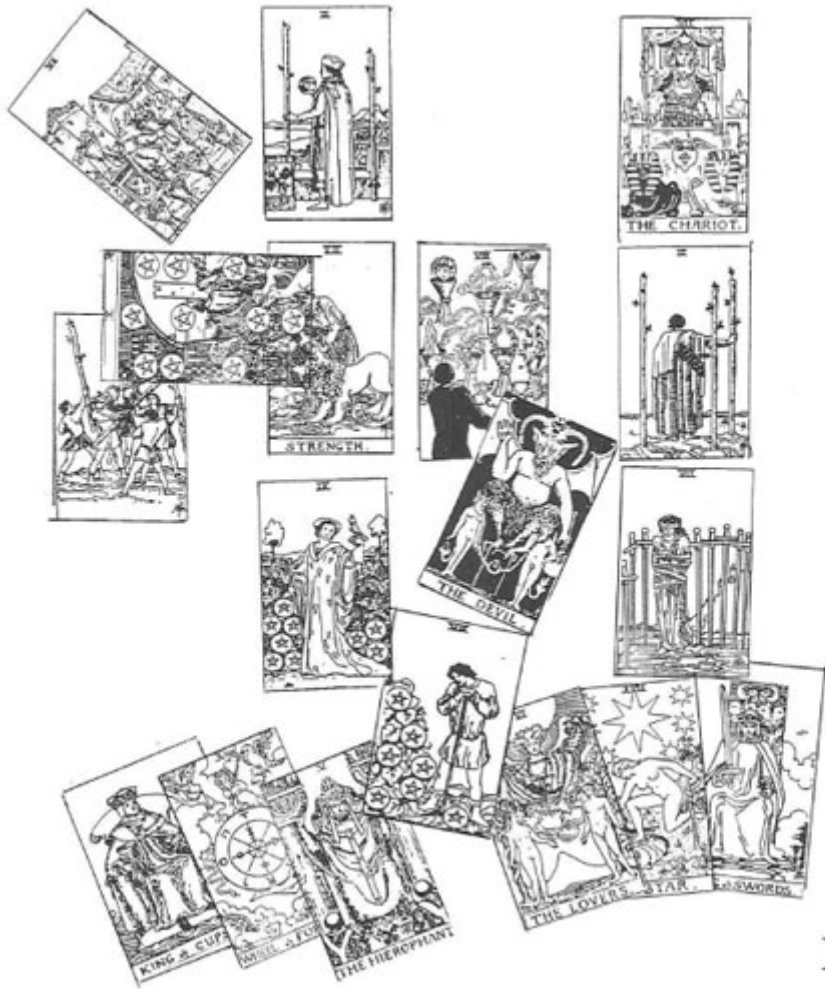


Figure 3

### ***Narrating the Images***

Card in the first position was the Major Arcana's Strength, crossed by the ten of pentacles in the second position. This indicated that, in the framework of her project, Lola's main concern was with satisfying her ambitions and exercising her will power for the purpose of establishing herself in the professional world. The crossing position of the ten of pentacles, a very positive card by itself in its image of stability and security, carried however the message of the hindering influence: perhaps the unconscious goal of Lola was not the creation of the project but the creation of the safe and secure nest for herself by means of the said project. It was the feeling of incompleteness, manifested by the third card, the nine of pentacles, and also a rather well-controlled thought process, that motivated Lola to inquiry into the current status of her enterprise. Although in the past she went through some internal struggle with herself, perhaps through the period of self-doubt, as suggested by the five of wands in the fourth position, her endurance and determination so far have carried her towards achieving of her goal.

Self-mastery was suggested by the vertical line that consisted of the nine of pentacles, via the Strength, toward the two of wands. Apparently nothing was actively happening now, as suggested by the two of wands in the fifth position, and Lola was becoming restless. Despite her being goal-oriented and strong,

the results of the project did not seem to will have been manifested in the near future. The waiting period of at least seven or eight weeks would be to Lola's best advantage, and this time better be spent wisely, otherwise the project would remain vague and more as the product of Lola's wishful thinking rather than practical reality. The card in the sixth position, the seven of cups, carried a strong message of "the castles built in the air" making the outcome of the project quite questionable. Apparently Lola's talents and imagination worked overtime and clouded the clear picture of the project with the almost innumerable options. Yet, her focusing on a single goal would definitely contribute to her becoming clear about what exactly she wanted to achieve. At this point Lola interjected and said that she was in therapy and having weekly sessions.

