Virtual Ontology/Real Experiences
By Inna Semetsky

1. Introduction

This paper is threefold. It is positioned against the background of a philosophical problem that refers to the human ability of knowing oneself and God as One. In the philosophical literature the positive answer to this problematic is usually delegated to the mystical realm; in the realm of concrete practical experiences the answer would have been negative as based on the apparent impossibility of connecting the human with the divine in real life. Such a connection is often posited as being “beyond the limit of all human understanding” (Kearney 2001: 104) and delegated to the mystical realm. This paper’s argument is that while this connection may seem to exceed human understanding, it does not have to remain as such. To construct the argument of how to overcome the great divide separating the human from the divine, the paper will examine three sources crossing over philosophy and natural science and grounded on a common foundation represented by the logic of the included middle.

The first is Basarab Nicolescu’s (2002a; 2002b; 2005) program of transdisciplinarity. The second is the cutting edge of contemporary science called coordination dynamics that posits the natural world in terms of “The Complementary Nature” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006). The third is a broad corpus of work by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze whose striking ontology of the virtual and method of transcendental empiricism will constitute the focus of this paper. In brief, disciplinary or \textit{in vitro} knowledge is based on the classical logic of the excluded middle that induces a separation between subject and object and reduces the nature of knowledge to knowing merely the “objective” facts of the external world. Nicolescu (2002) posits transdisciplinary, or \textit{in vivo}, knowledge as exceeding scientific knowledge of the external world independent from the subject. Yet, transdisciplinary knowledge does not reject science altogether. It is founded on the logic of the included middle that connects subject and object. The holistic (\textit{in vivo}) intelligence enabled by a triadic relation brings in the dimension of meanings which is traditionally (\textit{in vitro}) considered subjective, that is, located outside science. Transdisciplinarity presupposes passing through a transpersonal dimension and developing a transrelational attitude.

We need to better understand such a transpersonal element of experience. Kelso and Engstrom (2006) use the tilde $\sim$ as a symbol for relation that reconciles the apparently dualistic opposites and assert that in “the case of human beings, complex nonlinear self-organizing systems of energy~matter have managed to evolve to the point of organizing a sense of self~other” (2006: 253). A self-referential relation establishes meaningful correlations between/across the different levels constituting a system in the form of complementary pairs that are connected via coordination dynamics enabled by the logic of the included middle. Contemporary mathematician Louis Kauffman (1996) calls it virtual logic that “goes beyond reason into a world of beauty, communication and possibility” (Kauffman 1996: 293). The dichotomies of “either-or” thinking (\textit{in vitro}, as Nicolescu would say) are being transcended and traversed by virtue of the “both-and” (\textit{in vivo}) science of coordination dynamics.

To clarify further the problematic of self-reference, the paper will present Deleuze’s larger ontology that expands the limits of our understanding and perception and posits Being in terms of two enfolded levels of reality: virtual and actual. The virtual is not identical with the actual; the relation between them is complicated ($le pli$ is “fold” in French). Significantly, “the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is…actualisation” (Deleuze 1994: 211) that, due to Deleuze’s philosophical method of transcendental empiricism, enriches human experience with an extra, religious or spiritual, dimension, especially if we understand the meaning of \textit{re-ligio} literally as a self-referential process linking
backward to its (virtual) origins.

The virtual and the actual are related triadically in the manner of Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic structure of signs. A triadic structure of a genuine sign enables a correspondence or communication between two seemingly disparate levels. It is the actualization of the virtual potentialities in real experience that enables us to make connections or bridges, as Nicolescu says, between different levels of reality. The triadic logic forms a self-referential structure folding back via a relation symbolized by tilde “~”. The different levels therefore “communicate” with each other via a feedback loop, in accord with Nicolescu’s transdisciplinary knowledge that therefore cannot but be grounded in the relational dynamics where terms form a complementary pair rather than being dualistic opposites.

Importantly, the concept of communication exceeds verbal exchange, encompassing much broader semiotic categories representing what Deleuze called transversal communication. The supposedly mystical experience with which we started this paper would be, in Deleuze’s terms, an event of the actualization of potentialities or categories representing what Deleuze called transversal communication. The supposedly mystical experience remains as yet imperceptible. The dynamics of the process is analogous to the coordination dynamics of the “self–other” complementary relation. What plays the role of “~” would be, for Deleuze, an immanent affect that together with percepts forms new concepts, new understanding. Affective understanding transcends what is usually given to sense-perceptions in ordinary experience: empiricism is radically transcendental. Hence, it is in the reality of our human experiences that the transversal connection, a necessary condition for “the famous mystical principle of coincidentia oppositorum, beyond the limit of all human understanding” (Kearney 2001: 104), is being established.

The paper will have demonstrated, however, that expanding the limits of human understanding to encompass an extra affective, or transpersonal, dimension should enable us to build a bridge over the gap between the dual opposites. What was traditionally called the mystery of coincidentia oppositorum is grounded in Deleuze’s totally realist ontology that understands cosmos in terms of virtual reality comprising several levels of existence. At the conclusion of the paper a specific example of applying and using the logic of the included middle in practical experience will be introduced and described in detail. The Deleuzian transversal communication as a constituent part of the semiotic system becomes established in practice and therefore demonstrates how our real-life human experience become enriched with deeper, spiritual, significance, thus moving us closer to knowing self and other (other minds, God, Nature, etc.) as One, provided we understand the symbolic “language” embedded in such transversal communication that links together the disparate levels of reality.

2. Transdisciplinarity

The term “transdisciplinarity” as used by Basarab Nicolescu (2002a; 2002b; 2005) refers to overcoming the split between the sciences and humanities. Transdisciplinary knowledge belongs to what Nicolescu specifies as in vivo knowledge that exceeds scientific knowledge of the external world as independent from the subject. Bound to the internal world of human subjectivity, it necessarily includes a system of values and meanings exceeding objective facts alone. Yet transdisciplinary knowledge does not reject science, instead it is based on new scientific foundations (to be addressed in the following section) so that disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge complement each other. Positing what he calls transdisciplinary education in the context of the increased specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, Nicolescu (2005) comments that “transdisciplinarity” was first coined by Jean Piaget in 1970 as something between and across the disciplinary divide. Nicolescu reminds us that the UNESCO report of the Commission internationale sur l’“education pour le vingt et unième siècle”, chaired by Jacques Delors, strongly emphasized four pillars of a new kind of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together with, and learning to be. Learning to do will have included the creative emergence of novelty and bringing to light our creative potential. Moving from static knowledge to the dynamic process of learning to know based on the actualization of potentialities means becoming capable of creating multiple connections or bridges, as Nicolescu calls them.

