

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Interpreting the signs of the times: beyond Jung

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*(Received 5 March 2009; final version received 17 August 2009)*

This article introduces the semiotics of Tarot images in the context of human experiences and in the framework of Jung's analytical psychology. It presents Tarot pictures as symbolic representations of the archetypes embedded in the collective psyche. The images can function as symbolic triggers especially significant at the time of socio-cultural transitions, therefore making it imperative to read, interpret, and understand the meanings of those important signs that act out in human culture. The article addresses in particular the Jungian archetype of the Shadow as a sign and symptom, and considers some consequences of its functioning at both individual and social levels. It also posits the necessity of the integration of the Shadow in view of its projection as embodied in some real-life events affecting the collective psyche in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** culture; imaginative narrative; Jung's collective unconscious; Pauli; Peirce's interpretant; praxis; September 11; Shadow; Tarot symbolism

#### Introduction

The *Encyclopedic dictionary of semiotics* (Sebeok 1994, 1: 99–100) positions Tarot pictures squarely in the traditional framework of fortune-telling. Accordingly:

taromancy [is defined] as a branch of divination based upon the symbolic meaning attached to individual Tarot cards or modern decks, interpreted according to the subject or purpose of a reading and modified by their position and relation to each other from their specific location in a formal “layout” or “spread”. (Sebeok 1994, 1: 199)

Earlier empirical studies by Russian semioticians also equated the phenomenon of Tarot readings with fortune-telling; the cards were used for a specific pragmatic purpose by a fortune-teller whose task was considered to simply “exert a strong influence on the person whose fortune is being told” (Lecomceva and Uspenskij 1977, 70). Playing cards were regarded as a simple semiotic system with a limited vocabulary, in which “divination of past and present is a game” (1977, 71) and the future is foretold. In comparison with natural languages, the formal structure of “the system of cartomancy [as] a language with finite number of states” was considered analogous to “certain artificial languages with a limited semantics” (1977, 73).

Michael Dummett, the eminent British philosopher of language, devoted several monumental volumes to the history and mystery of Tarot, addressing it mainly from the perspective of a cultural game (Dummett 1980); that is, a sort of *fiction*. This article reconceptualises the phenomenon of Tarot by placing it in the context of

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Jungian depth psychology as the analysis of not just fictional but *factual*, both actual and potential, experiences via the medium of signs, symptoms, and symbols embedded in the collective memory gained by humankind in the course of its history. Jung's biographer Laurens van der Post, in his introduction to Sallie Nichols' book *Jung and Tarot: An archetypal journey* (Nichols 1980), notices her contribution to analytical psychology by virtue of the "profound investigation of Tarot, and her illuminated exegesis of its pattern as an authentic attempt at enlargement of possibilities of human perceptions" (Nichols 1980, xv). Contemporary post-Jungian scholar Andrew Samuels mentions "systems such as that of the *I Ching*, Tarot and astrology" (Samuels 1985, 123) as possible even if questionable 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. (Samuels 1985, 123)

Irene Gad (1994) connected Tarot cards with the stages of human development along the Jungian process of individuation towards becoming authentic selves, and considered their archetypal images "to be ... trigger symbols, appearing and disappearing throughout history in times of transition and need" (1994, xxxiv).

The original study by Aphek and Tobin (1989) has advanced cartomancy and taromancy to the level of complex, dynamic, meta-semiotic systems (cf. Semetsky 2001, 2008a), in which the multiple meanings of the cards were seen as representing "the possible semantic, cultural and social attributes of an umbrella term or theme attributed to that particular card" (1989, 13). They addressed the dynamic character of Tarot readings within which communication and the perception perform the function of "an individualized autopoietic process" (Aphek and Tobin 1989, 3). Still, as one of many branches of fortune-telling in general, a case of Tarot readings was considered just "a specific instance of persuasive dyadic human communication" (Aphek and Tobin 1989, 175), in which both participants were considered as being assigned "well-defined roles" (1989, 33). In the comprehensive study by Heeren and Mason (1984), the authors, adopting a socio-linguistic method, presented both the ethnography of communication used by contemporary spiritual readers as well as a therapeutic discourse as guiding their analysis, which focused on the precise form of readers' statements. They distinguished between the style of everyday life, interview style and visionary style. The latter was characterised as "the most unusual and distinctive" (Heeren and Mason 1984, 197) even as the authors acknowledged the ethnomethodological "et cetera principle" (1984, 200) employed by many readers. They described this principle as analogous to one that functions in:

everyday conversation when participants are expected to "fill in" meanings when others make ambiguous statements. [It] means that one supplies contextual information to make sense of the indexical expressions of others. So it is in spiritual readings. Readers are not expected to spell out precise details of the persons and situations in their clients' life. Instead clients must play an active part by trying to access the applicability of visionary statements to their life. (Heeren and Mason 1984, 200)

