Perspectives on Divination

**Theory & Practice**

Course document for September 16, 2015—Deicidus, Internet School of Magic

*As always, please leave questions and comments in the document if you do not mind sharing them with other students (Ctrl-Alt-M). This makes it much faster and easier for me to answer the questions, in-context. This document will be publically viewable.*

I am starting gig reading tarot once a week at a coffee shop in Redmond, WA, so I thought it would be interesting to review divination, particularly as it pertains to tarot. I mentioned in an email that I would probably not do a class on divination, because that skill is better taught in person. This class is not about teaching the skill of divination, but is rather a survey of various approaches and techniques that people use in the service of divination. I hope this provides you with new ideas, new techniques, and alternative ways of thinking about your existing divination practice.

# Definitions of Divination

Some people have very complex definitions of divination. But it generally involves a component of chance, a component of fortune-telling (telling the future or “reading” the present), and a component of advice-giving or therapy. Astrology is a good example of a divinatory craft which can take or leave the social/advising component. Astrology can be done alone purely for introspection, without any motives except self-understanding. Meanwhile, televangelist phone psychics have made a business out of claiming certain knowledge without doing any of the legwork—dumbing-down their clientele rather than helping them to deepen their spirituality.

# Divination as Sorcery

When I’m talking about reality-navigation, time-sorcery, ‘stances’, dæmonics, etc., what I’m talking about is *literally and actually altering your future experience.* The changes can either occur in the outside world, or merely in your individual perspective—but the edge cases where it’s not clear which has occurred are the most interesting. Robert Anton Wilson’s idea of “reality tunnels” comes to mind here. Divination allows us to alter our tunnel’s trajectory, by first seeing where it is we’re at now. Archetype-images are inherently active, so even just seeing an image of our current “position” helps to transmute that energy into a more rarified form.

For me, sorcery and divination are two sides of a coin, because it is precisely that which is being navigated or edited by sorcery which is amenable to being read by divination and its tools (tarot, runes, etc.).

# How Does it Work? Theories of Tarot

How does a tarot reading work? What does it do, exactly? Do the cards come up right, or are we just reading into things?

## Minimalist Perspective: Psychological Projection

In psychology, *projection* is a process where inner psychic content is projected on an object in the external world, fusing with it (*inhering*) and appearing to be the natural qualities of that object. We constantly project on people and objects in our environment, far more than we realize. At the micro level, projection can even be attributed as the mechanism of experiencing meaning and object-ness itself (object relations theory)—the reason we can see objects with qualities in the first place is that our mind pro-jects itself back to itself as the image of an external thing, upon which qualities are exposed (see also Hofstadter, *Surfaces & Essences*).

This is an extremely useful perspective because it is so precise, and because the dynamics of projection have already been worked out in great detail by psychologists. We can both utilize projections dynamically and magically, and we can also factor-out that which can be explained as a projection in order to define true magic (or rather, recast projections as an aspect of a complex of magical phenomena).

Projections are very complex, but they frequently involve the way we attach to others or desire others, or categorize others (family/role/race/gender projections). The erotic component leads directly into fantasy—there is a link here with tarot images and how they are intended to lead one into shamanic journeys in the imagination with precise trajectories (“pathwalking”).

The way particular projections inhere in objects is fascinating: for example, why does this tarot card become “my mother” and that tarot card become “qualities of grace and happiness”? Sometimes the recognition of the personal significance of an image comes almost immediately—even before the card is fully recognized. The brain is selecting out significant features as it processes the image, and matching these with charged (relevant) information in the brain. This frequently includes unconscious psychic material, since they are charged precisely because they are not being expressed (discharged). Thus, tarot becomes a useful tool to trawl through the subconscious—whatever it is we aren’t thinking about—and each new card becomes a fresh magnet with which to draw out informative projections.

Even with this minimalist perspective which is fully acceptable to a materialist psychological science, tarot or other divinatory tools are clearly very useful as introspective devices.

## Magical Thinking: Spirits

I don’t traffic much with this explanation—I figure the best information comes directly from the 0 (God/HGA/Self), so I simply always channel the purest information possible. However, many people invoke named spirits, particularly spirits of wisdom (=0), to provide the information during a reading. I don’t know a way to verify that the information is coming from spirits, or even to verify that there are multiple sources of information that it is possible to “tune into”—so I simply assume nothing and work starting from psychology into the further reaches of what it is possible to read.

