

4-1-2005

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Semetsky, Inna (2005) "The Phenomenolgy of Tarot, or: The Further Adventures of a Postmodern Fool," *Trickster's Way*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.

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The Phenomenology of Tarot, or: The Further Adventures of a Postmodern Fool

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Acknowledgements: The early draft of this paper has been orally presented at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP) Annual Conference 2004 "Critique Today", sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Division of SCMP, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 8-10 December, 2004, session 17 "Phenomenology, Semiotics, Ethics". Thanks are due to Melissa McMahon for her insightful comments and suggestions at the session.

Introduction

This paper is a sequel to my earlier Roberta Kevelson Memorial Award-winning essay entitled "The adventures of a postmodern Fool, or the semiotics of learning" (in C. W. Spinks (ed.). *Trickster and Ambivalence: The Dance of Differentiation*, Atwood Publishing, MA, 2001, pp. 57-70) which analysed the phenomenon of Tarot readings in terms of Deleuze's method of transcendental empiricism and traced the Fool's adventures as an experiential learning process. The present paper will not only address the implications of this philosophical method, that Deleuze has called both wild and powerful, but will also track continental thinking back to its phenomenological origins and Husserl's concepts of *noemata* and *noesis*. I will suggest that a singular reading creates a semiotic bridge that connects these two seemingly disparate "realms". The tentative conclusion of the paper is that the interpretation of Tarot images provides a practical means for determining the meaning and content of mental representations thus addressing (albeit not solving) one of the problems of primary significance (namely: the theory of content determination; see, e.g., Von Eckardt, 1996) in contemporary cognitive science.

Deleuze and Guattari's transcendental empiricism and a-signifying semiotics

Deleuze considered himself an empiricist, yet not in the reductive, *tabula rasa*-like, passive sense. Experience is that *milieu* which provides capacity to affect and be affected; it is a-subjective and impersonal. Experience is not an individual property; rather subjects are constituted in relations within experience itself, by means of individuation via haecceity. The exteriority of relations presents "a vital protest against principles" (Deleuze 1987: 55). The phenomenology is such that experience is rendered meaningful by virtue of the art of experimentation rather than just by means of grounding empirical particulars in abstract Universals. Something in the experiential "world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but a fundamental 'encounter'... It may be grasped in a range of affective tones" (Deleuze 1994: 139).

Novel concepts are to be invented or created in order to make sense out of singular experiences and, ultimately, to affirm this sense.

Experience is qualitative, multidimensional, and inclusive; it includes “a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness” (Deleuze 1995: 141): yet, an experiential event is subjectless. We are made up of relations, says Deleuze (2000), and experience makes sense to us only if we understand the relations in practice between conflicting schemes of the said experience. The difference embedded in real experience makes thought encounter a shock or crisis, which is embedded in the objective structure of an event *per se*, thereby transcending the faculties of perception beyond “given” data of sense-impressions. Difference is an ontological category, “the noumenon closest to phenomenon” (Deleuze 1994: 222), which however is never beyond experience because every phenomenon is in fact conditioned by difference. Transcendental empiricism is what Deleuze called his philosophical method: thinking is not a natural exercise but always a second power of thought, born under constraints of experience as a material power, a force. The intensity of difference is a function of desire, the latter embedded in experience because its object is “the entire surrounding which it traverses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 30).

If relations are irreducible to their terms, then the whole dualistic split between thought and world, the inside and the outside, becomes invalid, and relational logic is the logic of experimentation not “subordinate to the verb to be” (Deleuze 1987: 57). This logic is inspired by empiricism because “only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimension of the visible” (Deleuze 1990: 20) without a sole recourse to ideas, moral universals, or value judgments. The experiential world is folded, the fold being “the inside of the outside” (Deleuze 1988a: 96), where the outside is virtual yet real by virtue of its pragmatics. It unfolds in an unpredictable manner, and it is impossible to know ahead of time what the body (both physical and mental) can do. Because the body, acting within experience, is defined by its affective capacity, it is equally impossible to know “the affects one is capable of” (Deleuze 1988b: 125): life becomes an experimental and experiential affair that requires, for Deleuze, practical wisdom in a Spinozian sense by means of immanent evaluations of experience, or modes of existence. As affective, experience is as yet a-conceptual, and Deleuze emphasizes the passionate quality of such an experience: “perhaps passion, the state of passion, is actually what folding the line outside, making it endurable, ... is about” (Deleuze 1995: 116).