What has been overlooked in the aforementioned studies, however, is an almost complete absence of any informational content in their examples of readings.

Informational content is a necessary component for a sign to function as a sign; that is, to stand for or to mean something other than itself. Rather than being a simple dyad, a genuine sign – according to American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who is considered the founder of semiotics (cf. Deely 2001) – always has a triadic structure (Figure 1), in which it is an *interpretant* – as the included third between a sign and its object – that creates a meaning for the sign, that is, fills it with a specific informational content.

If there is a lack of *in*-formation, then no *trans*-formation is possible, so the reading remains just a reading without any implication of a therapeutic, or habit, change for the subject seeking the counsel of Tarot, as well as without creating a meaning for – or making sense of – the subject's often disturbing and traumatic experiences. In my empirical research conducted between 1992 and 1994 under the auspices of the Californian Board of Behavioral Science Examiners, I have collected and analysed data in the context of relationships and family counselling using the model of clinical case studies for 15 subjects (Semetsky 2005). The interpretations of cards' meanings in 15 reading sessions when one and the same card, however situated in different contexts, acquired different connotations, served to illustrate the concept of polysemy peculiar to Tarot. A quantitative assessment within this study based on the subjects' verbal protocols as the immediate feedbacks on their reading sessions has been performed. This feedback satisfied the criterion of a specific research methodology when people may be considered to be the somewhat imperfect measuring devices of their own mental processes and use their own self-reflection and their reports as data (cf. Ericsson and Simon 1984).

### The semiotics of Tarot images

Communication, as pertaining to semiotics, is not reduced to a verbal mode of expression as in the science of linguistics, but covers extralinguistic modes, such as pictures and images. Pictures (Sonesson 1989), as well as stories consisting of pictures (Posner 1989), belong to the category of signs. Not only do “pictures have a continuous structure . . . [but] it [also] induces the reader to . . . read the picture as if it were a written text” (Posner 1989, 276). Yuri Lotman, a famous semiotician of the Moscow-Tartu school, saw the total of culture as a set of texts described by collective memory (Lotman 1990). Tarot pictures, as symbols and signs, establish a syntactic

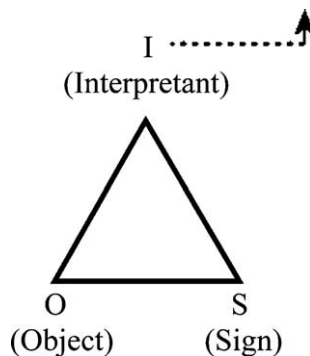


Figure 1. A triadic relation.

structure of a layout in the form of a pictorial extralinguistic text. They are purposeful and meaningful semantically and are polysemous; that is, capable of changing their meanings dynamically depending on the context they are situated in. Functioning as an unorthodox symbolic text communicating messages in a pictorial mode, the Tarot spread can be read and interpreted: it is “the constitution of messages [that] forms the subject matter of semiotics” (Sebeok 1991, 22), indeed.

A regular Tarot deck consists of 78 pictures, among which there are 22 so-called Major Arcana and 56 Minor. 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: its implicit meaning. Jacques Lacan was correct when he said that the unconscious is structured as a language. This language is subtle and non-verbal. Exceeding its solely linguistic representation, it expresses itself in the form of images, or Peirce’s *icons*. The images on the 22 Major Arcana cards (Figure 2) symbolically represent the Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious (see the next section) that are endowed with structure, hence with meanings, even if implicit and as yet outside our conscious awareness. The pictorial images of the major cards are accompanied by their names, thus combining “two different codes in a complementary fashion, as in Baroque emblems” (Posner 1989, 276). The remaining 56 minor cards represent multiple patterns of human experiences and habitual behaviours accompanied by the spectrum of feelings, emotions, desires, beliefs, and other psychodynamic processes and related affective and mental states.