A spirit model is very interesting because it can take into account the bias the information may have. It could also be used to introduce purposely-biased information, to create particular formulas.

However, as I said, I rarely call upon spirits during my readings—I find that simply reading and studying the process of reading provides ample information and accuracy.

## Synchronicity

Another explanation for the accuracy of readings also comes from psychology: Carl Jung’s monograph *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. I’m sure you’re all familiar so I won’t bore you with definitions.

The fascinating thing about synchronicity is that it gets at the link between mind and matter, and part of that link is the chance occurrence of events. Jung’s original *Synchronicity* recognized this, and von Franz’ *Number & Time* expands on it greatly. This link with chance is why synchronicities intrude upon our awareness, and why we try to goad out synchronicities using chance-based oracles. There is something about the selection of events which allows in psychological content, or which influences both psyche and matter timelessly, in rhythm.

## Sorcery on the Cards/Quantum Collapse Model

Another explanation of how the perfect card gets drawn in a reading is that sorcery is being done on the cards as they are drawn. This explanation does not contradict any of the others but rather can collate with them.

When I do a reading with tarot, I shuffle the deck, and then I frequently touch the center of the top card, which acts like the deck’s “chakra” (psychological center/port), and feel whether the deck has aligned with the question. Or, I simply double-tap the deck with my finger while mentally assigning it the question or person that is to be read—imprinting the cards with my intent. Reducing the assignment down to a single instant reduces uncertainty and thus improves accuracy. (This same principle applies to doing multiple readings for the same question—avoid doing so, because each additional reading introduces uncertainty to all of the readings.)

In this approach to reading, the “quantum waveform” of the future is “uncollapsed”, i.e., wavelike, until it is observed by a person. In other words, when you shuffle your deck, because there is no human observer that knows which cards are which, the deck is *actually* in a superimposed state: all possibilities exist in the same space; the deck is multiple and pluriform with its potential shufflings. Assigning intent to the deck collapses this waveform, or rather slants the collapsing when it does happen, when you draw a card (and that’s… magic, folks!). In this model, I am actually popping the cards to the top of the deck which align best with the energy I imprint into the shuffled deck. This is why my readings come out perfectly (because I precisely imprint my intent before drawing), and also why *everyone’s* readings are technically perfect *all* of the time. Whenever anyone draws a card, that card is the image of their soul at that instant. The trouble is in noticing precisely enough what was on the mind to have any hope of ascertaining the link between the card and the constellation of energies in the entire microcosm (personal sphere of experience) at that moment. This is why it is difficult to read cards well without extensive self-study, so that it becomes possible to factor-out projections which occurred at the moment of drawing (of course, it can be argued that if the projection occurred, it was somehow relevant).

## Overdetermination

As you can see, these perspectives are not in conflict, but rather collate to produce many explanations for why the right cards come out, and/or why we interpret them as the right cards. Thus the cards have plethora of causal explanations, not a shortage—they are “overdetermined” as Foucault put it.

The “sorcery” model subsumes under it models of magical determination of the cards, acausal coincidence of cards with situation, and effects the cards could have upon the future all under effects of the sorcery. This is a powerful model because it collects up all possible agency and then hands those reigns over to the intent of the practitioner (including choices of worldview/approach).

# Approaches to the Reading Situation

Not only do people differ on how they attribute why reading works, they also differ on what it’s for and what types of relationship can or should occur between reader and client during the reading. These perspectives or approaches are also complementary as aspects or ways to approach a reading.

## Advice-Oriented Reading

This includes all types of advice-orient readings: most novelty readings, relationship advice, and also deep advice on major life issues that require soul-searching and careful consideration. In the right hands, the tarot can deeply and succinctly provide an image of a relevant thought-structure in a form which is active and progressive, thus helping to untangle or move forward the matter in question.

## Initiatic Reading

Good readers are also aware of an initiatic function for divinatory readings: to connect or reconnect us with the divine and with the highest aspects of ourselves; to dispel ignorance and instill access to wisdom. This aspect of the reading looks to untangle or smooth any personality aspects or beliefs which are causing pain to the client; to draw attention to conflicts in belief and also to provide new perspectives which can rapidly heal the issue in question. **This often naturally comes out in the cards anyway, because tarot cards were *designed for* and are *about* the path of initiation** (e.g., Crowley’s Thoth deck is explicitly an initiatic tool, an index of his hermetic-kabbalistic symbol-system.) Tarot and probably all divinatory techniques are naturally initiatic (you could put that on the sticker). But, keeping an awareness of this dimension of the reading, and being able to speak with an awareness of the process of initiation in mind, the reading can be made much more impactful and of a deeper quality.