Disciplinary, in vitro, knowledge is based on the classical logic of the excluded middle that induces a separation between subject and object and reduces the meaning of knowledge to knowing merely the “objective” facts of the external world. The new transdisciplinary in vivo knowledge however is founded on the logic of the included middle that connects subject and object so that they will have, in Nicolescu’s words, corresponded to each other. Analogously, transdisciplinarity refers to dynamics pertinent not to a single level of reality but simultaneously across and between several levels of multidimensional reality.
Contrary to the so-called spectator theory of knowledge limited to the objective knowledge of external world, transdisciplinary knowledge is founded on the *interactions* between the external world of objects and a subjective world of “inner knowledge” (*in vivo*) that ancient philosophers called *Gnosis*. Contrary to analytic thinking that induces a separation between the mind and the world when an individual mind *observes* the natural world with the cool gaze of a Cartesian *Cogito*, a subjective mind that *participates* in the world demonstrates holistic intelligence which exceeds conceptual thought alone. Such holistic intelligence derives from understanding the harmony between the mind and world. Mind and nature cease being binary opposites but are related or coordinated, thus complementing a theoretical *episteme* with practical *phronesis* resulting from the feedbacks between knowledge and action; the unity of knowledge.

The relation between a knowing subject and an object to be known has a triadic vs. dyadic structure; the terms of the relation are not dualistic opposites but are engaged in correspondence, in conversation, in communication. Such mutual connection – a symbolic *bridge* between the terms – establishes a network as the proper structure for knowledge. The triadic relation as a foundation for network is akin to a feedback loop connecting in a non-linear manner subject and object, cause and effect, self and other; or any other binary opposites for that matter. The apparently *independent* dual opposites in fact form an *interdependent* polar *structure* in which both poles are bridged. Epistemologically, therefore, transdisciplinary knowledge is based on logic where terms form a complementary pair vs. being dualistic opposites: they are connected or interrelated.

Since the days of Aristotle, classical syllogism is based on the logic of the excluded middle, which means, as Nicolescu reminds us, that there is no middle or third term which is at the same time both A and non-A. But the logic of the included middle is a multivalent logic containing all three elements, A, T (the third term), and non-A. Therefore this logic is structurally equivalent to the triad of sign-object-interpretant embedded in what Charles Sanders Peirce called a genuine sign (Fig. 1):

![Triadic Relation Diagram](image)

Logic as semiotics includes a third term as an interpretant “located” between a sign and its object that performs the function of the included Third or included middle in the overall Peircean relational trichotomy. Interpretant is what provides a sign with its meaning which however can always be interpreted further (as symbolized by a dotted line); that is, meanings are evolving. Peirce posited a category of “Thirdness” or mediation, without which no communication, synthesis, integration, or evolution are possible. Such unorthodox logic (really, a contradiction in terms within strictly analytic reasoning in the framework of *in vitro*, disciplinary, knowledge) is akin to what contemporary mathematician Louis Kauffman (1996) calls *virtual*, or archaic, logic that “goes beyond reason into a world of beauty, communication and possibility” (Kauffman 1996: 293) as well as beyond given facts into a world of interpretable symbols, meanings and values. For Kauffman, it is virtual logic that allows us to move from one world of ideas to another, from one level of description to another; from one level of reality to another.

The emphasis on communication indicates that there is an interdependent network in which each level as if “speaks” to each other, desperately trying to understand each other’s expressive “language”, to thus create *shared* meanings along the communicative link embedded in a triadic relation. Logic is not a pure invention of logicians but is a *ratio* that always already exists in human praxis, and the world perfused with genuine signs, that is, grounded in the triadic relational dynamics, would be orderly and harmonious by its very nature. No wonder that Nicolescu is adamant that transdisciplinarity leads to the emergence of the interrelational or, better to say, transrelational attitude and passing through transpersonal dimension of experience. The terms in the logical relation do not oppose but sustain each other because of the included third.

The constructive, creative logic of the included middle is what “energizes reason… [and] provides the real
possibility and the means for opening of communication across boundaries long thought to be impenetrable” (Kauffman 1996: 293). To summarize, in vivo knowledge is not just a static knowledge of the “objective” facts per se but the dynamic understanding of meanings that not only differs in principle from predictability and knowledge of facts but by necessity brings in the dimension of meaning, purpose and value which is traditionally (in vitro) considered “subjective”, that is, located outside science (read: classical, “normal” science). But are meanings doomed to forever stay outside science?

3. The science of coordination dynamics

If not “normal” science, then what? What is the governing dynamics that informs transdisciplinary knowledge? Back in 1972, it was Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the founder of the General Systems Theory, who first addressed the insufficiency of the analytical procedures of classical science based on linear causality between two basic variables, and attracted our attention to “new categories of interaction, transaction, teleology” (Bertalanffy 1972: xix) as problematizing the old mechanistic paradigm: indeed, interactions between more than two objects create an unsolvable problem within the equations of classical mechanics. Importantly, the “interactions do not have to be physical; they can also be thought of as a transference of information” (Cilliers 1998: 3) that takes place along Nicolescu’s bridges constituting the networks of conversations or correspondences embedded in transdisciplinary, in vivo, knowledge. The said transference is the defining feature of the new science of coordination dynamics embedded in the world conceptualized as “The Complementary Nature” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006).

Kelso and Engstrom use a squiggle, tilde “˜”, for pinpointing the relation, the symbolic punctuation for reconciling apparently dualistic opposites, and assert that in “the case of human beings, complex nonlinear self-organizing systems of energy–matter have managed to evolve to the point of organizing a sense of self–other” (Kelso 2006: 253). Different disciplines have their own complementary pairs that, rather than being alien to each other in the manner of Cartesian dualism, are connected via what Kelso and Engstrom specify and present as the science of coordination dynamics. Different “self–other” (self–not-self) pairs do belong to a variety of discourses; their commonality is derived from the same relational dynamics “contained” in the logic of the included middle that brings in the transpersonal dimension: human mind transcends the boundaries of an individual ego and cannot be separated from the collective, relational and social domain: individual–society is one such “self–other” complementary pair in which the terms of the relation sustain each other.

Among complementary pairs in which the terms are related, or coordinated, are the following: cause–effect; res cogitans–res extensa; rationalism–empiricism; science–humanities; organism–environment; immanence–transcendence; body–mind; nature–nurture; being–becoming; certainty–uncertainty; novelty–confirmation; conscious–unconscious; and so on to ultimately include the bridge between the human and the divine that would also be functioning as interdependent polarities vs. irreconcilable opposites. Kelso and Engstrom comment on shamanism as a precursor to Taoism and Confucianism in Chinese philosophy in which the “principle of yin–yang [is] an icon symbolizing the fundamental conflict of opposites in nature” (2006: 20). Conflict or unity? Or something in-between?

Defining the complementary nature as “a set of mutually depended principles responsible for the genesis, existence, and evolution of the universe” (2006: 39), Kelso and Engstrom use a “complementary pair” as a minimal unit of analysis akin to Leibniz’s monad – a paradoxical windowless window serving as the means for studying and understanding the complementary nature as a whole. Sure enough, as noticed by Kelso and Engstrom, “coordination dynamics bristles with apparent…paradoxes” (2006: 193). The semiotic triangle in Fig. 1 represents a rather paradoxical structure because of its self-reference. It is precisely “sentence and self-reference [that] have been making trouble for philosophers for centuries” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 253). The self-referential relation tilde “˜” is what establishes the meaningful correlations between/across the different levels, dissolving the dualistic split between private experience and the public world.