The Deleuzian object of experience, being as yet un-thought, is presented only in its tendency to exist, or rather to subsist, in a virtual, sub-representative state. It actualises itself through multiple different/ciations. Deleuze’s method, compatible with Bergson’s intuition, enables the reading of signs, symbols, and symptoms that lay down the dynamical structure of experience. Experience cannot be reduced to what is immediately perceived: the line of flight or becoming is real even if “we don’t see it, because it’s the least perceptible of things” (Deleuze 1995: 45). Thinking, enriched with desire, is experimental and experiential: experience therefore is future-oriented, lengthened and enfolded, representing an experiment with what is new, or coming into being. Experience constitutes a complex place, and our experimentation on ourselves is, for Deleuze, the only reality. By virtue of experimentation philosophy-becoming, like the witch’s flight, escapes the old frame of reference within which this flight seems like a sort of immaterial vanishing through some imaginary event-horizon, and creates its own terms of actualisation thereby

leading to the “intensification of life” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 74) by means of re-valuation of experience.

Semiotics, in general, is the study of signs and their signification. As noticed by Genosko (1998), Deleuze and Guattari’s semiotics present a conceptual mix of Peirce’s logic of relatives and Hjelmslev’s linguistics; both frameworks are taken to oppose Saussurean semiology. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that content is not a signified, neither expression is a signifier: instead both are variables in common assemblage. An a-signifying rupture ensures transfer from the form of expression to the form of content. Dyadic, or binary, signification gives way to the triadic, a-signifying semiotics, and Deleuze and Guattari employ Peircean notion of a diagram as a constructive part of sign-dynamics. A diagram is a bridge, a diagonal connection that, by means of double articulations, connects planes of expression and content leading to the emergence of new forms. Fixed and rigid signifieds give way to the production of new meanings in accord with the logic of sense (Deleuze 1990). Concepts that exist in a triadic relationship with percepts and affects express events rather than essences and should be understood not in a traditional representational manner of analytic philosophy, which would submit a line to a point, but as a pluralistic, a-signifying, distribution of lines and planes.

Ontologically, *Being as Fold* (Deleuze 1993) defies signification. The transformational pragmatics consists in destratification, or opening up to a new, diagrammatic and creative, function. According to the logic of multiplicities, a diagram serves as a mediatory in-between symbol, “a third” (Deleuze 1987: 131) that disturbs the fatal binarity of the signifier-signified distinction. It forms part of cartographic approach, which is Deleuze and Guattari’s semiotics par excellence that replaces logical copula with the radical conjunction “and”. For Deleuze, the theory of signs is meaningless without the relation between signs and the corresponding apprenticeship in practice. Reading Proust from the perspective of triadic semiotics, Deleuze notices the dynamic character of signs, that is, their having an “increasingly intimate” (Deleuze 2000: 88) relation with their enfolded and involutioned meanings so that truth becomes contingent and subordinate to interpretation. Meanings are not given but depends on signs entering “into the surface organization which ensures the resonance of two series” (Deleuze 1990: 104), the latter converging on a paradoxical differentiator, which becomes “both word and object at once” (Deleuze 1990: 51).

Yet, semiotics cannot be reduced to just linguistic signs. There are extra-linguistic semiotic categories too, such as memories, images, or immaterial artistic signs, which are apprehended in terms of neither objective nor subjective criteria but learned in practice in terms of immanent problematic instances and their practical effects. Analogously, a formal abstract machine exceeds its application to (Chomskian) philosophy of language; instead semiotics is applied to psychological, biological, social, technological, aesthetic, and incorporeal codings (Guattari 1995). Semiotically, discursive and non-discursive formations are connected by virtue of transversal communication, transversality being a concept that encompasses psychic, social, and even ontological dimensions. As a semiotic category, transversality exceeds verbal communication and applies to diverse regimes of signs; by the same token, Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis and cartographies of the unconscious presuppose a different semiotic theory than the one appropriated in Lacanian psychoanalysis. The semiotic, based on the logic of included middle, process is the basis for the production of subjectivity. The line of flight or

becoming is a third between subject and object and it inserts itself “not so much... in their opposition as in their complementarity” (Deleuze 1987: 131). The relationship between subject and object is of the nature of reciprocal presupposition. Subject, which is always in process as becoming-other, offers to itself – due to transversal, indirect, communication – the object of its own signs, the object of itself.