Figure 2. Major Arcana.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all illustrations are from the Rider-Waite Tarot Deck, also known as the Rider Tarot and the Waite Tarot. Reproduced by permission of US Games Systems Inc., Stamford, CT, USA. © 1971 US Games Systems, Inc. Further reproduction prohibited.

Nearly every one of the cards has an image of a living being, a human figure situated in different contexts. This figure is not just a physical body but a symbolic representation for the mind, soul and spirit as well. And while a body goes through life and accomplishes different tasks, the psyche goes through the stages of transformation, as life itself calls for the constant renewal and enlargement of our consciousness and creating meanings for our experiences.

The 22 cards of the Major Arcana as per Figure 2 encode information that affects human behaviour (both individual and social) when this or that archetype is being activated, such as The Fool that embodies the archetype of the Eternal Child; The Hierophant – Persona; Sun – The Divine Child; Judgment – the Rebirth; and so forth. The meanings of the cards are codified; however, codification is never a fixed given but a dynamic, evolving process that includes a pragmatic dimension: it is precisely our “usage [that] renders the sign more precise and extends its convention” (Guiraud 1975, 25). The reading (interpretation) of images makes the implicit meanings explicit, as if creating them anew. The function of the semiotic *interpretant* is performed by the Tarot symbolic language, which – like any language in general – is represented by a structured semiotic system whose role is to pair expressions (functioning as public aspects, e.g. physical marks as actual pictures) and messages (private aspects: thoughts and concepts); that is, to have a means for mapping between them (cf. Jackendoff 2001). A sign “points beyond itself to a meaning that is ... still beyond our grasp, and cannot be adequately expressed in the familiar words of our language” (Jung in Noth 1995, 119) but needs a symbolic medium for its very expression. The symbolic language of images delivers “the truths of gnosis ... transformed into poetic and mythic language” (Martin 2006, 37) and a reader functions as a “bilingual” interpreter translating the semiotic expressions of pictures into their verbal counterparts. The archetypes are symbols of transformation capable of raising unconscious contents to the level of consciousness: when articulated, the implicit meanings become explicit by virtue of “becoming conscious and by being perceived” (Jung in Pauli 1994, 159).

Human experiences cross over the boundaries of an individual consciousness and expand to the level of culture. As a result of the interplay between nature and culture, codification (a presupposed rule, law, etc.) is evolving and subject to dual modes, analogue and digital (cf. “memosphere” in Dennett 1997, 66; see also note 3 below). The journey through the cards’ imagery is therapeutic as each new life experience contributes to self-understanding, self-knowledge and spiritual rebirth that culminates in the archetype of the individuated Self represented by the last card in the sequence, “The World”. The language of symbols serves as the true means of communication between the conscious mind and the unconscious: “symbols act as transformers, their function being to convert libido from a ‘lower’ into a ‘higher’ form” (Jung 1953–1979, 5: para. 344). For Peirce, it is his category of Thirdness (as interpretation) that, by means of performing a mediative, symbolic, function, creates or “brings information ... [it] determines the idea and gives it body” (Peirce 1931–1935, 1: 537). It is the Tarot symbolism – the universal language of signs (see Semetsky 2006a) – that establishes an unorthodox communicative link functioning as a semiotic *interpretant* (see Figure 1); hence, as the included Third of Peirce’s genuine triadic (versus dyadic) sign capable of creating a semiotic bridge to the Jungian collective unconscious.

### Jung's collective unconscious

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 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 [are] structural elements of the psyche [and] 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 1953–1979, 5: para. 232)

The nature of the relationship between the collective unconscious and 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).

The purpose of analysis is to enable the process of individuation by virtue of integrating the unconscious aspects of the mind into consciousness. 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 1953–1979, 6: para. 720); that is, to perform a prospective, *prognostic* function in addition to the symptomatic, or *diagnostic*, one. Agreeing with the ancient esoteric philosophies, Jung did not draw a line of great divide between the products of imagination and those of the intellect: all thinking aims to the creation of meanings. For Jung, the profound relationship between the soul of the world, *Anima Mundi*, and an individual human consciousness remained a great mystery. Jung did not distinguish between the *psyche* and the material world: they represent two different aspects of the *unus mundus* or one world. Archetype *per se* is seen by Jung as a skeletal pattern, filled in with imagery and motifs that are “mediated to us by the unconscious” (1953–1979, 8: para. 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 1953–1979, 11: para. 745). The archetypal images are “endowed with a generative power; ... [the image] is psychically compelling” (Samuels, Shorter, and 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*” (1953–1979, 8i: para. 82).

