

Le tarot comme outil de réflexion non linéaire, chez Suzanne Treister

Interview with Marie Lechner for the seminar, *Jouer, Déjouer*, Musée français de la carte à jouer à Issy-les-Moulineaux, France

13 December 2024

The tarot deck you chose is the 78 cards of the Tarot de Marseille? Is there a reason why you chose this particular deck?

Before I started HEXEN 2.0 I had come across a chart of the meanings of the Ancient Tarot Of Marseilles which were much more subtle and complex than the lists of interpretations I later found elsewhere and so I based my deck on this chart.

Do you use the symbolism associated with the tarot cards to develop your own version. Or do you just draw a loose connexion?

I make a chart of all the cards and spend a long time figuring out which subject of my deck to connect with each card and its original meaning. I use post-its with each subject on and juggle them around over the course of the work, until each subject makes sense with each card. Once this is set I am happy for my subjects to take over from the original meanings. They become a parallel text as it were.

Why did you feel the need to make a new version? There are almost 15 years between the two versions of Hexen. And why this jump from version 2.0 (in 2012) to 5.0 (in 2024)?

Because it was many years since the first version I made in 2009-11 and many things had moved on in the world, from new technologies, AI, the climate crisis, different fields coming together, converging, like spiritual ecology and nexus thinking and I was developing a different idea of the uses of cybernetics. The updated title reflects the names Web 2.0 and the possibly upcoming Web 5.0.

In retrospect, what do you think you didn't see coming in the way technologies developed?

I think the advances in machine intelligence and climate engineering may have been greater than most people expected.

You chose again to use the cards of a tarot deck, what do you find particularly appropriate about this format?

I find it perfect as a tool to enable groups of people to select random subjects which provoke discussion and ideas about potential positive action for the planet.

Also the form of a tarot deck fits with the visual structure of my cards which is derived from alchemical drawings from the 13th - 18th centuries, holistic, whole-system images, in which art, science and religion/spirituality co-exist, to entwine these subjects into a mystical space where they become differently animated and resonant.

How are we supposed to play the Hexen Tarot?

So you choose which kind of spread you want to use, for example there is one where you lay out 5 cards in a cross. You get people in the group to randomly pick 5 cards from the whole deck, and lay them face down. Then you turn them over one by one and the discussion progresses. Sometimes you can ask a question at the start, or just keep to the idea of the future of humanity and the planet. So the first card, the one on the left, will be about the forces at stake we are aware of, the second, on the far right, will be about the forces at stake we are unconscious of, the one in the centre will be our current situation, the one at the bottom will suggest part of the answer and the one at the top will suggest the future that lies ahead.

From what I've seen, it seems to me that this new version is more speculative, forward-looking than

historical? The former one was more a tool of comprehension, of linking things together (counter culture, military, technology etc..) and this one is more like a prospective tool? Or a kind of technology for “premonition” of future worlds?

HEXEN 2.0 looked into histories of scientific research behind government programmes of mass control, investigating parallel histories of countercultural and grass roots movements. It charted, within a framework of post-WWII U.S. governmental and military imperatives, the coming together of scientific and social sciences through the development of cybernetics, the history of the internet, the rise of Web 2.0 and increased intelligence gathering, and implications for the future of new systems of societal manipulation towards a control society. HEXEN 2.0 specifically investigated the participants of the seminal Macy Conferences (1946-1953), whose primary goal was to set the foundations for a general science of the workings of the human mind. The project simultaneously looked at diverse philosophical, literary and political responses to advances in technology including the claims of Anarcho-Primitivism and Post Leftism, Theodore Kaczynski/The Unabomber, Technogaianism and Transhumanism, and traces precursory ideas such as those of Thoreau, Warren, Heidegger and Adorno in relation to visions of utopic and dystopic futures from science-fiction literature and film.

HEXEN 5.0 has cards assessing the issues of AI, blockchain, crypto, DAOs, the singularity, big tech, whilst also critically and historically exploring new global developments in science, the ecosystem and climate crisis, recent and traditional fields of knowledge and spirituality, new branches of bio-socio-political theory, contemporary countercultural and futuristic movements and new directions in science-fiction, and proposed solutions for an ethical survival of the human race.

There are many developing technologies for renewable energy and food production, but it's the evolving new fields I have made cards for that inspire me with more hope for the future, fields like Nexus thinking, Earth System Science, Spiritual Ecology, Astrocognition, and some of the new countercultures of refusal and renewal, alongside new directions in science-fiction like Solarpunk and Hopepunk, because the people involved in these fields are the people who might effectively direct, promote, and make use of these technologies in ways that restore the complex planetary systems of which we are a part.