So what is that keeping her from manifesting results? Is it because her mind is elsewhere? Lola's mind seemed preoccupied with evaluating her private life rather than concentrating on the subtleties and details of her professional involvement. The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth cards (that I added to the standard ten positions of the Celtic Cross) suggested a stable relationship with a man, responsive to Lola at the emotional level (The King of cups) and who seemed to be quite serious in his intentions.

Lola commented that the man was good and, yes, oriented towards a traditional relationship. However three cards in the seventh position clearly demonstrated that Lola's mind was preoccupied with the thoughts about another man, with whom she was hoping for a romantic relationship. This man symbolised by the King of swords seemed to be quite an authoritative and independent personality, and perhaps those qualities both attracted Lola and kept her apprehensive about getting involved with him. Such a mental outlook clearly distracted Lola from concentrating on her project and devoting time, effort and energy toward its manifestation. The fourteenth card, the seven of pentacles, demonstrated Lola's concern about the fact that she has invested in the project, and since no results as yet came to pass, there was a feeling of the waste of efforts, perhaps some financial loss too. Lola said that, yes, she put her own money into the project. The imagery carried an advice for Lola not to stop but be consistent in her efforts, perhaps reassessing what she has achieved so far and what still needed to be done, including reevaluating her own attitude and motivations.

Since the whole layout suggested that Lola was strongly motivated to get the project moving, her driving forces needed to be addressed in detail to find out what was keeping this project from being realized. The eighth card, the eight of swords, indicated that Lola's environment was quite oppressive. But her project was an individual one, hence there were no factors coming from elsewhere, like administration, paper work, or peer pressure that would have created the obstacles hindering the development of any idea. In Lola's case the restrictions came upon her through her own confusion and virtual blindness. This card further emphasized the necessity for the revaluation of her own motives, and some team work in cooperation was suggested by the three of wands in the ninth position. Perhaps Lola wanted all the reward for herself only, but at this stage if she does not cooperate with others the project would not move ahead from its present stage, and there would not be any hope for progress.

So, to achieve the successful outcome, Lola must get out of the conflict she has unconsciously and unwillingly created within herself, torn apart by the confusing issues of personal ambitions and relationships versus the ideals of her goal. What was the original purpose? There seemed to be a danger

of the project becoming secondary to Lola's primary concern with establishing herself professionally in her field. The Chariot, the tenth card, indicated a high probability for Lola to be able to carry on, providing she would learn to consciously control those opposing driving forces in herself. Perhaps the time of waiting period, aligned through the two of wands with the Chariot, would need to be spent in further counseling working on the issues that surfaced during this reading. Lola said that self-discovery was a part of her project. The cards, however, carried a strong reminder of not to lose the main original idea, nor turning it into a vanity exercise, that might happen to be lost in the clouds of the seven of cups. At this point Lola wanted to further clarify the sixth card and she picked up the supplementary card out of the deck for this position. *When she turned it over, she discovered that it was "The Devil"* (see Fig. 3).

Associations that this card usually brings forward are frightening. On the other hand, if and when the collective unconscious directs clients to sub-consciously choose this particular card (all the cards are face down), it means it is extremely important that this archetype must be addressed here-and-now. No wonder the total layout kept on pointing towards further counseling, as the Devil – one's very Shadow - needs a lengthy exploration by itself. The time span of this reading session, fifty minutes, made inquiry into this major card quite limited, but nevertheless, very insightful for Lola. She exclaimed: "How frightening is to pick up the Devil card!". I asked her what was so frightening (an associative process thus begun). Lola mentioned darkness, then paused and added the word fear.