Massumi (1992) points out that Deleuze reinvents a concept of semiotics in his different books: In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze refers to four differently organized semiotic worlds. In *Cinema-I*, he presents sixteen different types of cinematic signs. For Deleuze, philosophers, writers and artists are first and foremost semioticians and symptomatologists: they read, interpret and create signs, which are “the symptoms of life... There is a profound link between signs, events, life and vitalism” (Deleuze 1995: 143). The task of philosophy is the creation of concepts, and a concept, in accord with *a-signifying* semiotics, has no reference; it is auto-referential positing itself together with its object at the moment of its own creation. A map, or a diagram, engenders the territory to which it is supposed to refer: a static representation of the order of references giving way to a relational dynamics of the order of meanings.

Tarot as a semiotic system

Semiotics describes “cartomancy (including taromancy)...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, vol.1: 99-100). Semiotics considers pictures, as well as stories consisting of pictures, as belonging 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). Cartography, in semiotic terms, is described as a mode of graphic communication capable of transmitting information by means of a visual channel. The graphic information may be expressed in a form of a diagram, network and a map, or in a mixed format of a cartogram, that is, a diagram superimposed on a map. Tarot images, as symbols and signs, establish the syntactic structure of a layout in the form of a pictorial “text”. They are purposeful and meaningful semantically and are polysemous, that is, they are capable of changing their meanings dynamically depending on the context they are situated in. The corollary is that, being a text communicating messages the Tarot spread can be read and interpreted thus having a potential transformational effect on the subject of a reading functioning as a counselling session (Semetsky 2000).

The so-called Celtic Cross spread (Fig.1), serving as an example of a typical reading, comprises ten positions, signification of which may be considered to carry specific connotations. Their meanings are only partially arbitrary and signification is only relatively codified: “Codification ... is a process: usage renders the sign more precise and extends its convention. ...[D]epending on each particular case, signs are *more or less* motivated” (Guiraud 1975 [1971]: 25). Signs, whose truth-conditions are impossible to articulate in precise terms, are *a-signifying*. For all intent and purpose, however, a semiotic code serves as “the correlation or correspondence between sign repertoires or signs and their meanings” (Noth 1995: 205); respectively we may consider each position

representing the following phenomenology as “encoded” in the variety of experiential structures (Fig.1):

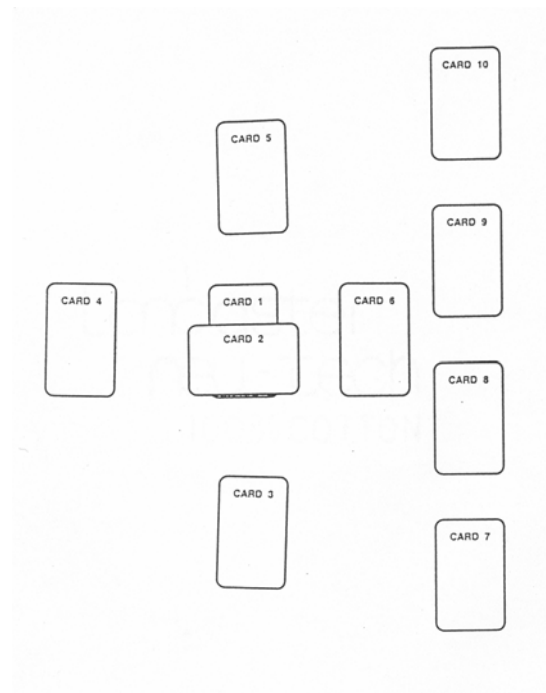


Fig.1 The Celtic Cross Spread

Position 1. The subject’s presenting problem, or an area of a particular concern to the subject of the reading.

Position 2. The influence, such as impulses, feelings, traits, or behavioural patterns (not necessarily the subject’s own), or some other *sign* that may strengthen or weaken the problem the subject is concerned with, as per position 1. Quite often, this position signifies some, as yet unperceived, obstacles.

