

**Publisher:** Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers  
41, rue Lécuyer - 93300 Aubervilliers  
in collaboration with LeMégot éditions  
1 passage du chantier 75012 Paris  
**Edition:** 300 copies,

signed and numbered by the artists  
**ISBN:** 978-2-915150-10-0

**Graphic design:** Matthieu Becker  
**Booklet printing:** LeMégot at Villa Belleville  
**Cards layout:** g.u.i.  
**Cards printing:** Escourbiac  
**Packaging & hot stamping:** Haller cartonnage  
**Distribution:** les presses du réel  
**Special thanks to:** Cris Tullio-Altan

For more info about the cards and feedback regarding their use  
write to  
[lesfacsoflife@gmail.com](mailto:lesfacsoflife@gmail.com)

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## DARK MATTER CINEMA TAROT

Conceived and created by filmmakers and artists Graeme  
Thomson & Silvia Maglioni as part of their residence, common  
infractions at the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (2016- 2017)  
curated by Mathilde Villeneuve

## I DARK MATTER CINEMA TAROT

Welcome to the Dark Matter Cinema Tarot. Composed entirely of images drawn from the history of cinema, the DMC Tarot is a vernacular technology, investing the fragmented and highly layered conditions of late modernity that are figured by cinema with techniques of oral speculation and storytelling. It differs in several ways from the traditional Tarot, both in terms of its structure and in the way we use it.

First of all, it is designed to be read collectively. That is to say there is no single reader invested with the knowledge of the Tarot's symbology and the ability to interpret its response to the question posed. Instead, a reading of the DMC Tarot is performed by a Nocturnal Committee (that can consist of any number of people from 3 up, although the question itself is normally posed by a single person, the querent). Therefore it is preferable if the question is potentially of concern to all those present at the reading.

Considering the DMC Tarot cards themselves, you will discover that each card features a still image from a different film. Unlike the traditional Tarot, the DMC Tarot makes no distinction between Major and Minor Arcana, between face cards and number cards. The DMC cards are all mutable in their powers and have no fixed symbolic meaning. Every time a question is posed, the meaning

of the cards that the querent draws from the pack will be determined anew by the Committee's interpretation.

As a general point, we would suggest that rather than studying the cards one by one, you allow the DMC Tarot to reveal itself gradually over time through the readings you make, since the individual cards gain a special charge when they are activated by a question. It should also be said that using the DMC Tarot requires no previous knowledge of the films from which the images are taken.

## **DARK MATTER CINEMA**

The hypothesis that up to 95 % of the universe may consist of a combination of unobservable dark matter and dark energy has existed in various forms for more than a century. Almost the same time, in fact, as cinema itself.

Dark Matter Cinema playfully borrows this hypothesis to speculate on the invisible component of visible images, suggesting that we only perceive a small fraction of what any image potentially contains. As some of its early pioneers and theorists, from Eisenstein and Vertov to Jean Epstein and even Antonin Artaud, have noted, the images produced by cinema already had the power to grant us access to realms of perception that would be invisible to the naked eye. The Dark Matter Cinema Tarot is an experiment in bringing to light further potentials of cinema images –

potentials that normally remain invisible because of the way these images are instrumentalized by narrative. It does this by approaching them from a specific angle (in this case a question) which might allow us to discern signs or portents in the image of which we were previously unaware, and that in turn can give us a renewed vision of the world and our situation in it.

The images themselves are single frames, each representing a 24th of a second, an infinitesimally small fraction of the film's duration. We have selected them because of a peculiar capacity each has to arrest and step outside of the film's narrative flow, as though containing a secret that the film passes over or cannot reveal. Reconfigured by the question and the effect of montage produced in a DMC Tarot reading, the images are able to expand their infolded dimensions.

For this reason, knowing which film an image comes from is of secondary importance, as what it shows in the context of a reading may have little to do with the film from which it originates. That said, in certain circumstances it might add an extra layer to a reading, a possibility of sharing cinematic recollections, depending on how the film itself relates to the question. The important thing is to consider every aspect of the images that are drawn, and to do so in relation to the question. You will discover that as images recur over time, they will reveal aspects of themselves that you hadn't seen before.

