

The Cartomancy

To the first feminist friend I ever had - my beloved father.

To Federica Martini, for being my role model, for always asking interesting questions and for the remarkable balance she strikes between passionate writing and discipline.

To my dear sisters, Andrea and Caterina, for believing in me, as without both of them

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Welcome to the magical and ecofeminist world of The Cartomancy. In this world everything connects and intersects with a spiraling playful timeline. I believe that time is an interactive, energetic line, where the archetypes of this world intersect. Everything is a reflection of the interactions between patterns that multiply as lively growing fractals and synchronizing side by side with other patterns.

In this world, I raise more questions than answers. I do this in the form of storytelling that is framed by a semi-divined version of the twenty-two cards of the Tarot Major Arcana.

My questions started from the absence of women, to expand to the oppression of nature, the oppression of intuitional animalistic connection, and the primitive patterns connected to the native bicameral¹ mind.

Replicating, or repeating an action to make a pattern, is one of the most important mechanisms in organising our minds and the actions of our daily routines. Making a pattern or routine is the mind's way of reducing energy, organizing thoughts, and effectively expressing through linguistics throughout the history of civilized humanity. Even in primitive societies patterns are connected to rituals, hunting, planting and societal beliefs.

My question as artist is: despite the repetition of elements, actions, and linguistic expression, why are stories and their consequences never the same? My questions revolve around the nature of bicameral¹ mind and the binary² one; the connection between patterns; and the framing of binary and nonbinary interaction.

This is why the thesis is framed by Major Arcana Tarot cards, as every single card represents a pattern, and every reading is different to another based on the order of the cards in the reading set.

What is Major Arcana and why Tarot cards?

Major Arcana cards are the manifestation of humanity's grand journey through life. Starting with the Fool - the child - who meets different challenging archetypes, has a unique journey, and is inspired by the ancient magical knowledge of Hermeticism, astrology, and Kabbalah's magical Tree of Life.

There are several aspects that have informed my choosing of Tarot as the frame for my thesis: personal, historical, psychological, and artistic as well.

The Personal:

Once upon a time, I was overwhelmed by the magically touching world of Alejandro Jodorowsky's³ films. His sustained dynamic narration revolved around tarot and was inflected with the most hyper-creative narration. I was enchanted by his visual version of tarot that ran in the background. This effect was intensified by tracing his personal quotes and interviews as they were sustainably full of this unique magical essence.

1- Bicameralism (the condition of being divided into «two-chambers») is a hypothesis in psychology that argues that the human mind once operated in a state in which cognitive functions were divided between one part of the brain which appears to be «speaking», and a second part which listens and obeys - a bicameral mind. The metaphor is not meant to imply that the two halves of the bicameral brain were «cut off» from each other but that the bicameral mind was experienced as a different, non-conscious mental schema wherein volition in the face of novel stimuli was mediated through a linguistic control mechanism and experienced as auditory verbal hallucination.

In my early life I read a lot in psychology and know deeply how vital the effects of self-illusion can be, and how dreadful the effects of implanted patterns are in both our personal and collective mindset. As a collective therapeutic action, I was attending Family Constellation⁴ sessions in order to intimately increase my awareness of the nature of collective subconscious symbols. Later, with receiving my first tarot reading, I was driven by the unexpected connection to both languages: the psychological and the esoteric, and I felt that both represented two sides of the same coin to me. Earlier in my research I was highly interested in energy, but I did not find the right gate through which to enter this topic. Driven by my humble intuition, I think I finally found a clue.

The Historical:

The first image that hits my mind as an example of Cartomancy, is a gypsy Oracle attempting to channel cosmic energy to give her divination reading to the seeker. I find this connection with women ironic, but as a gypsy it makes sense, as the journey of tarot is a very long and diverse process. It appears that tarot has now chosen its channel to manifest. This is particularly apparent when we consider that the journey started in the Far East in China as playing cards, was transformed into iconology of Ganjifa in India, and transferred to a version connected with chess in Turkey and Egypt in the Islamic era.

2- Binary thinking is a definition for thinking in a black and white way, when there is only one way for right and wrong, man and woman; this way of thinking is going more for the standards.

3- Alejandro Jodorowsky Prullansky, is a Chilean French filmmaker and artist. Best known for his avant-garde films, he has been «venerated by cult cinema enthusiasts».