Position 3. Some past unconscious factors that contributed to the present situation. The “roots” of the matter in question which are deeply embedded in the unconscious and may appear, quite often, in the subject’s dreams.

Position 4. A significant moment in the subject’s history that still affects the situation and whose implications are so strong that they might show up in the subject’s future dynamics. Even if the subject did not pay particular attention to it and almost “forgot” it, such a memory, if significant, comes out in a reading.

Position 5. A potential, or coming into being, future. Perhaps some motivations, even if outside of the subject’s conscious intent, have contributed to this development, which thereby shows its presence, even if only as a trace of “the memory of the future”.

Position 6. The further development of the situation as it unfolds in the immediate future.

Position 7. The subject's current state of mind comprising thoughts, accompanied by affects, shows up in this position. The subject's own perceptions may be quite overwhelming to him/her, or even obsessional.

Position 8. The subject's immediate environment, that is, home, or support system, family, friends, partners, relatives, business associates, in short people representing significant others for the subject in relation to his/her presenting problem.

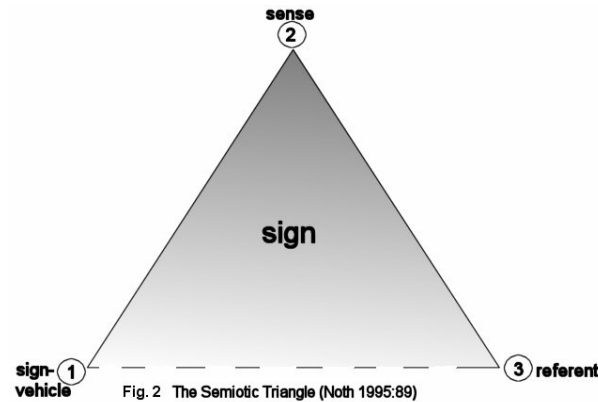
Position 9. The subject's hopes and wishes, aspirations and ideals, are shown here. They are often accompanied by fears or anxiety.

Position 10. A possible outcome of the current dynamics as it envelops all contributing and hindering factors represented by cards that will have occupied each position.

We can see that some positions in the spread appear to correspond, when narrated, to what in contemporary philosophy of mind are called the propositional attitudes and which indeed encompass such common semantic categories as beliefs, fears, desires, and hopes. The fifty-six minor cards in a deck comprise four suits numbered from Ace to 10 and including the four so-called court cards in each suit. The numerical growth from Ace to 10 represents progressive mastery of a problematic situation, even when encountering a temporary defeat, as a lesson to be learned, that may be connoted by some numbered cards. The dynamics never stops: pictures tell us multiple stories about feeling happy or feeling sad; making plans or breaking promises; winning or losing; experiencing financial difficulties or laying foundations for a marriage; falling in love or getting out of an abusive relationship; starting a new venture or experiencing separation anxiety; the list is endless....

Pictures that are "framed" by each of the aforementioned positions are subject to interpretation not only in terms of the relational ontology, but relational epistemology as well. They are interpreted differently depending on where exactly they are located in the layout, that is, in the context of which particular position this or that card is being "read". According to Deleuze, anything can possess a structure insofar as this "thing" maintains even a silent discourse, such as the language of signs. As "the presentation of the unconscious" (Deleuze 1994: 192), it is the transversal connection that leads to laying out the plane of immanence aiming "to bring into being that which does not yet exist" (Deleuze 1994: 147) thereby engendering "the representation of consciousness" (Deleuze 1994: 192). The layout of the plane of immanence is of the order of dreams and esoteric experiences; the plane must be laid out, indeed shown rather than thought: such is the "supreme act of philosophy" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 59).

Noth presents a synopsis of a triadic sign tracing its definitions and different terminology from Plato, to Stoics, to Peirce, to Frege, to Ogden and Richards (Noth 1995: 90-91), and notices that in order to construct a semiotic triangle connecting, in general terms, sign-vehicle, sense, and referent, the path of mediation, represented by a dotted line between a sign-vehicle and a referent, must be present (Fig.2):



A reading, as a means of transversal communication, is an example of an indirect discourse: it fills up a dotted line, when a card falls out after a card, until they form a layout in a semiotic process of displaying meaningful structures of experience via iconic signs: “sense is the mediator of the referent” (Noth 1995: 89). The triadic quality enabled by mediation makes the Tarot system a genuine sign, that is, a Peircean correlate of the representamen-interpretant-object triad, or an exemplar of the Deleuze-Guattarian triadic relation between the semiotic machine, the object or referent, and the expressive subject.