At the unconscious level Lola's psyche was overwhelmed by the dark underworld of fear and constrictive emotions, she fantasized about the project and eventually became enslaved by the idea she herself gave birth to. It was not she any more who controlled the course of events with regard to her project, the archetype took over and possessed her. She became obsessed with the idea and was now governed and controlled by it. The idea, instead of empowering Lola, became over-powering, the difference, however, being very subtle. Lola picked up one more card, to find out what, that she was not aware of, might keep her "imprisoned" (her expression) by the Devil. The card turned out to be the three of pentacles, very positive by itself, but in conjunction with the Devil, carrying messages of the inflated ego, and a strong desire to improve one's own social status and to earn approval from people in the position of authority. Lola said at this stage: "Yes, I want recognition!"

So why was her project not manifesting? A further challenge for Lola would be to work on her motivations, on the relation between fantasy and reality, on ability to concentrate on a single goal, in general on making herself more of a whole person in order to achieve wholeness in her enterprises. Several times during this reading Lola repeated: "This is the story of my life..." On my suggestion Lola picked up the last card to find out what else might be helpful in addressing all issues that emerged in this session. The six of cups indicated the idea of an honest talk and sharing with somebody Lola could trust, perhaps continuing the therapeutic process that would bring potential healing.

Lola said that this reading contributed to achieving her purpose, stating that she "gained insight in what is restricting [me] in achieving [my] goal, namely fear and confusion in [my] specific intentions within the project". She indicated that she would like to have a follow-up session explaining her answer as a desire "to find out more". She said that the reading was significant and meaningful to her, providing the following comment: "I gained some clarity on where I need to focus my attention in seeing my project



through as of today. I understood how Tarot works as a tool in self-discovery along psychology, allowing for more personal issues to come out and be pin-pointed for future discoveries”.

### ***Integrating the Collective Shadow***

At the collective level, the Shadow encompasses those outside “the norm” of the established order and social system, such as “criminals, psychotics, misfits, scapegoats” (Samuels 1985: 66). It is not only that they appear to stand outside the culture, but importantly culture itself fails to assimilate its own Shadow. The Devil card is a symbol of the ultimate slave morality, in Nietzschean sense, in the relationship between the oppressor and those oppressed. It represents a moment of psychological denial and the implementation of scapegoat policy by the dominant culture or nation, while in the meantime projecting onto some generic Other one’s own inferior and shadowy qualities. The scapegoat psychology is associated with what Erich Neumann called old ethics, and it is an ethical attitude indeed that is central with regard to the Shadow archetype. While the ego-consciousness focuses on indubitable and unequivocal moral principles, these very principles crumble under the “*compensatory significance of the shadow in the light of ethical responsibility*” (Jung 1949/Neumann 1969: 12; see footnote 5). The neglect of this responsibility tends to precipitate multiple evil consequences in the world.

While old ethic is the ethics of illusionary perfection and absolute Good that necessarily leads to the appearance of its exact opposite, the absolute Evil, the new ethics consists in recognizing our own dark side, that is, *making the darkness conscious*. The old ethics is “partial” (Neumann 1969: 74) as belonging solely to the Ego; the new ethics devoted to the integration of the Shadow is holistic and is a mode of existence of the individuated Self. The Self emerges only when the opposites exist as a harmonious whole and neither side is suppressed or eliminated. In his wonderful book *Tarot: Talisman or Taboo? Reading the World as Symbol*, Irish philosopher and monk Mark Patrick Hederman (2003) points out that the Apocalypse describes the Devil as Satan who passes judgment on us standing next to the throne of God; yet his other name is Lucifer, he who brings the Light in order to illuminate the darkness. In this allegory, “the evil that is the shadow side of everything that is bright and good remains hidden” (Hederman 2003: 176) or invisible. The perpetual presence of the shadow must be recognized – made visible – and integrated into consciousness; otherwise, it will fall into the depth of the unconscious where it will continue to crystallize.