Readings can also become launching-off points for discussions of symbolism and related esoteric subjects.

## Prop

Tarot cards are ultimately a prop to ease the tension and provide a neutral shared focus for the divinatory interaction. Readings of the same quality can be done without a tool, and often these readings can be even more specific because they are not tied to the cards or to any particular level of complexity. However, they are a very beautiful prop which also gives the readings a very interesting and agreeable structure.

An Appalachian Voodoo practitioner of great skill once told me his method for tarot: he handles the cards as he just tells the client about themself, shuffling the cards and occasionally drawing one. He simply does a cold/psychic reading on the client, speaking aloud and then using the cards for punctuation. He looks through them occasionally to find a certain card he wants to use to illustrate a certain point (an initiatic point, likely), but he also draws cards at intervals to punctuate and emphasize his speech. I tried this technique to very good results—individual questions or statements can be asked and read/answered with the resulting single card draw.

## Ritual Sorcery

The reading can also be intended as a direct act of sorcery. An initial spread can be drawn, and then cards can be altered, redrawn, replaced etc. in order to create a symbolic field which aligns with one’s intent. This simple ritual design is very powerful, as any divination system will be designed to include a relevant symbol for any aspect or quality one could imagine.

All readings, in simply creating such a symbolic image, could already be said to be enacting such sorcery.

## Aesthetic Component—Put on a Show

Readings are often seen as a performance art or a con show—but to ignore the aesthetic dimension of the reading is to miss an opportunity to beautify the work and entrance your clients. The entire interaction can be viewed with an aesthetic eye, producing opportunities in dress, manner, or voice that alter the circumstances of the reading.

# Cybernetic Inherence

I want to return to this idea of how projections inhere in images: how certain projections are selected that seem to appear in the external world, embedded in or manifested as part of images. This is relevant to synchronicity and the matter & psyche question.

Cybernetics is the study of feedback loops, and we can very simply apply this to the idea of how constellations of psychic matter (ideas, neural subnets) can become associated with an object over time. The qualities in the object, as they are parsed and identified by low-level neural layers, are increasingly abstracted and gestalted, until they begin to meet up with abstract qualities or patterns of mind, which are being attempted to concretize as potential perceived qualities or inherences of the object by the brain. This process of mutual feedback looping (which, it occurs to me, is Adjustment—Justice—8 in the tarot) continues indefinitely, allowing qualities to emerge and become linked with the psyche, as psychic contents that are partially-activated become increasingly-associated with external object fragments which are increasingly-identified with the qualities (and mental objects/names/categories as well). The switch from a negative feedback loop (stasis—7::2) to a positive feedback loop (8::1) is the moment when an “image” snaps into focus or a quality becomes identified/recognized in an image.

Seeing time in this way, we can see how influences are said to “come from the future” or viewed atemporally as eternal aspects or qualities which embed themselves in or manifest as matter.

This process, in reverse, allows us to develop facility with symbolization—taking literal objects as their symbolic counterparts, aspecting them out to the system in question.

This process of inherence is fascinating, because it has to do with our automatic responses, the parts of us that are pre-conscious and thus often sub-conscious or out of our control (see also “projective test” in psychology).

If you understand what I am saying here, about this duality and bidirectionality between linear and atemporal (chronic and aeonic), you understand the root of what magic is, and what I call “backwards time”.

# Further Reading

* [The Politics of Divination](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O93vFGN7VTI) ([Part 2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkkWK64Pya8))
* Jung’s *Synchronicity*
* von Franz’ *Number & Time*
* *DIV* by Sorceress Cagliastro is an excellent book about the practitioner’s side of divination.
* *Tarot as a Way of Life* is a Jungian look at tarot.
* *Tarot ReVisioned* by Leigh McCloskey contains beautiful (but tragically greyscale) illustrations of the tarot as well as in-depth contemplations of the symbology and deep essence of each of the 22 major arcana archetypes.
* *The Book of Thoth* by Crowley is essential reading material for the practicing divinator.