The Fool’s adventures in The World

A pictorial phrase, another one, yet another, unfold into a narrative, a story of the Fool’s journey. Each card refers to a contentful state. “The Fool” is the first card, numbered zero, and is portrayed by a youth that signifies innocence, an open mind, and the possibility of multiple life-choices (Semetsky 2001). That’s where the journey starts. This is an experiential journey – as Deleuze was saying, experimentation is our only reality – and it comprises symbolic lessons to be learned during the process of individuation or subject-formation. As a multiplicity, or an assemblage of signs as relational entities, individuation is always already becoming-other. The layout functions in a mode of the construction of the Deleuzian plane of immanence. The plane of immanence “does not immediately take effects with concepts...and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable... or reasonable” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 41): similar to a Tarot spread, it is pre-rational and a-conceptual and it ultimately enables “the conquest of the unconscious” (Deleuze 1988: 29) when itself being constructed during the process of individuation based on the dynamics of becoming.

Destratification as a praxis of thought involves perpetual dislocations, that is, folding and unfolding, so as to construct a diagram, or a map, of the original, outside, territory: in other words, to integrate the unconscious into consciousness. Deleuze presents semiotic structures as unconscious and necessarily overlaid by their products or effects. The subtle language of the unconscious, in the process of individuation, is to be perceived: the imperceptible can be shown, or made sensible, by means of transversal communication so as to bring the “assemblage of the unconscious to the light of the day, to select the whispering voices, to gather ...secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (Moi)” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 84). The realm of the virtual is reminiscent of, as Deleuze put it, the shadow around the words, and it can be actualised,

or brought into consciousness as a thought-form, that is, reterritorialized during the process of individuation. Deleuze and Guattari's cartographic method becomes a means for mapping the structural multiplicities of behaviors, feelings, and thoughts.

Deleuze used the term "parallelism" with regard to the mind-body problem, asserting that there must be a threshold that brings thought to the body. The same parallel relation exists between the virtual and the actual – both real – that would have required a metaphorical threshold, or transversal link, for their connection. Transcendental empiricism as founded on the repeated differentiations affirms "the double in the doubling process" (Deleuze 1988a: 98). "Doubling" here is taken in a sense of unfolding that presupposes a necessary existence of an extra dimension, without which the concept of fold wouldn't make sense. This "outside" dimension becomes internalised, enfolded in the mind: hence doubling as "the internalisation of the outside...[becomes] redoubling of the other...[and] it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me" (Deleuze 1988a: 98). Expanding on Deleuzian conceptualisations, it is also possible to actually see this internalisation, which came about by redoubling, not in our mind as an abstract concept, but with our eyes as a concrete picture. Just so as to become able to see it, we have to re-redouble it, that is, to differentiate it once again; in a way, transcend, albeit in a "primitive" mode of laying down the cards.

The term "transcend" acquires a meaning of, in fact, bringing down to earth, or grounding the concept by means of embodying it or giving it a contentful form so as to project that what has become interior as a result of internalisation, or, using the Deleuzian term, deterritorialization. This is done by literally out-placing "the other in me" on the metaphorical transversal link between parallel planes or levels. Transversal link creates a triadic quality in the relationship between the two and makes Tarot a sign par excellence. As an abstract machine, it is transversal to both inside and outside, it is the fold, or the inside of the outside, and it "is installing [itself] transversally to the machinic levels [such as] material, cognitive, affective and social. ...It is this abstract machine that will or will not give these levels an existence" (Guattari 1995: 35). The layout embodies the creation of its own terms of actualisation, hence becoming "a bridge, a transversality" (Guattari 1996: 23), by means of creating a form of content via its own expression. The embodiment of the transcendental field allows it to merge with its own "object" which, despite always being immanent in perception, would remain disembodied and, as such, beyond recognition in the absence of the reading!