The absence of freedom, the lack of hope, and the total powerlessness will reach their critical mass and will start acting from within the psyche spreading spontaneously until reaching the destructive climax. Non-incidentally, the subsequent card after “the Devil”, “the Tower” (Fig. 4) represents this upcoming climax:



In the Tarot feminist interpretation (Gearhart & Rennie 1981), the image of “The Tower” signifies radical intervention, revolution and the overthrowing of false consciousness, violent social conflict and change, destruction of the old order on a grand scale, and release from imprisonment in the patriarchal structure during the very process of its demolition. Jung spoke about the archetypal *temenos* in one’s psychic structure. The original meaning of *temenos* in Greek is a sacred precinct like a temple; a synonym for it is a hermetically sealed vessel or, for that matter, the Tower. *Temenos*, as employed in Jungian analysis, has acquired psychological connotations as the psychically charged area surrounding a complex, and may be experienced sometimes through the symbolism of any closed container such as a womb or a prison. Because the vessel -the womb, the prison, the Tower — is sealed hermetically, the force looking for its way out will be ultimately felt as acting from within in an erratic, horrifying and unpredictable manner (Semetsky 2000).

As regards real events in human culture, “The Tower” – which in some decks is called The Tower of Destruction – has an uncanny resemblance with the image of the destroyed Towers on September 11 (Fig. 5 as found on the Internet):



The Tower image is an embodiment of contradiction and the conflict of opposites; significantly Jung did use the notion of contradiction with regard to the meaning of the tower which he, at a symbolic level, identified with the Tower of Babel, that is, symbol of false omnipotence and mistaken certainty, a priori condemned to destruction during the most powerful and confusing instance of the contradiction and amidst persistent contradiction and mutual misunderstanding: the confusion of tongues, indeed. Fig. 6 below incorporates the elements of the famous Brueghel's masterpiece<sup>[fn6]</sup>:



Thunder and lightning as per the image of “the Tower” are the universal signs of the wrath of gods; the symbolism of which also indicates a swift – and painful – alteration at the level of collective consciousness when it observes the aftermath of the destruction of the self-erected unstable structure. The ultimate destruction – a body turned into a life-less skeleton – is seen in this other poignant and maximally real image of 9/11 also published on the Internet (Fig. 7):



During a Tarot reading the appearance of the Tower card may indicate a catharsis, that is, a dramatic and forceful replay of the unconscious material that exceeds the boundaries of the current “circumference” of the mind and forces the darkness at the very deep level to break through into the surface of consciousness. However, the enforced evacuation, breaking all defences, frees one from being incarcerated in the symbolic tower of one’s own making, whether it is psychological, ideological, cultural, or any other belief system. Any unforeseen cataclysmic event that suddenly brings people down to earth by disturbing the existing norm and order of things through the abruptly terminated current psychological state or a break-up in a set of values privileged by a given culture, necessarily raises the level of consciousness. The breakdown in existing order simultaneously creates conditions for the potential production of a new order. Thus the image of “the Tower” card is a sign not only of a breakdown but a *breakthrough* when the darkness embodied in the preceding image of the Shadow-Devil is illuminated and made conscious.

I wholeheartedly agree with Mark Patrick Hederman (2003) who warns of a danger to ourselves and others if and when we choose to remain unconscious of the Shadow. If history and culture taught us anything, it is that in the 20th century “The Devil” fully manifested as

a hell on earth and that this hell was a human creation. It was a hell of cruelty and mayhem resulting from the incapacity of the powerful people to decipher their unconscious motivation... [E]ach of us has to discover and explore the labyrinth of the dark, the unconscious... Its language is incomprehensible, even inaudible to most. But, no matter how difficult it is to decipher, such work must be undertaken. We must recognize that most of our past, whether personal or historical, took place underground, in silent rivers, ancient springs, blind pools, dark sewers. While the task of making them accessible to our