It is almost ironic how in the course of the modern epoch the complementary science–magic pair has gradually become separated into dualistic opposites. While acknowledging what the pure reason of modernity considered to be a supernatural action, the attempt to explain this very action was made in terms of the method of classical science customarily connecting cause and effect directly, without any symbolic mediation. The “prompt” conclusion was therefore in terms of some anomalous effect, as in magic, without attributing the possibility of existence to yet “another kind of causation” (Peirce CP, 6.60). But the natural world is not limited to its solely mechanical aspect, similar to human experience not being reducible to blind action and reaction. What is customarily called magic, then, may in fact be considered a science of hidden relations – akin to coordination dynamics – that are capable of producing real effects when their cause is not at all obvious. The
apparent dichotomies and antinomies of the old “either-or” narrow reasoning are being transcended and traversed in accordance with the new “both-and” science of coordination dynamics equally applicable to natural and socio-cultural systems. Importantly, coordination dynamics as governed by self-organization, that is, “spontaneous formation of patterns in open systems” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 112), does not require the presence of a physical coordinator.

Indeed, such a relational dynamics of experience that sounds foreign to materialist science has all along been familiar to religious thinking. The relational, complementary, structure of Nature is the very condition of its knowability by the method of analogy – or likeness – that, while preeminent in spiritual teachings with regard to essential kinship and Oneness with the world, remains foreign to physical causality that deliberately separates the observer from what is observed. Mystics, however, as well as creative artists or true philosophers, play an intensive, participatory, role vs. remaining detached observers. Their presence in the world proceeds in accord with “subtle and seemingly mysterious ways. What one perceives affects what one does and what one does affects what one perceives” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 41).

Even if seemingly “getting information” from the realm that appears inaccessible to sense-perception, they (mystics, artists, philosophers, lovers, poets, madmen…) still “do not conjure things out of thin air, even if their conceptions and productions appear as utterly fantastical. Their compositions are only possible because they are able to connect, to tap into the virtual and immanent processes” (Ansell Pearson 1997: 4) embedded in Gilles Deleuze’s virtual ontology. This information is what Kelso and Engstrom call functional, that is “meaningful and specific to any kind of coordinated activity… Information is functional if it allows people to communicate…learn and remember. Functional information can take many forms, and many forms can realize functional information. …According to coordination dynamics, functional information transcends the medium through which parts and processes communicate” (2006: 98-99). We can construct another semiotic triangle with its included middle of information as the third term to the usual dyad of matter and energy (Fig. 2):

One example of functional information would be what Deleuze called the transversal communication that confers shared meanings on experience. This link, or communication, in which “observer and observed are one” (Kauffman 1996: 295) is what guarantees self-reference embedded in the multileveled, virtual–actual, world.

4. Deleuze’s ontology of the virtual

This paper began with a promise to explain how the apparently dual opposites of real human experience and the transcendental realm of the divine can be bridged so that this mystical connection does not remain “beyond the limit of all human understanding” (Kearney 2001: 104). The transdisciplinary science of complementary nature and coordination dynamics took us closer to solving the riddle of reconciling the opposites. Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical method of transcendental empiricism and his ontology of the virtual will take us even closer.

Deleuze’s method is empirical by virtue of the object of investigation being regarded as real, albeit sub-representative, experience, yet it is transcendental because the very foundations for the empirical principles are a priori left outside the common faculties of perception so as to require a transcendental analysis of their implicit conditions. In this respect, transcendental empiricism purports to discover conditions that exist prior to the actual commonsensical experience. According to Deleuze’s ontology, there is more to the world as compared to how it appears to common sense. The observable facts is not all there is to experience: the dynamic understanding amounts to creating meanings in/for novel experiences and events that may confront us. Thinking is not a pre-given exercise of some cognitive faculty but is always a second power of thought, born under the constraints of experience as a power, an objective capacity embedded in the total experiential
situation, which is able both to affect us and itself become affected. As Deleuze says, 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).

Such a forceful perilous act of thinking demands attention to our implicit assumptions so as to be able to express them explicitly: this is a self-reflective element in Deleuze’s philosophy. The experiential world is folded, and “we go from fold to fold” (Deleuze 1993: 17) within the unfolding experience. The fold is described as the inside of the outside, that is, a self-referential relation functioning in accord with “the logic of sense” (Deleuze 1990), the logic of the included middle. And the functioning of this logic is grounded in Deleuze’s larger virtual ontology according to which the virtual level is not opposed to the real but itself possesses a full reality; what it apparently opposes is merely the level of the actual.

The realm of the virtual exceeds the possible. Possible can be realized, and the real thing is to indeed exist in the image and likeness, as the saying goes, of the possible thing. But the virtual is always already real – even without yet being actual! The Deleuzian object of experience is considered to be given only in its tendency to exist: the very nature of any “thing” is, according to Deleuze, just an expression of tendency. Virtual tendencies have the potential of becoming actual through the double process of differentiations of the transcendent and “initially undifferentiated field” (Deleuze 1993: 10). The universe of knowledge is structured and ideas are intensive multiplicities. How should we understand this notion? The unfolding proceeds not like a regular linear information processing between input and output, inside and outside, but on the very border along what Deleuze called a line of becoming which “is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) in the fold. This line, as Deleuze says, underlying its mediatory quality, “has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is neither one nor two” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293), says Deleuze, presenting us with a powerful visual metaphor for the third term in the relation constituting the logic of the included middle.

Deleuze uses some terminology from the theory of communication that belongs to the family of complex systems, namely: how information is transmitted in a channel as a sign/signal system. A signal is produced at the moment of coupling between two heterogeneous series of events operating at different levels. This does not mean that “something” actually flows through the channel, just that a relation, or interaction, is being established. A sign as a “bit” of information is Janus-faced: it provides a link as a squiggle “~” constructing a semiotic bridge between events without actually passing from one to another (cf. DeLanda 2002) but rather being engaged into what Leibniz would have called “a dance of particles folding back on themselves” (Deleuze 1995: 157). A sign has to be Janus-faced because of its own self-reference. It closes “as if” on itself; however – and this is crucial – by its very closure, or coupling, it is capable of becoming another sign, contributing to the process of becoming along the multiplicity of levels.

According to Deleuze’s radical empiricism, thinking, while exceeding solely rational thought, is still “fundamentally linked to a logic – a logic of multiplicities” (Deleuze 1987: viii) in accord with “a theory and practice of relations, of the and” (Deleuze 1987: 15). It is the relational dynamics constituting the logic of the included middle that forms the triad of affects, percepts, and concepts. It is the presence of affect – or desire, or love, or Eros -- that connects the levels of reality by crossing over, or traversing, the difference between the virtual and the actual and exceeding the reductive model of purely analytic thinking. One has to “pursue the different series, to travel along the different levels, and cross all thresholds; instead of simply displaying phenomena or statements in their vertical or horizontal dimensions, one must form a transversal or mobile diagonal line” (Deleuze 1988: 22), a line of flight or becoming. Becoming is not reduced to terms of a relation; it is a relation per se as a pure sign that maintains an ontological priority. The dynamics proceed in a double movement of differentiation (with a “c”) by means of which differences in intensity establish a flow of information; and differenciation (with a “t”), by means of which unobservable virtualities do actualize themselves.

The logic of multiplicities means that there is no simple addition of information even if Deleuze uses the conjunction “and” to describe the process. The information becomes active or what Kelso and Engstrom call functional. “The and” of Deleuze is the in-between squiggle tilde “~” as a symbol for the mediating relation constituting a triad of a Peircean genuine sign based on ontological difference between the virtual and the actual that itself is capable of making a difference of the second order in the world of real experiences. This logic would have represented “not the emanation of an ‘I’, but something that places in immanence the always other or a Non-self. … I do not encounter myself on the outside. I find the other in me” (Deleuze 1988: 98). This is a process of summation that, while suggesting a simple adding of information, in fact intensifies it (the
Deleuze is adamant that "there is not a simple addition, but a constitution of a new plane, as of a surplus value" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 313).

The addition will have indicated the linearity of the process. But a triadic relation is based on a non-linear dynamics of experience interrupted now and then by “a new threshold, a new direction of the zigzagging line, a new course for the border” (Deleuze 1995: 45). By virtue of experimentation thinking-as-becoming escapes the old habitual frame of reference within which the movement along the line of flight seems like a sort of immaterial vanishing through some imaginary event horizon, and creates its own terms of actualization thereby leading to the “intensification of life” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 74) by means of “an increase in valence, a veritable becoming” (1987: 10). What Deleuze calls *becoming* means always *becoming-other* in accord with the foundational self-other complementary pair embedded in the science of coordination dynamics.

In terms of Deleuze’s ontology of the virtual (cf. Boundas 1996; May and Semetsky 2008; Semetsky 2009), it is the dynamics of pure events that constitutes virtual reality. The actual does not resemble the virtual in the manner of Plato’s model and copy. Deleuze presents us with reversed Platonism. The two are related not mimetically but semiotically; they are different, and it cannot be otherwise because the virtual is posited just as a tendency, therefore no-thing. Virtual tendencies as potentialities or no-things become actualized as though created *ex nihilo* and embodied in the actual things, in the guise of new objects of knowledge, new meanings. The nuance is significant: it is “[f]rom virtuals [that] we descend to actual states of affairs, and from states of affairs we ascend to virtuals, without being able to isolate one from the other” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 160).

Ontologically, “Being as Fold” (Deleuze 1998: 110) is grounded in the very *difference* enfolded in the virtual–actual nexus. Difference is not an individual construct as a feature of personal uncertainty or Cartesian doubt: it is a quasi-ontological category and is considered by Deleuze “the noumenon closest to phenomenon” (Deleuze 1994: 222). The difference makes thought encounter a shock, or crisis, embedded in the objective structure of an event *per se*, thereby transcending the faculties of perception beyond some apparently “given” data of sense-perceptions. An encounter with difference is intense, and the intensity of difference is a function of affect or desire as complementary to a purely cognitive understanding. Precisely because of experience being excessive, that is, spilling above and over the cognitive confines of an individual mind, the infamous object of desire would be “the entire surrounding which it [desire or affect] traverses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 30) forming, as such, a transversal connection between affects, percepts and concepts in a triadic relation of the included middle embedded in the Moebius strip of the Deleuzian folds of Being. Another semiotic triangle (Fig. 3) illustrates a structural analogy with Figs. 1 and 2:

![Fig 3.](image)

Deleuze used a biological metaphor of a rhizome to describe a model for knowledge-structure akin to Nicolescu’s transdisciplinary, *in vivo*, knowledge. As a symbol for unlimited growth through the multitude of its own transformations, rhizome is contrasted with a tree, the latter symbolizing the linear and sequential reasoning rooted in finite knowledge. The tree metaphor accords with the infamous tree of Porphyry, which is an example of the classificatory system, or a hierarchical structure based on precise definitions that serve as the foundation for rationally justified knowledge. The tree of Porphyry incorporates an arborescent reasoning, that is, a type of syllogistic logic based on the method of division – of the excluded middle – to form a precise catalogue. The hierarchical structure precludes any interdependence, relationships, or harmony between “things” located at separate branches of the sacramental tree, contrary to the rhizomatic network of relationships based on the logic of the included (in-between) middle. This network, in contrast to a map representing a given territory, engenders the very territory to which it is supposed to refer. Accordingly, a static representation of the order of references gives way to a relational dynamics of the order of meanings when concepts are created in experience.
A concept inhabits the empirical happening; it is, as Deleuze and Guattari say, a living concept, but the practical task is “to set up...to extract” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 160) the meaning of the event in the newly created concept; to treat concept not as object of a prior recognition but “as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now...from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed “heres” and “nows”. ...I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentered center, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them” (Deleuze 1994: xx-xxi). It is the very repetition of the different that is the essence of transcendental empiricism grounded in the ontology of the virtual. What is defined as the ontological Outside is both virtual and yet real by virtue of its very pragmatics, that is the effects it produces at the level of human actions and experiences. As affective, experience is as yet a-conceptual and is not limited to what is immediately perceived: it needs mediation or interpretation for the creation of concepts, creation of meanings by virtue of learning from experience per se.

Deleuze’s model of learning is based on the explication of extra-linguistic signs embedded in experience among which may be involuntary memories (similar to those awakened by Marcel Proust’s famous madeleine) or images as potential (virtual) sources of meanings in accord with the logic of sense, the logic of multiplicities. The logic is grounded in Deleuze’s radical empiricism because “only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimension of the visible” (Deleuze 1990: 20) – or sensible, in Platonic terms – therefore establishing a relation by virtue of connecting in practice with the realm of invisible but nevertheless intelligible, using a Platonic term again. The underground sprout of a rhizomatic plant, rather than having a traditional root, has a stem, the oldest part of which dies off while simultaneously rejuvenating itself at the top. This naturalistic metaphor for creativity is potent because it is precisely when the old is dying off that the new may be created. At this critical point a rhizomatic line would zigzag, as Deleuze would say, into a new direction, therefore betraying “the principle of linear progressive ‘building up knowledge’”’ (Deleuze 1995: 139) as prescribed by the in vitro model. Learning is “infinite ... [and] of a different nature to knowledge” (Deleuze 1994: 192), but that of the nature of a creative process as a method of inventing concepts in practice.

The creation of concepts in experience demands, for Deleuze, “the laying out of a plane” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 36). To think means to construct the plane of immanence – to actually show that it is there rather than merely “to think” it – so as to “find one’s bearings in thought” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 37) by means of stretching, folding, unfolding, enfolding, that is by multiple movements of this plane’s intensive lines of becoming. At the level of perception by regular senses such zigzagging non-local connections would have remained imperceptible. But learning by means of the interpretation of facts, re-valuation of experience and “an apprenticeship in signs” (Bogue 2008) enables one’s perception to vitally increase in power due to the logic of summation, thereby tending to becoming-percept, that is, becoming able to perceive something previously imperceptible.

Connecting the experiential dots in the multileveled rhizomatic network enables one to make sense out of the disparate bits and pieces of information, that is, de-stratify one’s old way of thinking by means of some novel interpretations, by the dynamic understanding of meanings implicit in the experiential events; thus constituting a process called by Deleuze and Guattari the transformational pragmatics. The transformation along the transversal line of becoming actualizes the virtual and as such is real even if physically “we don’t see it [the line of becoming], because it’s the least perceptible of things” (Deleuze 1995: 45).