Says Deleuze, "I undo the folds ...that pass through everyone of my thresholds...'the twenty-two folds' that surround me and separate me from the deep" (1993: 93). These twenty-two folds correspond to the number of Major cards in a Tarot deck. On the first Tarot picture the Fool is portrayed as standing at the edge of the abyss, which symbolises the experiential world, a journey ahead. The undoing of folds leads to the Fool becoming "The Magician", trump number 1, a symbol of practical wisdom and successful accomplishment of goals (Semetsky 2003). Signs are evolving: they grow and become other signs. Each subsequent card in a deck represents an evolution in human consciousness as a function of experience in a phenomenal world. "The High Priestess", represented by the Arcanum number 2, is a symbol of female intuition and spiritual life. She is Sophia, the goddess of wisdom, whose task is to indeed unfold the scroll so as to reveal to the Fool some of the symbols of esoteric and secret knowledge. Striving to get

more experience, the Fool meets “The Empress”, trump number 3, who teaches it a lesson of healing with her abundance of feelings and ability to give and receive love, like only the archetypal Mother can provide.

Next comes “The Emperor” as a symbol of super-ego, representing the omniscient and powerful Name of the Farther. To adjust to societal standards the Fool must learn a lesson of conformity and to follow traditions of those who make rules in the establishment as represented by “The Pope”, a symbol of lawful rules and conservative politics. “The Lovers”, trump number 6, represent temptations and duality, a time for choice; as for “The Chariot”, it teaches our Fool a lesson of controlling one's emotions and being able to differentiate between fantasy and reality. With the newly found inner “Strength” (trump number 8) the Fool is able to acquire interpersonal skills. It can tame now any beast that distracts it from learning what are its strengths, values, skills and limitations. On this Tarot picture the female figure is portrayed as mastering the lion with her bare hands and the lion conveys the image of accepting the “defeat” so as to reconcile the action of both conscious and unconscious influences. The primitive instincts are won over, and with the new awakening of the guiding power of intuition and consciousness the Fool is ready for the lesson of “The Hermit” who teaches it the Socratic “know thyself” principle. Next comes the trump number 10, “The Wheel of Fortune”. After many efforts the Fool has reached a turning point in its journey and a possible change of luck. Perhaps the Fool is getting insight into the law of karma or distributive justice, represented by the Arcanum number 11; it learns that each of the many steps along the road to individuation provides a base for the next one. The Fool is bound by “The Justice” to maintain a balance and to weigh and give a fair and balanced (symbolised by a blind-folded, holding the scales, female figure, who knows justice with her heart) evaluation to the life issues. It might be necessary to face a sacrifice: perhaps something is counterproductive to the journey ahead; such is a lesson of “The Hanged Man”, trump number 12. The Fool feels as if being suspended between the sky and the ground: there is no solid foundation under its feet at this point. This is a testing period accompanied by the feeling of the loss of the direction.

The Fool might need a fresh start, represented by the trump number 13, “the Death”: transition, change and renewal. Restricting viewpoints, stagnated environment, or everything that was playing the role of status quo for the Fool is now in a stage of evolution and transformation even if the dynamics of this process may be quite painful. Do not rush, advises “The Temperance”, trump number 14, who teaches the Fool a lesson of moderation. The Fool may be feeling as if enslaved by a symbolic image of “The Devil”, trump number 15, the fallen angel, the dark archetypal Shadow of oneself. Self-destructive tendencies may pull the Fool back. What is holding our Fool in bondage? How to overcome the fear of becoming-other? The realisation comes forward, sometimes in a form of a shock, and “The Tower”, next trump number 16, breaks everything in the Fool's life that it does not need for a journey ahead. At the level of the psyche, overthrowing of false consciousness takes place, sometimes in a form of a catharsis. A rapid – and painful – rising of consciousness is transmitted by this card's symbolism; it is a lightning that hits the ivory tower one imprisoned oneself in! It might be a moment of a sudden truth shaking the basic security – perhaps it was a false security – but providing enlightenment, a light of awakening, and in this light the Fool is able to see “The Star”,

trump number 17 (Semetsky 2004). This is the star of hope and healing which empowers our Fool with confidence, realisation of talents, and self-esteem.