4- Family Constellations, also known as Systemic Constellations and Systemic Family Constellations, is an alternative therapeutic method, founded by Bert Hellinger, which draws on elements of family systems therapy, existential phenomenology and Zulu attitudes to family.

This version is the main ancestor of today's playing cards, with similar symbols and numbering, but without any depictions of humans as was developed later in Europe. This saw Arabic calligraphy replaced with the names of the king, first and second marshals, and completed with drawings of the king and first marshal, and sometimes the queen instead of the second Marshal. The appearance of the queen only happened later in Italy, France, and the UK. The Swiss and German versions did not have any women at all, and later it was attacked by the Church because of their rejection of gambling cards. Esoteric cards transformed people's interaction with cards in general by modifying them from a collective men's game into a one to one form: The Cartomancy and the Seeker.

“Tarot as an esoteric form appeared in the eighteenth century, in glaring contrast to religious trends in the West which were moving towards greater secularisation. Tarot has shifted from the mundane towards the sacred”.⁶

It was very challenging to trace when exactly the first deck of tarot was invented. “Duke Filippo Visconti of Milan is the most likely candidate for the inventor of that first deck, sometime early in the fifteenth century. Laterly, in eighteenth century France, tarot was so far removed from its original cultural context that the contemporary description of its symbolism became impossible. currents which included an infatuation with exotic cultures, esoteric doctrines and an ardent yearning for a lost Golden Age”.⁶ It was then synchronized with the discovery of Rashied Stone hieroglyphic symbols, and with the Industrial Revolution. Instead, it was reinterpreted according to a new set of intellectual “The failure of the Church to adapt to the changing political, social and spiritual circumstances enabled the emergence of alternative and

esoteric doctrines which would constitute the French Occult Revival”. It was in this milieu that tarot was transformed from a Renaissance game to an esoteric device, and was legendarily created in an Egypt still perceived to be the repository of arcane knowledge. “It was linked to all manner of abstruse schemes including Hermeticism, astrology, and kabbalah by esotericists, most notably Éliphas Lévi and Gérard Encausse, otherwise known as Papus”.⁶

The movement from normal playing cards to divination cards is connected with significant development in tarot that occurred in an England that was also in the grip of the Occult Revival. “It is surrounded by the mysterious atmosphere of secret groups, such as the Freemasons and the Golden Dawn. Though never possessing more than three-hundred members, the Golden Dawn was enormously influential in the practice of magic and tarot interpretation. These nineteenth-century magicians altered the trump sequence and linked each card to one of the twenty-two pathways between the sephiroth on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. These pathways lent a divinatory interpretation to each card which forms the basis of contemporary divinatory meanings”.

The Psychological:

The tarot cards are a divining/esoteric version of the playing cards. The invention of games in general varies from one culture to another, but is still connected with the psychological dynamics of winning, and is subsequently connected to the main sensation of pleasure which can sometimes produce addiction. Games were invented to conquer death, or to answer questions not answerable in a joyful way. Tarot, as an esoteric game, has this essence of predicting the future and smothering feelings of anxiety regarding what the future might hold.

6- Helen, Farley, “A cultural History of Tarot, From Entertainment to Esotericism”, Academia online Pdf, I.BTAURIS, New York, 2009. p: 2, 3, 21.

The Oracle's divination process contains an intimate trust in wise energy. The Oracle can explain the forgotten and mysterious dream that the seeker has had, and does so in the form of a card reading which gives the listener the freedom to follow or abandon. Divination revolves around repetitive emotional frames connected with pain, fear, insecurity, trauma, oppression, racism, and the lack of self-love.

As an artist, my mind sees the tarot as a Rorschach test with the abstract drawing inside replaced by esoteric symbols. Only the Oracle is capable of translating and assisting the individual that is seeking revelation. "As a diviner, the Oracle acts as a translator between the language of the unconscious and the language of consciousness, and uses a predefined set of symbols familiar to both. Divination therefore involves an essential paradox: one must learn a set of meanings for the Oracle's symbols in order for consciousness to understand them, yet one must also, to some degree, abandon those meanings to the often abstract and contradictory impressions through which the unconscious communicates its hidden wisdom. This is a sort of back-and-forth, give-and-take between the work and the observer."⁷

I am inspired by the Gestalt⁸ school vision about subconscious patterns which connect simple emotional reactions. As a mysterious part of ourselves, we usually attract the same patterns in our lives, as replicating similar mistakes, and attract the same painful loops, based on the generation of our subconscious through childhood experience. Meanwhile, this sustainable experience is framing our own perspective and our own identities in connection to the world. You can control these patterns by controlling your thoughts.