The meanings of the symbols embedded in Tarot pictures are not arbitrary but accord with the *grammar* of the universal language of signs 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. (1953–1979, 9: paras. 236–237)

An expert Tarot reader interprets this subtle colloquy embedded in the images that form a pattern in this or that layout as a material embodiment of the archetypes by means of which this implicit colloquy expresses itself. The semiotic link to the collective unconscious that is created during readings is of paramount importance: “in Jung’s language, psychotherapy achieves its ultimate goal in the wholeness of the conjunction” (Hillman 1972, 293), equivalent to the connection as established between a sign and its object (i.e. between a picture and a corresponding archetypal pattern of behaviours, feelings, emotions, and thoughts) by means of the included third of the *interpretant* (see Figure 1). The reader as an interpreter converts the pictorial language of the unconscious into verbal expressions, thus facilitating the *trans*-formation of *in*-formation into consciousness.

The signs may vary, but the means of symbolic communication remains the same: what takes place is an indirect, *mediated*, connection akin to the acting principle of synchronicity posited by Jung in collaboration with the famous physicist and Nobel laureate Wolfgang Pauli.

Synchronicity addresses the problematic of meaningful patterns generated in nature and culture alike along the multiple paths of human experiences. The concept of the unconscious extends its boundary tending to the notion of “‘field’ in physics [thus 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.<sup>1</sup>

Let me at this point employ a computer metaphor<sup>2</sup> 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)

While we may not know if we ever find anything upon “opening” a human mind and looking inside because mind is an intangible “thing”, we still may find something if we consider the importance of projection in Jungian analysis and the intangible mind as projected through the tangible material properties of the cards with their picturesque images that embody powerful symbolic meanings (Semetsky 2006b). 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 potential meanings, pictures can be used to make inferences so as to make their meanings explicit by creating an *imaginative narrative*<sup>3</sup> for the archetypal

journey of individuation symbolised by the images on the cards. 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”, major card number XVI, and so on (see Figure 2).

When symbolically represented in Tarot images, the transcendental realm of the psyche is being brought, so to speak, down to earth by virtue of its *embodiment* in physical reality, confirming Jung’s insight that “psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing” (Jung 1953–1979, 8: para. 418). They are united during readings, 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 social *praxis* as encompassing human behaviours, decision-making or choosing a particular course of action and/or policy 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 cited in Neumann 1969, 13)<sup>4</sup>

Yet, in practice (as complementary to theory), each and every Tarot reading (Semetsky 2005) becomes a step toward our conscious realisation of the deepest meaning (*corpus subtile*) of a particular situation or event; subsequently, the enlargement of consciousness becomes itself a step towards individuation. 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 “achievement of a greater personality” (Jung 1953–1979, 7: para. 136).

### **Integrating the Shadow**

Often, the action of the archetypes is such that they can possess the psyche in the 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 card number XV, “The Devil”, the fallen angel – the dark precursor in the natural progression, or evolution, toward two subsequent cards called “The Tower” and “The Star” (Figure 3).

In the guise of the Shadow, the Devil can easily possess one’s psyche and, importantly, the Shadow can often become projected onto others, and one may very well attribute to significant others those qualities that one is tempted to deny in oneself. The 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 appear to have lost the ability of clear judgement and seem helpless. The Devil’s heavy chains represent our self-destructive tendencies and weaknesses; bondage and fear. In interpersonal relationships, the Devil can reflect upon co-dependency issues. It may be a deeply ingrained fear of breaking free, similar to battered women unable