While not all virtualities may become actualized in the present, they are nevertheless real. Maximilian de Gaynesford (2001) relates Deleuze’s philosophy to the fourth- to fifth-century theology, and Michael Hardt (1993) indicates a subtle connection of Deleuze’s thought to Scholastic ontology. In Scholastic terminology virtual means the ideal or transcendental, but not in any way abstract or just possible: it is maximally real, ens realissimum. Because virtual ideas exist as implicit tendencies they define the immanence of the transcendental field. The transversal communication along the in-between line of becoming enables one to potentially cross the threshold of one’s old habitual universe of thinking and acting by virtue of forming “an echo chamber, a feedback loop” (Deleuze 1995: 139) embedded into the semiotics of experience. What is traditionally called a mystical experience is, for Deleuze, an existential real-life practice: it is an experiential and experimental art of perceiving the otherwise imperceptible.

Deleuze purports to show the as-yet-imperceptible by laying down a (visible) map of (invisible yet intelligible) territory or, in other words, creating a mediatory link – Kelso’s “-~” that belongs to the family of transversal “non-localizable connections” (Deleuze 1994: 83) – between what are customarily considered the dual opposites of sensible and intelligible, matter and mind. This subtle, as if intuitive, transversal communication makes Deleuze’s empirical method “patterned after Bergson’s intuition” (Boundas 1996: 87). Intuition enables
the reading and interpretation of implicit signs and symbols above and over the visible world of physical objects. As “the presentation of the unconscious, [and] not the representation of consciousness” (Deleuze 1994: 192), intuition leads to laying out what Deleuze called the plane of immanent consistency aiming “to bring into being that which does not yet exist” (Deleuze 1994: 147) in actuality but is subsisting in its virtual potential form. A philosopher as a creative thinker – an artist of their trade – becomes capable of bridging the difference between the apparently dual opposites of the actual and the virtual (ontologically) by virtue of the conscious–unconscious (epistemically) complementary pair connected by a transversal communication signified by “~”.

We “are made up of lines” (Deleuze 1987: 124), we are dynamic relationships; lines move us, and the most strange line of becoming is the one that carries us across many thresholds towards a destination which appears unpredictable. This line is “not foreseeable, not pre-existent. This line is simple, abstract, and yet the most complex of all … the line of flight and of the greatest gradient. … [T]his line has always been there, although it is the opposite of a destiny” (Deleuze 1987: 125) because the third term in the relation guarantees not the reproduction of the sameness but the repetition, or iteration, of the difference. It is the “transversal communications between different lines [that] scramble the genealogical trees” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 10-11) leading to the emergence of novelty. For Deleuze, “there is no other truth than the creation of the New: creativity, emergence” (1989: 146-147). In one of his books on the analysis of cinematic images, Deleuze (1989) equates mystical experience with an event of a sudden actualization of potentialities, that is, awakening of perceptions, such as seeing and hearing, by raising them to a new power of enhanced perception; a percept which is future-oriented. Such “a vision and a voice…would have remained virtual” (Goddard 2001: 54) unless some specific, affective, conditions in the real experience that are necessary for the actualization of the virtual would have been established.

Affect, Desire, Eros, Love, Creation! Whatever its name, this is what accomplishes the Neo-Platonic double – that is, ultimately, self-referential – movement of ascending and descending. Eros, the mystical son of Poros and Penia, was conceived in an act that has occurred in the middle and muddle of “groping experimentation … that…belong[s] to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 141). As a culmination of desire – affect/love – sparked between the two deities, Eros itself is a symbol of union. The desire, or Eros, de-constructs the neo-Platonic Oneness between the true, the good and the beautiful by means of bringing it (One) down to earth into the multiplicity and diversity of real, flesh-and-blood, human experiences. Hence follows what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) present as a magical formula expressed in a form “One = Many” and which posits unity in the plurality of experiences. The creation itself is not a single point of origin but a continuing dialogue, an interaction or coordination as an ongoing transrelational sign-event. The symbolic Eros “does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings which it traverses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 292) thus establishing transversal communication as a necessary condition for “the famous mystical principle of coincidentia oppositiorum, beyond the limit of all human understanding” (Kearney 2001: 104).

But, we repeat, is it really so? Should such a conjunction of opposites remain at the level above and over human understanding, hence considered mystical? If human understanding overcomes the narrow rationalist knowledge of facts and allows itself to develop what Nicolescu called a transrelational attitude based on the logic of the included middle, then the conditions for the actualization of virtual potentialities – by means of what Deleuze specifies as the symbolic conjunction “and” – will have been created in experience per se! Therefore there exists a definite, even if radical, method – transcendental empiricism – in the midst of what appears to be the madness of mysticism. What Deleuze called the ontological Outside (an unknown, yet potentially knowable, invisible fold of Being) is an overcoded virtual space that nevertheless “possesses a full reality by itself … it is on the basis of its reality that existence is produced” (Deleuze 1994: 211). However, “in order for the virtual to become actual it must create its own terms of actualization. The difference between the virtual and the actual is what requires that the process of actualization be a creation. … The actualization of the virtual…presents a dynamic multiplicity…the multiplicity of organization. … Without the blueprint of order, the creative process of organization is always an art” (Hardt 1993: 18).

Such artistic creative interpretation and reorganization is possible because of the meanings implicit in the unconscious that are over and above rational thought and can be actualized, or brought into consciousness by virtue of the “capture of code, surplus value of code” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 10) that ensures the actualization of potentialities. Tapping into such virtual, potential, reality means a possibility for it, in an almost Aristotelian spirit, of becoming-actual when our thinking “reconquers an immanent power of creation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 140) in lived experience amidst real-life events. Respectively, the whole dualistic split between thought and world, self and other, ourselves and our environments – in general, between the
inside and the outside – is rendered invalid due to the relational logic which is not “subordinate to the verb to be” (Deleuze 1987: 57), that is, not reducible to the logic of identity (cf. Nicolescu). Such constructive and creative logic is what “energizes reason [and] provides a real possibility and the means for opening of communication across boundaries long thought to be impenetrable” (Kauffman 1996: 293).

The dynamic understanding of meanings must be – by the logical necessity of the included middle as the natural ratio embedded in life processes – enriched and expanded with affect/desire/love, therefore seemingly blending into what Aristotle called Nous poetikos. It is Eros that brings the affective dimension of creative art into the domain of science because of its functioning not in accord with the two-valued (true vs. false) logic but as embodying the logic of the included middle represented by the noumenal difference between the opposite poles of a single structural whole, a network. The “~,” of the transversal communication establishes a semiotic “bridge, a transversality” (Guattari 1995: 23) connecting what otherwise appear as dualistic, forever irreconcilable, opposites.

What was traditionally called the mystery of coincidentia oppositorum is grounded in Deleuze’s totally realist ontology that understands cosmos in terms of virtual reality comprising multiple levels of existence. It is “the difference between the virtual and the actual [which] requires that the process of actualisation be a creation” (Hardt 1993: 18), and it is this human creativity in practice as becoming capable of making a difference in the real world of action that might appear to carry a flavour of mysticism. It is an erotic affect, “immanent to a plane which it does not pre-exist” (Deleuze 1987: 89) that creates or lays down the plane of immanent consistency for the construction of concepts, hence complementing conceptual thought with affective understanding. The function of affect or desire appears to be analogous to what Nietzsche called the will to power; according to Deleuze, however, “there are other names for it. For example, ‘grace.’” (Deleuze 1987: 91). Wherein the plane of immanence is being constructed, “the spiritual and the material [as] two distinct yet indiscernible sides of the same fold” (Goddard 2001: 62) do meet. The plane of immanence therefore always presupposes an extra dimension, as if populated by “grace.” Being supplementary – or transpersonal – it can easily appear to us as mystical.