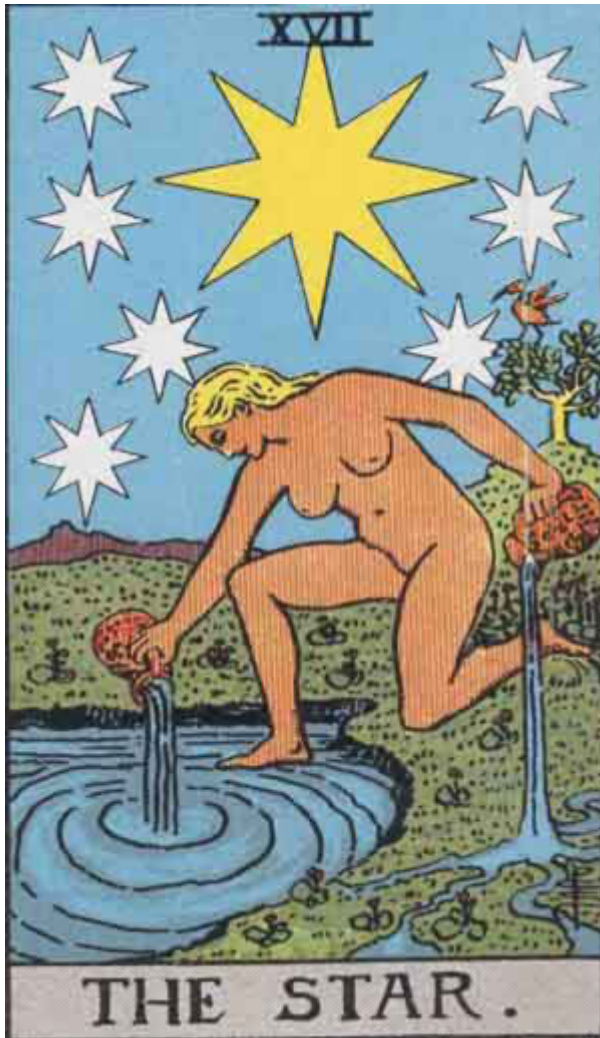
consciousness is difficult, it is nonetheless imperative. Even more so at the beginning of a new century when we hope to outline some plausible tracks into a better future. We have to read the signs of the times... (Hederman 2003: 21).

The signs of the times may come from the earth, such as volcanos or earthquakes; or from the water such as tsunamis; or from the air such as the attack on September 11; or from the fire when draft causes famine; in all cases the results are disastrous. Yet, the lives can be saved because all four elements of nature are trying to communicate with us in the form of real significant events that encode messages about the behavioural patterns, which have caused (or will have caused!) them. To decode these messages through the vibrant language of the unconscious embodied in the symbolic system of Tarot is not a utopian dream for the future but the reality of the present because *this code is already available to us!* Sure enough, the future can still be skewed because prevailing ideologies or grand meta-narratives are still here and remain the means “of imposing our own myopic architecture, of obliterating the splendour of *what might have been: the future perfect*” (Hederman 2003: 22; italics mine).

The least we can do is to have a *hope* for the better future. But, in accord with Jung’s reference to the foreknowledge by virtue of symbols as purposive, healing, and numinous, the better future might already *will have been!* Tarot readings perform an amplifying function in agreement with Jungian synthetic method that implies the emergence of new meanings as carrying the utmost significance. Synthetic method reflects *the future-oriented path to knowledge*, and the archetypes do determine “the nature of the configurational process and the course it will follow, with seeming foreknowledge, or as if it were already in a possession of the goal” (Jung CW 8, 411).

Significantly, the polyvalence of the image that follows the Tower in a deck, called “The Star”, connotes the field of meanings which include hope, healing, inspiration, creativity, and the realization of our spiritual dreams. Hence, we do understand the message that The Tower of Destruction, which preceded “The Star” temporarily, was only a stage in the directed-forward evolution of consciousness and the development of the humankind. We have learned our moral lesson embedded in “The Tower”. The presence of “The Star” in a deck, as a *natural progression* from “The Tower”, is a symbolic message that the Tower itself is a precursor to the renewal and the creation of new psychic space aligned with nature.

The image of “The Star” (Fig. 8 ) convenes oneness with nature – the wholeness of the symbolic conjunction – symbolized by the naked woman pouring waters.



As the first figure in the sequence of the Major Arcana – importantly, feminine – without any clothes on, “The Star” is a symbol of being finally stripped off the darkness due to the darkness itself made conscious. The eight stars with eight spikes carry the message of spirituality especially significant today, in the year two thousand and *eight*. The vessels are red, this colour representing full flesh-and-blood humanity in unity with spiritual essence (water, blue). “The Star” embodies the meaning of hope, healing, inspiration and the forthcoming new Aquarian age; in fact, this card is often called The Star of Hope. In the current global climate permeated by diverse beliefs, disparate values and cultural conflicts when different ideologies compete with each other at the global level and have led to destructions of “The Tower” scope, the universal value of Hope is paramount. We can bring in the *revolution* (as Neumann called it) in the societal value-system if we step into our own process of *evolution* and transform the potentiality into our very reality by virtue of the lived-through meanings contained in the (dis)contents of the Tarot symbolism.