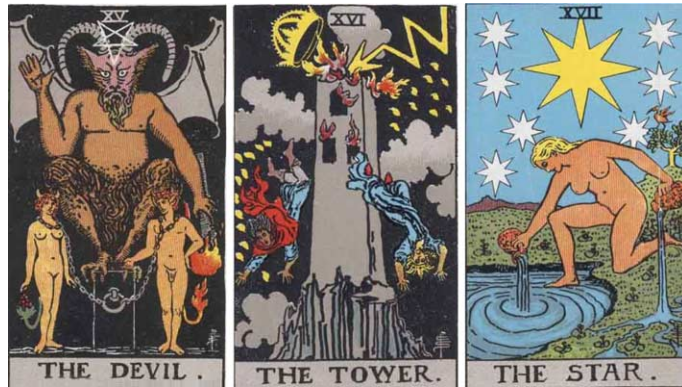


Figure 3. The Devil (Arcanum XV), The Tower (Arcanum XVI) and The Star (Arcanum XVII).

to leave and continuing to stay in abusive relationships, 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?

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 these shadowy figures appear to stand outside culture, but importantly culture itself fails to assimilate its own Shadow. The Devil card is a symbol of the ultimate slave morality, in the 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 cited in Neumann 1969, 12; emphasis in original, see note 5). The neglect of this responsibility tends to precipitate multiple evil consequences in the world. While old ethics is the ethics of illusionary perfection and absolute Good that necessarily leads to the appearance of its polar opposite, absolute Evil, the new ethics consists of recognising 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 judgement 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 recognised, made visible, and integrated into consciousness; otherwise, it will fall into the depth of the unconscious where it will continue to crystallise. The absence of freedom, lack of hope, and total powerlessness will reach their critical mass and will start acting from within the psyche, spreading spontaneously until reaching a destructive climax. Non-incidentally, the card that follows “The Devil” in the deck, “The Tower” (Figure 4; cf. Figure 2), represents this upcoming climax.

In the Tarot feminist interpretation (Gearhart and 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).

Regarding 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 11 September (Figure 5).

Jean Baudrillard (2002), in his analysis of the spirit of terrorism, talks about the shift of the struggle into the symbolic sphere where an initial event – “as quite a good illustration of chaos theory” (2002, 23) – becomes subjected to unforeseeable consequences. Such a singular event – like the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11 – propagates unpredictably, causing the chain of effects “not just in the direct economic, political, financial slump in the whole of the system – and the resulting moral and psychological downturn – but the slump in the value-system” *per se* (Baudrillard 2002, 31–32). The collapse of the towers represents the fact that “the



Figure 4. The Tower (Arcanum XVI).



Figure 5. The Twin Towers on September 11.

Note: Photo courtesy of FEMA.

whole system has reached a critical mass which makes it vulnerable to any aggression” (Baudrillard 2002, 33). No longer projected inward, the released darkness becomes directed into the outer space. Baudrillard points out that not only terrorism itself is blind but so were the actual towers – “no longer opening to the outside world, but subject to artificial conditioning” (2002, 43): air conditioning, or mental conditioning alike – similar to the Tower in the Tarot picture that was sealed at the top when suddenly struck by lightning.

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 that he, at a symbolic level, identified with the Tower of Babel; that is, a symbol of false omnipotence and mistaken certainty, *a priori* condemned to destruction during the most powerful and confusing instance of contradiction and mutual misunderstanding: the confusion of tongues, indeed. The picture in Figure 6, from the deck called The Lovers’ Tarot, incorporates elements of the famous masterpiece by Peter Brueghel the Elder.

During Tarot readings 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 a very deep level to break through into the surface of consciousness. Significantly, 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 of any other belief system. Thunder and lightning, as per the image of “The Tower” in Figures 4 and 6, are 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 lifeless skeleton – is seen in another poignant and maximally real image of 9/11 also published on the Internet (Figure 7).



Figure 6. The Tower (Arcanum XVI).

Note: Image from the deck called The Lovers' Tarot, by Jane Lyle. Illustration © Oliver Burston 1982. Published by Connections (January 2000) in the United Kingdom, by St Martin's Press in the United States.

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



Figure 7. The destroyed towers after September 11.

Note: US Navy photo by Journalist 1st Class Preston Keres.

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 have taught us anything, it is that in the twentieth 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 water such as tsunamis; or from the air such as the attack on 11 September; or from the fire when drought causes famine – in all cases, the results are disastrous. Still, human lives can be saved because it is all four elements of nature – air, water, earth and fire, corresponding to the four suits in a deck (swords, cups, pentacles, and wands) – that are trying to communicate with us in the form of images representing real significant events that encode symbolic messages about the behavioural and cultural patterns that 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* (Semetsky 2008b). 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; emphasis added). The least we can do is to have *hope* for a 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 the Jungian synthetic method (*contra* reductive Freudian psychoanalysis) that implies the emergence of new meanings as carrying the utmost significance. The 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 1953–1979, 8: para. 411).

Significantly, the polyvalence of the image that follows the Tower in a deck, called “The Star”, connotes the field of meanings that include hope, healing, inspiration, creativity, and the realisation 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 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” (Figure 8) convenes our oneness with nature – the



Figure 8. The Star (Arcanum XVII).

wholeness of the symbolic conjunction – symbolised 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 of the darkness by bringing it to the level of conscious awareness. The eight stars with eight spikes carry a message of spirituality especially significant today. 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”: the hope for new understanding! In the current global climate permeated by diverse beliefs, disparate values and cultural conflicts, when different ideologies compete with each other, leading to destruction on the scale of “The Tower”, the universal value of Hope is paramount. We can bring about a 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 Tarot symbolism.

### **Conclusion: 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” (1953–1979, 6: para. 717). 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 co-exist. 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 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 in the present. Their shadows are being cast deep in the implicate order. (Quoted in Hederman 2003, 43–44)

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 organisation of the collective unconscious. The art of memory can be schematised as per the so-called “triangle argument” (Figure 9) of Einstein’s block-universe, which concedes that some events in the past and future co-exist.

In agreement with the triangle argument, the subject of the reading in the present moment appears to co-exist with itself *later*: “me-now” is simultaneous with “me-tomorrow”, hence creating a non-linear and tenseless (atemporal) “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.<sup>5</sup> The synthesis of time inscribed in the collective unconscious as the universal memory pool accords with Peirce’s process of *semiosis*; that is, the action of signs within a shared layer of human experiences that includes all three dimensions of past, present and future:

A man denotes whatever is the object of his attention at the moment; he connotes whatever he knows or feels of this object, and is the incarnation of this form ... his interpretant is the future memory of this cognition, his future self ... (Peirce 1931–1935, 7: 591).

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 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 2009) that will have enabled humankind to make decisions and choose ethical actions in unity and harmony with the Jungian *unus mundus* (one world). The present twenty-first century is itself

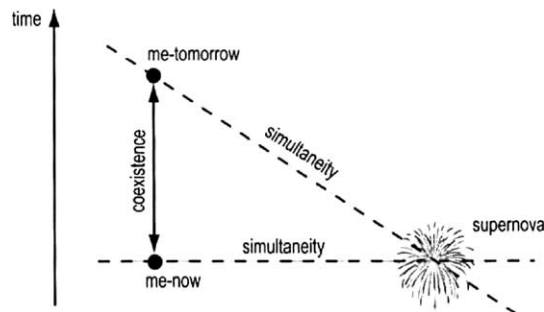


Figure 9. The triangle argument (from Kennedy 2003, 63, Figure 5.3).

symbolic of this forthcoming transformation towards new understanding: the last card in the deck is numbered XXI and is called “The World” (see Figure 2) – as the archetypal image of us, fully individuated Selves, capable of living in harmony with Others and taking ethical responsibility for the social and natural World we inhabit.

## Notes

1. See Meier (2001) with a preface by Beverley Zabriskie; this particular letter is designated in the book as 56P, pp. 81–83. See also Semetsky (2006a).
2. 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 analogue (and not digital) information and defined as “bits” within a certain context only; that is, holistically as parts of the greater *whole*.
3. Imaginative narrative is one example of research methodologies employed by the cutting-edge scientific discipline called Futures Studies.
4. From Foreword by C.G. Jung to Neumann (1969). Jung’s Foreword is © 1968 Bollingen Foundation, New York.
5. In *Atom and archetypes: The Pauli-Jung letters 1932–1958* (see note 2) there is an earlier unpublished essay by Pauli, written in 1948 and called “Modern examples of ‘background physics’” (Meier 2001, 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 “whether the ‘series’ is thought of in temporal terms or as a simultaneous juxtaposition” (Meier 2001, 187) and referred to the idea of the transmigration of souls when the timeless reality of the archetypes is being repeatedly interrupted by a temporal sequence of physical/biological lives and real human experiences.

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