Next comes the warning of “The Moon”, trump number 18. The Fool may be distracted by the cold light of the moon and unable to distinguish between truth and deception. Real or imaginative – but perceived as real by the psyche – enemies may be present. Nonetheless, after having worked through confusing and overwhelming issues the Fool is welcomed by “The Sun”, trump number 19, as though having been born again into the sunshine after the moonlit night. The next card, “Judgement”, number 20, is a symbol of rebirth when the wise Fool becomes capable of finally hearing the sounds of trumpet from the higher plane of expanded consciousness. The final card, numbered 21, is called “The World”, or the Universe in some decks. It represents the very symbol of becoming: the circular shape on the World picture represents a continuum, that is, the never-ending search for meanings in the changing circumstances of experience. Personal wholeness is an ideal limit approximated by the many actualities in the hecceities of experience, and the Fool continues on the road of discovery starting again from zero, its widened consciousness bringing it into better relationship with its subjective internal world and with the world of objects at large. The culmination of the journey taught our Fool the lesson of accepting responsibility in the world and for the world. The ever expanding and varying multitude of experiential situations and events always presents new challenges: the story of the Fool’s journey describes the process of becoming-other, and this becoming, as Deleuze was saying, is unlimited.

The zero numbering of the Fool picture appears to signify nothing, but not quite so. In fact, the presence of the Fool in each subsequently numbered card is a truism: $1+0=1$, $2+0=2$, and so forth. As an imperceptible difference, the Fool – in terms of physics – exemplifies the zero-point energy, a quantum fluctuation, or pure information bordering on becoming active. In terms of abstract entities of mathematical analysis, multiplicity is a set. Like an empty set \emptyset – signifying nothing, that is marked by zero – the Fool organizes a meaning into what is intrinsically meaningless when it itself enters into relations following its symbolic leap into the abyss. The logic is being constructed, after the first intuitive leap, as represented by multiple bracketing $\{\dots\{\dots\}\dots\}$, that is, making a distinction or presenting a difference in the context of each consequent Arcanum in a series (Fig. 3):

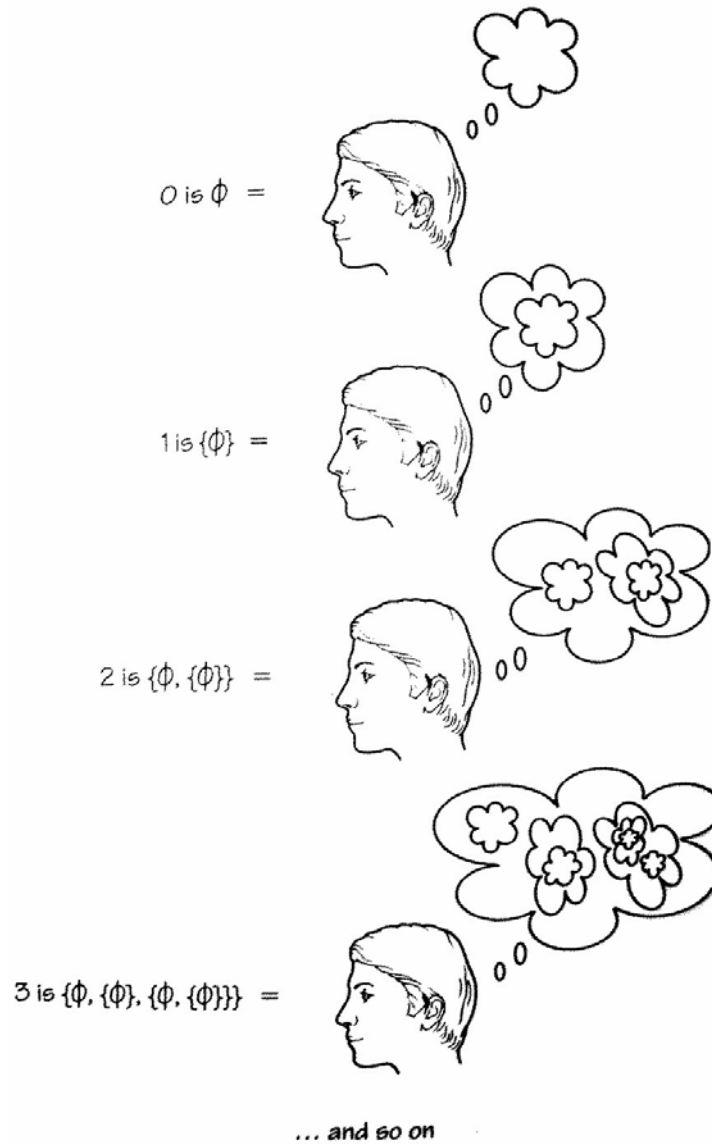


Fig. 3 (adapted from Barrow 2000: 160)