## FORMING A NOCTURNAL COMMITTEE

A Nocturnal Committee is formed every time a group of people gather around a burning question that someone wishes to pose to the cards. As its name suggests, the Nocturnal Committee has something to do with the night. Drawing on the tradition of night committees as sites of dissent and friendship, the Nocturnal Committee meets at night, generating an enhanced experience of vision, at once lucid and intimate, for those in attendance.

But the term 'night' can also simply denote a nocturnal atmosphere or mood, as the reading could very well happen during the day, in a state of daylight insomnia. The Committee and the questions it poses pass through the night of the world, an interior night, suspended, 'that exists in phantasmagorical imagery, where it is night everywhere...' and, in a sense, the Committee exists also to traverse and face collectively these phantasms of night.

The Committee can consist of any number of people (from three up). The important thing is that everyone should be able to see and sense the cards' response.

## POSING A QUESTION

A key element in any DMC Tarot reading is the question we pose to the cards. Any kind of question is possible, though it should be one you are

willing to share and explore with the Committee, so questions of a highly personal nature are probably not advisable. The question should ideally not demand a single answer but open up a field of enquiry and reflection or be a springboard for collective fabulation. A good question also encourages us to use our intuition, not just our logical faculties. It leads to new questions as much as it does to answers. It is a question that might be 'posed in a moment of quiet restlessness – at midnight – when there is no longer anything to ask'.

## GETTING STARTED

As in all forms of ritual, including cinema, the preparation of the space is of paramount importance. Our own preference is for low lighting, while we normally use a red velvet cloth, either spread on a round table or on the floor. At the beginning of the reading, one member of the Committee is designated as the conductor. The conductor is responsible for setting the cards in motion and for laying down those drawn by the querent. Once a querent has volunteered to pose a question, the conductor asks them to shuffle the pack, all the time thinking of their question. The conductor should then spread the pack out on the table with the cards face down and using both hands begin moving the cards in a swirling motion, in either a clockwise or anticlockwise direction. After about a minute, the querent continues this motion while continuing to think of the question they wish to ask. At a certain point, the conductor asks the querent to stop and to select from the spread of cards the first that attracts their attention, an

action which the querent repeats 4 times, each time laying the card they select face down on the conductor's outstretched palm. The conductor then asks the querent to reveal their question to the Nocturnal Committee before laying down the cards, one by one, in cross formation, beginning from the bottommost card (see fig. 1).

## THE READING

When the 4 cards are laid down, everyone in the Nocturnal Committee should be given sufficient time to study them before beginning the reading. The Nocturnal Committee is invited to read the cards in the order in which they are laid down, and then cross-read them according to any correspondences, repetitions, inversions or contrasts that may occur. In this sense the spread of the cards can be considered a form of montage that is not necessarily linear.

In interpreting the cards, it's useful to think of their response not so much as a definitive answer as a way of unfolding other questions that the question contains or implies. As there is no correct way to interpret the meaning of the images, each interpretative act constitutes a partial hypothesis that the other members of the Committee may choose to build upon or dispute, as the case may be. The most interesting readings are often obtained through a wait and see (or see and wait) approach and by trying to be open to everyone's ideas, and to the energy of the group.

Once everyone in the group is happy that the initial reading has run its course, a 5th or synthesis card may be drawn by the querent and placed

in the centre of the cross (see fig. 2). This card shouldn't be seen as the final word but rather as a way of modifying the circulation of energy by introducing a new element. Often this card may announce a second phase of the reading in which all the cards will begin to resonate differently, possibly opening a way to a deeper understanding of the original question and all that it implies.

During the course of the reading, don't be afraid of moments of silence, hesitation, uncertainty, irrational ideas, glitches of language where the self begins to stammer. This is a healthy sign that the Nocturnal Committee is taking good care in allowing new spaces of vision to emerge.

*Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson*