

Dark Matter Cinema Tarot Out of a State of Emergency

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The Dark Matter Cinema Tarot was developed by Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson during their residency *common infra/ctions* at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and constitutes what the artists refer to as a “vernacular technology”. After being invited to CA2M, Madrid, where several readings were made as part of JORNADAS DE ESTUDIO DE LA IMAGEN 2016, it has now become a fully nomadic practice, assuming a different form each time a Nocturnal Committee takes place.

Whenever a Nocturnal Committee is called, members of the assembled group may pose questions to the cards, and through the collective reading that ensues, explore ways in which the images can open up new channels of inter- and infra-subjective perception, connecting different realms of personal, aesthetic and political experience and enquiry by reaching towards the dark matter that haunts the cinematographic image. At the same time, they can tease out alternative narratives and divinatory or therapeutic possibilities that may lie in the constellation of figures and forms resulting from each fall of the cards.

In conceiving the DMC Tarot, the artists have replaced the Major and Minor Arcana with a selection of still images drawn from the history of cinema. No longer tied to the symbolism of the classical tarot, suspended between contingency and fatality, the DMC cards refract the questions posed to them through a process of speculative description and collective fabulation and story-telling, with each reading forming a singular montage of gestures, situations and relations.

Readings are frequently interwoven with screenings of film sequences and the playing or performance of durational sound pieces that expand upon territories of infra-perception unveiled by the cards.

The querent:

“Are we going to get out of this state of emergency any time soon?”



The fall of the cards:



The Nocturnal Committee:



- Let's look at the first image... It seems we have a slightly opened train window, with a hand protruding. It appears to be a female hand, dropping out what looks like torn fragments of paper, scattering them to the winds. The window is steamed up so we can't see in. Only the hand is visible...
- It might be an unsent letter (a letter to the president?) or a letter that the writer has torn up, or maybe the tearing up of the response... An image of futility, in any case. Such a small hand.
- What strikes me in this image is an idea of journeys, border crossings and identity papers... Someone prevented from travelling might decide to tear up their papers, it might be beckoning us to tear up *our own* papers, as a way of resisting the state of emergency.
- It seems to be an old train, therefore an image of slowness as opposed to the TGV or Thalys, trains that are made for bureaucratic speed and efficiency.
- Who has the luxury to tear up their papers? Those who already have papers. Also those whose papers are invalid, worthless.
- But since the first card normally refers to the querent, maybe it's *my* question which is being torn up and scattered.
- Or it's the ticket that is torn up. The train no longer goes where the ticket indicates... it's going somewhere else. It's taking the passenger somewhere else, not where they want to go...
- The train fixes the direction of travel according to specific, regulated routes, which the torn letter or ticket escapes. Its journey is more aleatory, multiple, unpredictable, somebody said *scattered to the winds*.
- For me this train window is an image of oppression, imprisonment, preventing someone leaving, like those millions of people on the planet who cannot travel.
- But maybe it's also an image of someone getting out, leaving the country...
- Or being taken away. Sent to a camp after having been arrested.



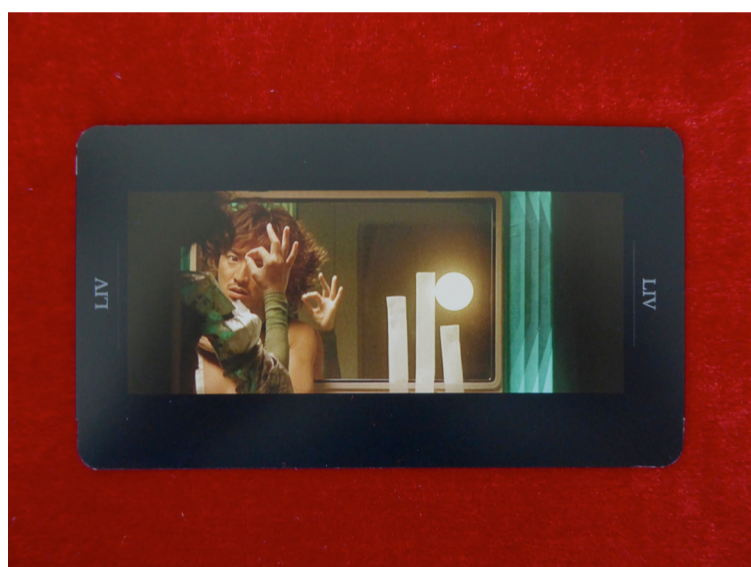
- This last reading might be confirmed by the fact that the second image is of a guy with his hands up... as though someone was threatening him. Maybe someone with a gun. There's also the question of the reflection...