Where HEXEN 2.0 analysed the legacy of cybernetics as embodied in Web 2.0 and systems of control, showing how Web 2.0 works as a societal controlling system, HEXEN 5.0 traces cybernetics' relevance to whole earth systems and the climate crisis, where the cybernetic self-regulating feedback loops of the planetary ecosystem, which we have sent out of whack, need to be re-regulated through an understanding of the workings of the global ecosystem. This is embodied in the aims of Earth System Science and potentially in an even more holistic system which could incorporate traditional knowledges and a spiritual dimension. Climate engineering and other new technologies need to be based on these models within an ethical framework or they will cause even more damage to ourselves and the life of the planet.

When we saw each other last time, you said that you need to lighten your information-filled brain, to put all this knowledge to rest. You expressed this feeling of being overwhelmed by the pace of all those new knowledges and developments in science and technology. Is this format of a card deck also a way of synthesizing all the knowledge acquired in recent years?

Yes I am coming to the end of the project and have a whole lot of information in my head. I'd like my next project to be more poetic, imaginary, to use a different part of my brain for a while. My projects tend to oscillate between the more directly political and the more poetic. In the period between the two decks I have investigated many fields and issues in other projects, from high frequency trading, to blockchain, psychedelic plants, AI, kabbalah, and also worked for 5 years on several projects at CERN in Geneva in relation to particle physics, extraterrestrial lifeforms, quantum theory, black hole theory and the holographic principle. So in the making of HEXEN 5.0 I have naturally included some of these subjects in relation to the many other areas that make up this new big picture we find ourselves in.

The tarot desk goes hand in hand with your (complex) diagrams. Could you explain how these two forms work together?

The diagrams in HEXEN 2.0 and HEXEN 5.0 are like educational maps of the territory, they are big picture histories showing the interconnections between the subjects. Each of the 78 cards is derived from something in the diagrams.

I feel there is a sort of similarity between the latent space of AI (and all its potential images/text etc waiting to be activated), and the space of possibilities generated by the drawing of tarot cards? What new meaning could this tarot deck gain in the age of AI?

I think one of the purposes of this new deck is to help us navigate these new technologies and their implications and possible uses, and to encourage us to take ethical responsibility, each of us to push in some way these new technologies for more positive uses, whilst being very aware of possible pitfalls.

Would you mind describing shortly three of the new cards you chose to add?

Sure. Here is the information on three cards:

1. *HEXEN 5.0/Tarot/XIV Temperance - Web3/3.0 – Web 5/5.0*

Web 1.0 – read-only static. Web 2.0 – read-write interactive - enabled social networking, user-generated content and big tech/govt personal data mining. In development : Web 3/3.0 – read-write-trust verifiable Web3 refers to a decentralized web based on blockchain technology coined in 2014 by Ethereum co-founder Gavin Wood . Web 3.0, conceptualised by Tim Berners Lee is a semantic web that is more intelligent and connected.

Web 4.0 - the Symbiotic web where humans and machines can interact, connecting the Internet of Things and advanced virtual reality.

Web 5.0 – read-write-control-govern personal data and identity

In development by Jack Dorsey's The Block Head, "The Telepathic Web" or "The Symbionet Web" promises, through AI, an emotional, human-like interface.

Web 5.0 represents the next phase in the evolution of the Internet, aiming to create a decentralized, peer-to-peer platform. It strives to give users complete control and ownership of their information, allowing them to store and manage their personal data on decentralized web nodes.

2. *HEXEN 5.0/Tarot/V The Hierophant - Spiritual Ecology* is about the emerging field of spiritual ecology. Spiritual ecology proposes a symbiotic relationship between world religions, spirituality, environmentalism, science and academic research. It suggests that environmental work should include spiritual elements and that contemporary religion and spirituality should include awareness of and engagement in ecological issues, it proposes spiritually motivated environmentalism and environmentally motivated spirituality. At the root of Spiritual ecology is indigenous wisdom's understandings of the sacred nature of the environment. It recognises that the forces of environmental destruction can only be overcome through personal transformation on a global scale.

3. *Hexen 5.0/tarot/x wheel of fortune – post-truth*

The 21st century socio-political world of spin, enabled and exponentialised by the internet/web 2.0, an abundance of competing truth claims, social media toxicity, influencers, divisive algorithms, opinion masquerading as news blurring the line between fact and opinion, between objectivity and subjectivity. Sociopolitically dangerous positive cybernetic feedback loops of escalating misinformation, distrust, skepticism, confusion, anxiety and disorientation, leading to negative public brainwashing, re-shaping of public perceptions, advancing political agendas, worsening sociopolitical divisions, disincentivising rational discourse, increasing real-world violence, nationalisms and xenophobia. Long-term solutions: Critical Thinking And Media Literacy Education.

There are more women in this new one. You added Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin, Jane Goodall, and even Donna Haraway. Is there a reason for that?

HEXEN 5.0 is a more forward looking deck, looking for positive ways forward, perhaps there are more women who are having a positive influence?

Why do we need Hexen 5.0?

It's supposed to be a positive educational tool towards encouraging everyone to help restore the planet.