Husserl's phenomenology revisited

While reading is a conventional term for interpreting a Tarot spread, the meaning of it, in practical terms, seems to come close to what in contemporary cognitive science (Von Eckardt 1996) has been called a theory of content determination for the human mental representations system, especially with regard to habits as their psychological grounding. If “certain sorts of ink spots... have certain effects on the conduct, mental and bodily, of the interpreter” (Peirce CP 4.431 in Von Eckardt 1996: 151), then it is logical to assume that eventually interpretation would have led to habit-change according to

some lawful relationship. The Tarot acquires not only syntactic and semantic dimensions, but pragmatic as well, in the sense of rendering the flow of information meaningful by means of its effectiveness with respect to future consequences. Von Eckardt insists that “we do not use our propositional attitudes. Rather, they themselves involve a ‘use’ of, or an attitude toward, a content” (1996: 165). Contrary to Cartesian ego-centred subject, this inversion implies the as yet “subjectless”, that is, bordering on possessive and forceful, nature of mental states when they function unconsciously as a blind habit.

Due to the mediating function of interpretation, the latent, unconscious, contents of the mind are rendered conscious, and the signs which are brought to the level of awareness, that is, intensified and amplified up to the point of their possible integration into consciousness, are capable of creating a momentous feedback in the psychodynamic processes of the subject of a reading. This dynamics is capable of producing “a change in the subject’s mental life which, in turn, changes his or her disposition to act... in ways dependent on the content of representation” (Von Eckardt 1996: 283-284). The ability of the mind to be about something or to have some content constitutes intentionality, or the mark of the mental. Husserl’s phenomenology is a study of intentional objects or noemata. We arrive at these features through self-reflection, the epoch. As this paper attempted to demonstrate, the praxis of Tarot readings makes Husserl’s theoretical concept a lived reality by virtue of laying out noemata, or extra-linguistic meanings, that constitute the experiential structures as patterns in the shared life-world. The noematic objects are both transcended to and immanent – or intended to – in the mental process. Noema is a structure of experience and it is present to consciousness as an implicit meaning.

This paper, I believe, demonstrates the Husserlian method in action, that is, it has presented a careful description of the phenomena of Tarot readings without (as yet) analysing the possible causal relation of intentional objects to existent external objects, which would have constituted a project of naturalising phenomenology and is outside of the scope of the present paper. I suspended my preconceived ideas and received beliefs so as to share the experience of Tarot readings with you. Husserl and Deleuze alike were looking towards transcending the limitations of ordinary experience and expanding the realm of meanings beyond the common sense. The method of transcendental empiricism – by adopting phenomenological vs. natural attitude – enables us to “intuit” the character and nature of such an extra-ordinary experience. Noesis – or intuition – as an operation of the nous represents the highest portion of human knowledge. For Husserl, the noetic and noematic are ideally two sides of the same experience, and as this paper demonstrated the phenomenology of Tarot enables us to see – in a form of sensible patterns – that which otherwise would have remained “outside” of experience, in the realm of merely intelligible. The creative act of reading and interpretation is indeed “as if” of objects represented by pictorial cards. The object is “given through the act” (Zahavi 2003: 90). Thoughts, emotions, hopes, fears, interpersonal relationships, intrapsychic conflicts, in short, all the patterns of life-world, of which however the subject may not yet be aware at the conscious level, are represented in the layout. The integration of the unconscious into consciousness takes place during readings thereby overcoming the eternal alienation between “itself” and “other” in one’s psyche and leading – in accord with Husserl’s original project – to a progressive disclosure of transcendental intersubjectivity, within

which a subject is to be individuated, that is, constituted as an individual by the dynamics of becoming-other.

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