***Past/present/future***

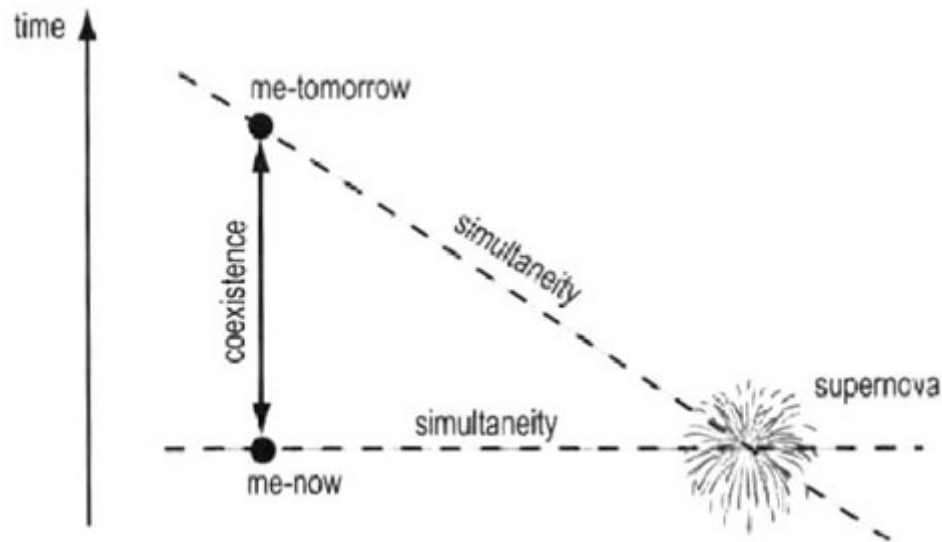
For Jung, “psychological fact ... as a living phenomenon...is always indissolubly bound up with the continuity of the vital process, so that it is not only something evolved but also continually evolving and creative” (Jung CW 6, 717). Importantly, for Jung, the collective unconscious encompasses future possibilities, and “[a] purposively interpreted [image], seems like a *symbol*, seeking to characterize a definite goal with the help of the material at hand, or trace out a line of future psychological development” (Jung CW 6, 720), that is, to perform a prospective, *prognostic* function in addition to the symptomatic, or *diagnostic*, one. Jung’s understanding of dreams was that they function in a compensatory mode, providing what is missing, but also in a prospective and prophetic modes anticipating and predicting a possible future psychological direction.

Respectively, the metaphysics of time in the Tarot spread reflects a four-dimensional view, in which past, present and future events coexist. David Bohm, a physicist, has posited all possible events as enfolded in the timeless implicate order. In the actual world they unfold into explicate order thereby creating time in our physical three-dimensional reality. Referring to the experience of dreams, Bohm said:

When people dream of accidents correctly and do not take the plane and ship, it is not the actual future that they were seeing. It was merely something in the present which is implicate and moving toward making this future. In fact the future they saw differed from the actual future because they altered it. Therefore I think it’s more plausible to say that, if these [synchronistic] phenomena exist, there’s an anticipation of the future in the implicate order in the present. As they used to say, coming events cast their shadows [sic!] in the present. Their shadows are being cast deep in the implicate order” (Bohm, quoted in Hederman 2003: 43-44; brackets mine)

Ditto for the readings: when the cards are being spread in a layout that comprises positions signifying all three aspects of time simultaneously, human perception encompasses both past and future “memories” (Semetsky 2006a) compressed in the here-and-now of each particular reading. Hillman (1972) believes that it is the very art of memory that serves as a method for presenting the organization of the collective unconscious. The art of memory can be schematized as per so-called “Triangle argument” (Fig. 9 [from Kennedy 2003: 63, Fig. 5.3]) of the Einstein’s block-universe, which concedes that some events in the past and future coexist.