The plane of immanence is enfolded analogous to the Baroque art that expresses the harmonious multiplicity of the folds (Deleuze 1993). According to the Baroque model, “knowledge is known only where it is folded” (Deleuze 1993: 49). The complex conceptualization of the experiential unfolding as the repetition of the different might seem to be a contradiction in terms if not for the epistemic role of the unconscious that exists over and above – outside – the ego-consciousness of the Cartesian subject. The critical philosophical framework is too narrow: Deleuze posits philosophy as an enterprise both critical and clinical (Deleuze 1997) tending towards the deepest level of analysis akin to Carl Jung’s archetypal psychology. The triadic logic leads to the process of intensifications or subtle reflexive amplifications. During each of the iterations something different is being repeated, until a rational thought forms an assemblage with an affective non-thought that, accompanied by percept, “guides the creation of concepts” (Deleuze 1995: 148). Percept is part and parcel of conceptual understanding, and philosophical thinking is equivalent to the art of the creation or invention of concepts. The creative process is accomplished by affect or desire akin to Platonic Eros. Each concept “should express an event rather than essence” (Deleuze 1995: 25) and exists in a triadic relationship with percept and affect: “you need all three to get things moving” (Deleuze, 1995: 165; italics in original).

A play of affects may reach “a point of excess and unloosening” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 134). At this crucial turning point there are two options: a subject must “either annihilate itself in a black hole or change planes. Destratify, open up to a new function, a diagrammatic function” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 134), that is, align yourself with this very transversal that connects the human with the divine. Similar to the drapes in fabric, things themselves, as Deleuze says, are wrapped up in nature; as for ideas – they are often so enveloped or enfolded “in the soul that we can’t always unfold or develop them” (Deleuze 1993: 49) based on subjective rationality as one’s conscious will solely unless experience itself is saturated with affective, almost numinous, conditions for their unfolding. Such a self-transcending breakthrough establishes the line of flight which “upsets being” (Deleuze 1995: 44), yet along this very line “things come to pass and become evolve” (1995: 45). One is not self-consciously passing through the line of flight, just the opposite, Deleuze insists that “something [is] passing through you” (Deleuze 1995: 141).

What appears to be a mystical experience of the conjunction of opposites is the potential human ability to raise “each faculty to the level of its transcendent exercise [and] to give birth to that second power which grasps that which can only be sensed” (Deleuze 1994: 165) thus establishing a bond of a profound complicity akin to the synchronistic bridge between matter and mind and connecting levels that seemingly belong to two disparate Platonic realms of sensible things and intelligible Ideas. A newly created meaning encompassing the triad
of percepts, affects and concepts is ultimately self-referential. Being self-referential, the concept – at the moment of its creation – posits itself and its object simultaneously. The concept stops being a propositional statement: “it does not belong to a discursive system and it does not have a reference. The concept shows itself” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 140) in experience when magically – or rather in accord with the new science of coordination dynamics – moving from the apparently inaccessible Platonic realm of intelligible Ideas to the visible, sensible world of real-life experience.

Sure enough, phronesis – or practical wisdom – is embodied in ethical action performed by a wise, virtuous person and by necessity includes a special sensitivity and sensibility (cf. Slote 1997; Varela 1999); yet how such sensibility operates has never been made clear in the philosophical literature. Here are two key questions: How is an epistemic access to the Platonic Ideas of the True and the Good made possible? Whence any foundation for moral knowledge? It is Deleuze’s self-referential triad of affects, percepts and concepts grounded in his ontology of the virtual that enables a glimpse into the functioning of phronesis when, sure enough, “the concept shows itself” to the one who has the potential of becoming-wise via self-reflection. Wisdom, then, as the highest intellectual virtue, would be the actualized potentiality, in Aristotelian terms. But most importantly, it is immanent to the plane that it itself constructs by virtue of an “unconscious psychic mechanism that engenders the perceived in consciousness” (Deleuze 1993: 95).

The actualization of potentialities, ontologically, is then akin, epistemically, to the unconscious-becoming-conscious, thereby traversing or bridging in a seemingly mystical manner that “fundamental distinction between subrepresentative, unconscious and aconceptual ideas/intensities and the conscious conceptual representation of common sense” (Bogue 1989: 59) which thus function as a coordinated complementary pair. To elucidate, Deleuze refers to music, “where the principle of composition is not given in a directly perceptible, audible, relation with what it provides. It is therefore a plane of transcendence, a kind of design, in a mind of man or in the mind of god, even when it is accorded a maximum of immanence by plunging it into the depth of Nature, or of the Unconscious” (Deleuze 1987: 91).

The corollary is another inseparable immanent~transcendent triad constituting Cosmos itself: Self (human), Nature, God (divine) where each stands in a relation of a “reciprocal presupposition” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 109) to each other, that is, functioning on the basis of both bottom-up and top-down “reciprocal causality” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 115). The rationalist causality that associates events on a direct cause-effect basis is complemented by the possibility of bringing these events together by means of creating a symbolic bridge establishing rapport and coordination between oneself and the world via the depth of spiritual life. Hence we can become capable of knowing self and God as One; as a holistic semiotic structure represented by a semiotic triangle in Fig. 4:

![Semiotic Triangle](image)

For Deleuze, it is Nature itself that is essentially “contingent, excessive, and mystical” (Deleuze 1994: 57). The notion of contingency is related to the complementarity of the virtual–actual pair. The virtual gives rise to a particular actuality; yet it may very well have given rise to other actualities. Contingency however is not the same as arbitrariness. The virtual can unfold into several “things” but it cannot unfold into just anything. Nature exceeds the observable world of physical facts and includes its own virtual dimension which however is never beyond experience and hence understanding. Any object of experience contains potentialities as virtual or implicit meanings, even if they are not yet actualized or made explicit. A symbolic mediation provides “intensity, resonance…harmony” (Deleuze 1995: 86): yet it appears imperceptible and, as such, borders on a direct mystical contact with the divine.

The contact in question is described by means of “non-localizable connections, actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes…which transcend spatial locations and temporal successions” (Deleuze 1994: 83). Concepts are forever fuzzy and their truth-conditions are never completely determined: although “a
concept…has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 27), the very singularity of experiential conditions makes truth “a being-multiple” (Deleuze 1987: viii). As Deleuze says, there exist forces constraining experience and the most important is a self-referential relation singled out by Deleuze as “an affect of self on self” (Deleuze 1988: 101) when a force impinges on itself. We repeat that it is the problematic of self-reference that has “been making trouble for philosophers for centuries” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 253). In this respect, Deleuze’s philosophy is naturalistic akin to an ancient science as a natural philosophy – and Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on nonlinear enfolded dynamics of experience (cf. DeLanda 2002) puts them at the very forefront of the contemporary cutting-edge science of coordination dynamics.