7- David, Bruce, Albert Jr. "A philosophical Essay on Tarot Divination & Human Consciousness", Academia online pdf, 2015. p: 5.

8-Gestalt psychology or gestaltism is a school of psychology that emerged in Austria and Germany in the early twentieth century. Gestalt psychologists emphasized that organisms perceive entire patterns or configurations, not merely individual components.

This is how patterns work. For example: if you think about getting sick after doing something, you probably will get sick. Or, if someone told you that you would feel happy after doing something, it will probably happen, especially if you trust this person. In a way, whatever a cartomancy says - even if you are not totally sure - could be implanted into your subconscious to manifest later in one way or another. What I am speaking about here, in our contemporary world, is the main technique behind advertising, social media, and our collective mind. Tarot here is an estorec example but it reflects a lot of the power dynamics inherent in psychological tricks.

In the world of social media, in the contemporary public sphere, and in dominating binary patterns, we as a society and as individuals, deal with destructive "patterns" on a daily basis. We received sustained implanted patterns in our subconscious from everywhere, framed by the hegemonic systems of patriarchy and commercialism, and deeply connected with the symbols of the entertainment industry. Meanwhile, oppressed constructive patterns are not in the picture because they belongs to a less digitized direction, or a nonbinary dynamic which severely threatens the main dominating binary system.

The Artistic:

I believe in magic. I believe that every single human has his or her internal magical world, and you choose to see it or not. That is why I used the form of anti-hierarchical writing in order to guarantee the delivery of my message, and of the experience of not knowing what is next. This also gives the reader the opportunity to make his or her own divination or narration as a Cartomancer that is alternatively following intuition to sense the matriarchal potential of the game.

Laterly and not finally, the thesis is the main part of a progress project called Cartomancy.

In this project I am connecting the previous artworks and possible future artworks with The Cartomancy text. The previous works connected to the thesis process are: Emotional Maps (Wheel of Fortune), I am a baby sloth (The Star), The Replicators (The Fool), and Erasing Process (The Devil).

As inspirational cards, I would love to transform them into an interactive visual form:

The Moon, The High Priestess, The Empress and The Hierophant.

Reading Guidance:

The reading guidance helps the reader to build his or her own narrative as the cards are not supposed to be read in order. The cards are printed separately, and the reader has the authority of the Cartomancy by shuffling the cards and choosing to build his own narration.

As a content; this tarot version consists of ecofeminist cards that question the absence of feminine energy, and are inspired by the reversed and non-reversed readings of original tarot. In each non-reversed card, I show how these patterns work originally with the balanced energy; and as reversed I show how the patriarchy effects these patterns. All cards are inspired by the keywords of the original tarot. This is why writing techniques are varied, and no two cards are similar. There are some cards that have no reversed version, some cards are absent, or minimal, and some are connected to a personal way of writing, like a fairy in an absent version of a fairytale. With the Fool card, there are many questions about repetitive actions in genes as metaphors for patterns or archetypes.

The hidden or the errorful is particularly evocative here as they control us as humans and are connected with hidden animalistic patterns, making them more obvious than the archetypes of other cards. In some cards, like the Empress and High Priestess, I am questioning gender equality and female and natural oppression by the dominant patriarchal system of patterns. Also, fairytales and orality are important tools in the hands of women. I reveal how these tools were completely dulled, and the intuition of collective consciousness fought against in order to reverse our human nature into binary one instead of a unique connection of human worlds. In other cards, like The Hierophant and The Chariot, I am speaking about the centric perspective of the White Man. The cards can be read in several ways, based on your choice, and your current moment energy or luck, and become playful synonyms for the word divination.

What is divination?

In divination there are collective complicated symbols as in your dreams. The role of the oracle/cartomancy is to translate these concrete symbolic archetypes into an understandable language, to make sense for the seeker, or to at least alert some triggers for enlightenment.

The idea behind shuffling the cards and following your intuition to choose the card, is to be honestly connected to the energy of the card, and to have the power of rewriting/narrating the stories with me as an Oracle. Each time the story could be changed depending on the order of the cards in the reading set. Sometimes it could make a great deal of sense; sometimes there could be simple connections or there may just be chaotic fragments from parallel worlds that do not have not any linear time or structure.

You are the Oracle.

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