In agreement with the triangle argument, the subject of the reading in the present moment appears to coexist with itself *later*: “me-now” is simultaneous with “me-tomorrow” hence creating a non-linear and tenseless (a-temporal) “book” written in the symbolic language of images that can be read, narrated and interpreted. The *aion* (a spiritual-timeless time-series) becomes projected into *chronos*, that is, a linear time of our physical reality[fn7]. Tarot empowers us with the ability to make sense out of the chaotic flux of experiences as we become capable of *learning from and within this very experience when it is being unfolded in front of our very eyes*. The major function performed by Tarot is akin to Jung’s *transcendent function* in its providing a union of the unconscious and conscious contents thus leading to the individuation and the “achievement of a greater personality” (Jung CW 7, 136).

The images contained in the pictures, as Sallie Nichols reminds us, “were conceived deep in the guts of human experience, at the most profound level of the human psyche. It is to this level in ourselves that they will speak” (Nichols 1980: 5) along a continuous process of individuation and moral/spiritual education (Semetsky forthcoming) that will have enabled us to make decisions and chose ethical actions in harmony with the Jungian *unus mundus*.

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### Footnotes

[fn1] See *Atom and Archetype: The Pauli/Jung Letters 1932-1958*. Edited by C.A. Meier, with a preface by Beverley Zabriskie (2001, Princeton University Press). This particular letter is designated in the book as 56P, pp. 81-83. See also my 2006 article “The language of signs: Semiosis and the memories of the future”, *SOPHIA: International Journal for philosophy of religion, metaphysical theology and ethics*, Vol 45, No.1 pp. 95-116. [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn2] The computational approach needs qualification. At the cutting edge of philosophy of mind and cognitive science computers are understood as dynamical systems that indeed manipulate “bits”, but

these units of information are not reducible to what in physics would be called particles. They are moments in the process of flow represented by analog (and not digital) information and defined as “bits” within a certain context only, that is, holistically as parts of the greater whole. [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn3] [Images from Holley Voley’s 1909 Waite-Smith deck] [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn4] Imaginative narrative is one example of research methodologies employed by the cutting edge scientific discipline called *Futures Studies*. [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn5] From Foreword by C.G. Jung to Neumann’s book *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*. Jung’s Foreword copyright 1968 by the Bollingen Foundation, New York [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn6] This image is from the deck called The Lovers’ Tarot, by Jane Lyle; Illustration Copyright Oliver Burston 1982. The pack is published by Connections (January 2000) in the UK and St. Martin’s Press in the US [[return to paragraph](#)]

[fn7] In *Atom and Archetypes: The Pauli-Jung Letters 1932-1958* (see note 1) there is an earlier unpublished essay by Pauli, written in 1948 and called “Modern Examples of ‘Background Physics’” (pp. 179-196). Pauli comments on the doubling of the psyche akin to a human birth as a division in two parts out of initial unity. Time-wise, the doubling of the time-series is represented by *aion* and *chronos*. At the time, Pauli remained agnostic on to “whether the ‘series’ is thought of in temporal terms or as a simultaneous juxtaposition” (p. 187) and referred to the idea of the transmigration of the souls when the timeless reality of the archetypes is being repeatedly interrupted by a temporal sequence of physical/biological lives [[return to paragraph](#)]

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March 2009 | Category: [Reading](#) | [2 comments](#)

**2 comments to**

***Tarot (dis)contents: past/present/future***

- Christine Houde

[March 18th, 2010 at 09:58](#)

I don't know who this comment is going to! I just stumbled onto this article by Dr. Semetsky and I'm so thrilled I can hardly contain myself! Finally! At LAST—someone who speaks my two favorite languages fluently and profoundly—depth psychology and Tarot!

- Suzan Lemont

[November 3rd, 2010 at 11:21](#)

I also “stumbled” on this page looking for information on whether others have published on the topic of using Tarot in expressive therapy sessions. I wrote my Master's thesis on the topic in 1997 (*The Journey Into the Mirror: The Phenomenological Use of Tarot in the Expressive Therapies*) and am now involved in a project in S. Africa, using cards/symbolism in both working with traumatized children, and in data collection/analysis. I wish to know if this owrk has been attempted and any other info. available.