– Somebody in the foreground who we can't see is wearing what look like rubber or latex gloves. It's a bit menacing, forensic, clinical...

– Like not wanting to leave any traces at the scene of a crime.

– Is there any sense of a temporal sequence?

– There seems to be an idea of progression. The gradual revelation of a person or persons through the disclosure of different limbs. Hands in particular. And in the second, you see the body, the presence of a whole person.



– So, in terms of gesture... the first hand gets rid of a torn document, the second has his hands up, and the third gesture as if to say everything is okay...

– The gesture that we see in the third card also suggests a very small space, a tiny hole, perhaps the size of the space of freedom, or a small avenue of escape.

– Which echoes the small opening in the train window.

– Because the guy doesn't look convinced that everything is ok, he looks anguished...

– I think it's a woman or maybe a child, trying to reassure the man by indicating that everything is ok, but the other remains unconvinced.

– It depends where you live. In Brazil, I believe that gesture means fuck you.

– The second and third cards both show what look like mirror reflections, but they're quite deceptive, not direct. We don't know if it's the same person in the reflection, or who is real, and who is reflected.

– As a general point, I would say the images are all quite disturbing.



- We still have to speak about the fourth card, where there are two seated figures, one of whom seems to have an arm missing while the other looks like a dwarf. It's like an image of lack, inadequacy, of something missing.
- I hope the dwarf isn't Sarkozy.
- Maybe it's Valls...
- The other guy might have his hand in his pocket.
- There's the question of the size of the figures. And the Greek statue behind them...
- That could refer to the origins of democracy on which the two men have turned their backs.
- So they're like the people of power in front of a Greek statue – maybe it's Aphrodite, goddess of love. A crippled, dwarfish state turns its back on democracy and love. Isn't there a Godard film, where one of the characters talks about how the state is incapable of falling in love?
- But the statue also suggests a frozen representation of the democratic ideal, perhaps its institutional form which has become bankrupt, or else a luxury good, a museum piece.
- There's also the pattern of interruption, zigzagging or fractured lines, like a cartoon image of TV interference.
- An interference pattern, noise, a message that doesn't pass, like the torn up letter.
- The two men are looking at us.
- They are looking at us now!
- And perhaps they're mocking us. The image looks distorted, something to do with the camera angle, like a surveillance camera.
- The red curtain is a bit like our red tablecloth.
- So perhaps it's we who are under surveillance.
- And what about the two trumpets on either side, pointing upwards, a powerful messaging system, like the state's

megaphones or the four trumpets of the apocalypse. But here, there are only two, so it's more like a half-baked apocalypse...

– Because obviously we have to make cuts.

– Yes, it's the austerity apocalypse.



– There's a man lying down and a dog beside him... It seems to me the dog is eating the guy, he's a corpse the dog is feeding on.

– Somebody sleeping in water is someone who's not doing too well.

– At first glance, I thought the dog was aggressing him but then I realized it wasn't.

– The man is in a foetal position.

– Is it an image of helplessness or... ?

– He looks afraid.

– Again there are broken lines, the rippling water which conveys the idea of a mirror but one that is disturbed.

– A broken reflection.

– Troubled waters and suffering...

– But there's also the idea of someone listening.

– The ear to the ground, or the water... trying to listen to something below that is also echoed by the direction of the two trumpets in the card underneath, which could be like megaphones pointing up...

– The dog is watching over him.