Being self-referential, the concept – at the moment of self-creation – posits itself and its object simultaneously, thus defying a dualistic split between subject and object, matter and mind, science and art, sacred and profane, human and divine. Concepts are invented or created as if reborn in experience, in practice. Self-reference, due to the included middle, means self-transcendence or, in Deleuze’s words, becoming-other and changing in nature when expanding connections. Deleuze’s transformational pragmatics takes place along the vanishing line of flight at the very limit of human experience – yet within intensified and amplified human understanding, not over and above it! It manifests at the moment when the potential meaning actualizes itself and becomes expressed by “the manner in which the existing being is filled with immanence” (Deleuze 1997: 137) along the line of the mysterious conjunction with the transcendental. The occurrence of the transversal communication therefore always has a numinous, religious element, especially if we read re-ligio etymologically as linking backward to itself in the process of forming a feedback loop that enables a correspondence or conversation with the transpersonal, virtual, realm of Being. As Deleuze says, we “head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 41).

This obvious circularity of self-reference is what makes “esoteric experiences” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 41) seem to us esoteric or mystical. Aristotle’s loving Intellect (Nous Poetikos) is still subject to disputes whose historical or philosophical scope is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Anton 2000); what is important, however, is that it blends inner knowledge with an impersonal, cosmic and transcendent, entity as both “think” each other. As Kearney comments, “Creatures need a Creator and a Creator needs creatures” (2001: 103). As such, the mystical, Gnostic, tradition should not be confused with the contemporary “New Age controversy [which] explains away” (Kearney 2001: 47-48) transcendence, but instead grounded in the fact that it is human action in our very practice that can “make the world a more just and loving place, or not to” (Kearney 2001: 5). The said injunction (“or not to”) is significant. The unity of theoretical knowledge and practical experience not only acquires a deeper ontological significance but, importantly, phronesis – our practical wisdom – becomes almost a guarantee, provided we learn how to recognize and enable the functioning of transversal communication in our real life; how to utilize the theoretical concept of the logic of the included middle in our practice; how to understand and interpret the “language” of signs that perfuse our experience.

5. The language of signs: transversal communication

Since time immemorial, humankind has searched for a universal language in its quest for the perfect means of communication that would transcend prevailing cultural, religious, and language barriers. A poetic tale (Coelho 1993) explored such a language, once understood by everybody yet now forgotten. The young hero of the tale who spends years in search of that universal language arrives at the understanding that it’s all written there in...
Noesis

Deleuze's method of transcendental empiricism enables us to "intuit" the character and nature of such an extra-

intelligible. That which otherwise would have remained as if "outside" of experience, in the separate realm of the

Tarot layout. The real-life practice of Tarot readings enables us to see – in the form of sensible patterns –

being constructed in the process of laying out and interpreting pictures as the unfolding patterns embodied in

conceptual, yet practical, system (theory–praxis nexus), Tarot is oriented toward the discovery of meanings for the multiplicity of experiences that are symbolically represented in the form of images and pictures and against the background of a deep metaphysical system that has its roots in Hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophies and Christian mysticism.

In his Afterword to the latest 2002 edition of the book Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism, which is considered to be written by Valentin Tomberg, a Russian Christian (yet published as Anonymous), von Balthasar referred to the images of the so-called Major Arcana in a Tarot deck as the

expressions of the "all-embracing wisdom of the Catholic Mystery" (2002: 659) while tracing its history back to the revival of Greek, Arabic, and Jewish philosophies during the Renaissance, followed by the gathering and accommodation of Hermetic and Cabalistic wisdom into Biblical and Christian thought (2002: 661). Tarot images embody both a spiritual dimension of experience at the ontological level of Deleuze's virtual reality; and the unconscious, as yet unarticulated, potential meanings at the epistemic level. The interpretation of the implicit meanings makes them explicit and creates narrative structures serving the self-reflective function of our learning from such an embodied experience. Experiential learning is what leads to practical wisdom. In the Tarot deck, the potential for wisdom is embodied in the image of the High Priestess, the Major Arcanum numbered 2. She is a symbol for Sophia (Σοφία is Greek for wisdom) or Shekinah (in Jewish mythology) as a feminine principle complementary to the patriarchal figure of Pope. Her function in the world is to unfold the scroll she holds in order to reveal to humankind the secrets of Gnostic knowledge lost in scientific (read: overly masculine) rationality. Sophia is a concept equally important for Hellenistic philosophy and religion, for Platonism and Gnosticism, as well as for Orthodox Christianity and Christian mysticism. In Egyptian tradition, her name is Isis, the goddess of the rainbow as a symbolic bridge between heaven and earth, who was also depicted as a wisdom figure in mythology. In the Hebrew Bible Wisdom/Sophia is personified in the Proverbs (8:22–31).

The High Priestess knows the secret code of the biblical lost speech that describes the true nature of things in a

symbolic language similar to that used by Adam before the Fall. Deleuze affirmed that language, in its multiple forms, linguistic and extra-linguistic alike, is the only thing that can properly be said to have structure, "be it an esoteric or even a nonverbal language" (in Stivale 1998: 259), such as pictorial, imaginary, or the language of dreams. Anything can possess a structure insofar as this "thing" maintains a silent discourse, such as the language of signs. As "the presentation of the unconscious" (Deleuze 1994: 192), it is the transversal connection established by actually laying down the plane of immanence, which "shows itself" in the Tarot layout, that engenders "the representation of consciousness" (Deleuze 1994: 192). 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 and Guattari 1994: 41). While its layout is pre-rational and a-conceptual, it nonetheless ultimately leads to "the conquest of the unconscious" (Deleuze 1988: 29) when itself being constructed in the process of laying out and interpreting pictures as the unfolding patterns embodied in the Tarot layout. The real-life practice of Tarot readings enables us to see – in the form of sensible patterns – that which otherwise would have remained as if "outside" of experience, in the separate realm of the intelligible.

Deleuze’s method of transcendental empiricism enables us to “intuit” the character and nature of such an extra-

ordinary, habitually considered mystical, experience. Intuition – or noesis as an operation of the Nous –
represents the highest portion of human knowledge. Using the term “parallelism” with regard to the mind-body problem, Deleuze asserts 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 requires a metaphorical threshold, or transversal link, for their connection. Transcendental empiricism affirms “the double in the doubling process” (Deleuze 1988: 98). “Doubling” here is taken in the sense of unfolding that presupposes the necessary existence of an extra dimension, without which the concept of fold is meaningless. This “outside” transpersonal dimension becomes internalized, 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” (Deleuze 1988: 98). Expanding on Deleuzian conceptualizations, it is also possible to actually see this internalization, 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 different/ciate it once again; in a way transcend, albeit in the “primitive” mode of laying down the cards.

The term “transcend” acquires the meaning of, in fact, bringing down to earth, or grounding the concept by means of embodying it or giving it a form so as to project that which has become interior as a result of internalization. This is done by literally out-placing the potential or virtual “other in me” (Deleuze 1988: 98) on the transversal link created by the pattern of Tarot images so that a generic self–other complementary pair is actually being formed in real experience in accord with the by now familiar semiotic triangle as shown in Fig. 5.