- Or he's also listening.
- It's quite ambiguous.
- But the guy is suffering, he's in a kind of marshland, a swamp.
- But it could also be a man-made canal or gutter, a sewage outlet, something toxic at any rate.
- It's like a swamp that we're stuck in.
- But he appears to be lying on something that keeps him above the water.
- We talked about the feeling of surveillance in the fourth image. But here, with the dog, surveillance has become something like a vigil. The dog is keeping watch over the guy, maybe protecting him.
- Is he listening or sleeping, or perhaps both? Or maybe he's trying not to hear in order to sleep.
- He's resting, curled up like a child.
- There's again the question of the train that the posture evokes, like the way you lie down and put your ear to the rails to hear if a train's coming.
- But maybe he's assailed by something, a noise, the trumpet blast from the fourth image below and he's trying not to hear, or to listen to something else.
- He seems somehow exhausted, folded into himself.
- Lying on waves... I like the idea of the gesture of listening. It's already evoked in the fourth card by the pattern on the floor and the trumpets. Then you have the phantoms of the past that emerge, the statue, and the dog.
- We're listening to the space, to the crossing.
- But going back to the state of emergency, how does that relate to listening?
- The man's waiting for an answer and he's down there listening to the earth, or he's trying to discern something through the noise, the scrambled interference patterns, while the inadequate men of power look up in the air, or they're watching us watching them.
- And most of the human presences are fragmentary or delayed. We just see bits, or they're folded up or far away.
- Below we have the loveless state, the trumpet blare of its monologue, the media noise that makes it impossible to see or hear anything clearly. And above, a dog's vigil which is already a bit better than a state.
- It's the ambivalence of the concept of watching over. The state watching over the French territory.

- Perhaps it's a police dog.

- No, it doesn't look like a police dog.

- So we've had the evocation of writing, looking and listening, and maybe even touch... though the rubber gloves suggest an avoidance of touch. But it doesn't look like writing is going to be of any use.

- It's like writing is ineffective, the text has been torn up. Or maybe it works too well, maybe it's the constitution and our rights that are being torn up and rewritten as the train of state, with its opaque windows, speeds on. But neither will this situation pass by looking on. Because from that opaqueness, we pass to the gaze caught by the deceptive mirror that only reflects back the self who looks. The images we are given on the news, for example, are not reliable, they don't tell us anything, but they fascinate us nonetheless, all of which deflects awareness of the state of emergency we're living under. We're encouraged to focus on ourselves, mind our own twitter feeds or facebook updates or whatever, enter into a play of mirrors which leads to a kind of narcissistic self-absorption that maybe the guy with his hands up is trying to warn us about. So yes, perhaps it's a question of switching off our devices and listening.

- The situation is troubled, the story hasn't yet been written.

- For me that's a corpse in the water. I don't see anything poetic or any hope in that.

- But no, there's so much light in that image.

- If the future is a holdup and the present is a swamp of stopped time, we'd better take the train right away and there the letter we throw out the window is either the papers or it might be like Rimbaud's lettre du voyant, something that permits us to see.

- I have a vision. I see the state of the state. The artificiality of its mirror reflection, the mirror stage of the big other where nothing happens (of the ideological interpellation of individual subjects). And then, there is the other of the other, the dog and the deep water. There, the state of emergency is over. We take the train, tear up the ticket.
- Or maybe it's the state that's finished.

- The state is by definition a state of emergency.

- There's something interesting about the idea of action here. Action and inaction. The first card, the idea of the letter or of getting rid of something, leaving something behind progressively, gives way to various states of inaction and the last card simply suggests putting up with, or suffering, this state of affairs. The dog may be like a friend, but it's not human. It's pretty pessimistic.

- The man has no control, and what consoles him is not another person, it's a dog.

- I see that as optimistic.

- Maybe it's other kinds of living beings that we should turn to in a state of emergency.

- A dog isn't a symbol, it's a dog. But there's a bit of multiplicity anyway, with the dog, the man, the water...
- Do animals sense the state of emergency?
- They sense our anxiety.
- They feel when there's something not right.
- They can also sense it when they're being sent to the slaughterhouse.



Images:

Max Ophüls – *Madame de...*

Jean Cocteau – *Orphée*

Wong Kar Wai – *2046*

David Lynch – *Fire Walk with Me*

Andrei Tarkovsky – *Stalker*