![Tarot layout diagram](image)

The Tarot layout is a sign, itself the included middle, that mediates between the world without and the world within; and represents both in relation, notwithstanding that we ourselves as participants, and not detached observers, are continuously enacting and reenacting the world in question. By virtue of being transversal to both self and other, both inside and outside, both I and Thou, it symbolically represents Being as Fold and “is installing [itself] transversally to the machinic levels [such as] material, cognitive, affective and social. …It is this abstract [virtual] machine [at the metaphysical level of description] that will or will not give these levels [their actual] existence” (Guattari 1995: 35). The embodiment of the transcendental field allows it to merge with its own “object” which, despite always being immanent in perception, would remain disembodied or virtual and, as such, beyond actual recognition in the absence of the reading and interpretation. The Tarot system functions in the mode of dual-representation: from the (objective) viewpoint of the action of signs (called by Peirce semiosis) in nature, or sign-production, as well as from the viewpoint of (subjective) human experience in the here-and- now of the actual reading and interpretation.

The as yet unarticulated meanings, which exist only in the form of some unconscious implicit contents at the level of virtual reality, unfold in front of our eyes, following the spatio-temporal organization according to a type of spread that resembles a cinematic “syntax” organized by a sequence of images. Tarot images may be considered as representing Memoria posited by St. Augustine. A pagan turned Christian, he described in his Confessions, “the fields and spacious places of memory (campos et lata praetoria memoria), where are the treasures (thesauri) of innumerable images” (in Yates 1966: 46) Says Deleuze: “I undo the folds...that pass through every one of my thresholds… ‘the twenty-two folds’ that surround me and separate me from the deep” (1993: 93). The world is folded and, as such, “we can endure it, so that everything doesn’t confront us at once. … ‘Children are born with twenty-two folds. These have to be unfolded. Then a man’s life is complete’” (Deleuze 1995: 112). These twenty-two folds, non-incidentally, correspond to the number of the images representing the Major Arcana in a Tarot deck, each Arcanum being a symbolic representation of a meaningful enfolded pattern. Each consequent Arcanum stands in relation of difference to the preceding one. This means that likenessor analogy between the worlds above and below (between the human and the divine) as posited by
the Hermetic maxim cannot be reduced to their absolute identity.

A reading, as a means of *transversal* communication, is an example of the indirect discourse when the triadic quality enabled by interpretation makes the Tarot system a genuine sign, that is, a Peircean correlate of the sign-interpretant-object triad in Fig. 1 enfolded in the self-referential dynamics between “the semiotic machine, the referred object and the enunciative subject” (Guattari, original French, in Bosteels 1998: 167). According to Peirce’s semiotics, “genuine mediation is a character of a sign” (CP, 2.92) and visual signs combine together to form cartographies. 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 the form of a diagram, network or map, or in the mixed format of a cartogram, that is, a diagram superimposed on a map. As a cartogram, the Tarot spread can be read and interpreted, thus leading to the Deleuzian transformational pragmatics for the subject of experience. The transformational pragmatics consists in destratification, or opening up to a new, diagrammatic and creative, function when laying out the plane of immanence as a constituent part “of the cartographies of unconscious [that] would have become indispensable complements to the current systems of rationality” (Guattari, original French, in Bosteels 1998: 155). The signs enter “into the surface organization which ensures the resonance of two series” (Deleuze 1990: 104) due to “intensive and affective logic of the included middle” (Bosteels 1998: 151).

The series, while “located” at disparate levels of reality, converge on a paradoxical differentiator, which becomes “both word and object at once” (Deleuze 1990: 51) in accord with the triadic logic of relations and the science of complementary pairs. To repeat, “coordination dynamics bristles with apparent…paradoxes” (Kelso and Engstrom 2006: 193), an example of which is the intervention of the transversal line as the included middle between the supposedly dual opposites when it inserts itself “not so much… in their opposition as in their complementarity” (Deleuze 1987: 131). The *subject* of Tarot reading, who is always in the process of becoming-other, offers to herself – due to transversal, indirect, communication – the object of her own signs, or herself as an *object*, thus forming a complementary subject-object pair. As regards the psychology of perception, “space-time ceases to be a pure given in order to become… the nexus of differential relations in the subject, and the object itself ceases to be an empirical given in order to become the product of these relations” (Deleuze 1993: 89) when the relations – or signs – are brought to consciousness, that is, actualized. For Deleuze, “immanence is constructivism” (1995: 48), that is, the conquest of the unconscious.

At the ontological level such self-reference, being either a complementary pair of *virtual–actual* or *conscious–unconscious*, indicates the Univocity of Being. In an almost alchemical vocabulary, Deleuze and Guattari describe the functioning of transversal communication as “a transformation of substances and a dissolution of forms, a passage to the limit or flight from contours in favor of fluid forces, flows, air, light, and matter, such that a body or a word does not end at a precise point. We witness the incorporeal power of that intense matter, the material power of that language” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 109). Deleuze stresses the a-personal nature of this specific expressive language by describing it as the paradoxical fourth person singular, that is, collective yet univocal. Let us again turn to St. Augustine:

> Whoever…is able to understand a word, not only before it is uttered in sound, but also before the images of its sounds are considered in thought… is able now to see through this glass and in this enigma some likeness of that Word of whom it is said, “In the beginning was the Word…” For of necessity,…there is born from the knowledge itself which the memory retains, a word that is altogether of the same kind with that knowledge from which it is born. …And the true word then comes into being. … [it] is a simple form, and simply equal to Him from whom it is, and with whom it is wonderfully co-eternal (in Clarke 1990: 26-28).

Such is the symbolic “Word” embedded in Tarot images. Hans Urs von Balthasar points to the “the veiled presentiments of the Logos” (2002: 659) that may reveal itself to us. The transformation into the Word due to the action of signs in nature and culture alike is thereby an intelligent, noetic, activity. In this respect, Tarot functions in the capacity of a meta-language akin to Leibniz’s alphabet of thought or a symbolic lexicon used by the universal intelligence, the *Nous*. This lexicon expresses the Hermetic wisdom of the world, according to which the divine powers of human intellect are implicit in the “man’s mens” (Yates 1966: 147).

It is by virtue of this language of signs, symbols and images that the Word expresses itself. It *shares* with us the implicated meanings when explicating them within each transversal communication; at the level of our experiences these meanings however appear to be created anew. Hence Tarot images may also be conceived of as embodying, in the worlds of von Balthasar, the “principles of the objective cosmos; … the sphere of the ‘powers and mights’, as they are called in the Bible” (2002: 661). Yet, it is holistic human intelligence
partaking in the conversation with the Nous that enables us to read, interpret and even create anew the elusive signs embedded in experience. By means of “reading the signs [we are] decoding the secrets of intelligent alien life [both] within and without us” (Ansell Pearson 1997: 4), both inside and outside ourselves when unfolding the archetypal folds and becoming able to “read, find, [and] retrieve the structures” (Deleuze 1968 in Stivale 1998: 270; italics Deleuze’s) implicated in the deeper virtual level of reality, yet explicated at the level of our actual real-life experiences.

References


---

**Endnote**

1 Deleuze’s quotation on the twenty-two folds is from *The Space Within* by Henri Michaux, in *The New Directions Series*, printed in France by Henri Marchand & Company. Michaux’s book was first published by Gallimard in Paris in 1944 under the title *L’Espace du Dedans* and then appeared in English as *Selected Writings: the space within* (translated, with an introduction by Richard Ellmann).

Published 2009.05.28