Shuffling the Times of Modernism: Primitive Magic and the Making of Modernity*

Alessandra Violi

Abstract
This article discusses the role of the occult in the making of modernity through the material practice of tarot reading, a relatively marginal form of magic that gained surprising currency in a vast array of modernist cultural spaces, ranging from psychological laboratories to the visual and performing arts, from the esoteric rituals of High Magic to the secular magick of popular entertainments. This is taken as a test-case to reconsider the much debated opposition between modernity and primitive enchantment in the light of more recent historiographic accounts of modernity as a multilayered phenomenon, fractured into alternative and competing cultural conceptions. While making room for the occult among these other modernities, we suggest that the temporal montage allowed by tarot cards was a strategy already devised to shuffle the times of modernism.

Keywords: tarot reading, visuality, occult, cinema

1. Laying the deck

Whether T. S. Eliot ever learnt to read the tarot or whether, as he claimed in a footnote to *The Waste Land*, he was "not familiar" with it, the "famous clairvoyante" Madame Sosostris remains one of the most intriguing figures of literary modernism:

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. (*The Waste Land*, ll. 43-46)

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Through this female medium and her magic device, Eliot deliberately set up the poem as a *séance* of tarot reading, a move that has long been regarded as bizarre and idiosyncratic and that has been recently attributed as much to his "parody of the contemporary flotsam of the occult" (Luckhurst 2002: 267) as to the poem's "struggle with femininity" (Armstrong 2005: 125), perhaps in tune with Molly Bloom's dabbling in cartomancy towards the end of *Ulysses*.

Still, as this essay aims to illustrate, Eliot's game of playing 'primitive' magic off against (High) Modernism appears much less eccentric and parodic once we fit it into a larger cultural map of modernity. Indeed, with the re-charting of this map through the circulation of a marginal and often neglected occult phenomenon such as tarot reading, the longstanding opposition between modernity and magic has been giving way to an alternative picture of cultural modernism as, to use historian Alex Owen's formula, "the place of enchantment" (Owen 2004).

Despite George Bernard Shaw's complaint, in 1919, that the demotic fad for the occult was making the moderns "addicted to table-rapping, materialisation séances, clairvoyance, palmistry, crystal gazing and the like" (Shaw 1953: 330), the *séances* of tarot reading and the magical functions of the cards attracted the interest and fascination of a very heterogeneous range of enquiries and cultural practices. To start with the usual suspects: W.B. Yeats, well known as a committed spiritualist, handled the tarots to set up telepathic transmissions and healing at a distance (Leavitt 2007: 133-4), or to intercept the ancestral memories that he recorded in his poems, conceiving of them as 'electroencephalograms' of the collective brain waves. As Daniel Albright points out, even the shuffling of poetic images in Yeats' occult work *A Vision* (1925, 1937) is modelled on "a deck of playing cards" (Albright 1997: 39), a pattern that Yeats himself attributed to Pound's *Cantos* and its manipulation of "the four suits" in a random and ever-shifting order.

As well as being practiced in the numberless occult and theosophical societies that were proliferating in *fin de siècle* Europe, these rituals of élitist High Magic also became one of the staples of popular culture in the thoroughly secularised world of fairground fortune tellers, stage conjurors and illusionists. Celebrity magicians of London and Paris, such as John Maskelyne and Georges Méliès,

were quick to tap into the modern craze for the 'primitive' occult and to update their old repertoire of prestidigitation and sleights-of-hand with tarot reading, crystal gazing and clairvoyance, featuring them as novel stage wonders: the paradigmatic case, as we shall see, is that of Méliès, who, turning entertainment magic into modern cinematography (During 2002: 167-73), filled his movies with animated cards (e.g. *Le livre magique*, 1900, *Les cartes vivantes*, 1905) and tarot pictures. Conceiving of film frames as a pack of image-cards, much in the tradition of stage magicians who produced conjuring effects through trick slides and projection devices, Méliès brought the divining technique of 'cutting the deck' up to date as cinematic montage, the illusion-making trick that allowed him to cut his cards/frames and recombine them to amazing supernatural effects. In this light, it is not surprising to find that, in 1923, a *TLS* reviewer of the *Waste Land* turned down the "Fragmentary Poem" for being a mere "magic-lantern show", a spectacle set up by the poet-entertainer only to impress his audience with a projection of his slides/cards (Rickword 1923: 616). This is the same association between filmic phantasmagoria and divination as the one described by the French writer Raymond Roussel in the "luminous tarots" of his 1914 novel *Locus Solus* (ch. 6; a work that Eliot knew and appreciated), and which set off the obsession of modernist cinema – from Anton Giulio Bragaglia's *Thaïs* (1917) to Jean Epstein's *L'auberge rouge* (1923) or H.D. and Macpherson's *Borderline* (1930) – with card-like backdrops or fortune tellers.

Tarot reading also took centre stage in the burgeoning world of psychical research, where both professional doctors and popularisers of spiritualism started investigating the phenomena of clairvoyance and the role that cards and other magic devices played in them. The British quarterly *Borderland*, founded in 1893 by the prominent journalist and spiritualist William Stead to study those phenomena "on the borderland" of science that had previously been "relegated to Superstition" (Stead 1893: 8), reported in 1897 on a *séance* of tarot reading held in the bourgeois consulting room of a Paris medium to test her powers, coming to the conclusion that, despite the "abundant 'fishing'", there was "evidence of thought transference" though the cards were "merely dramatic accessories" (Stead 1897: 17). When French medical researchers into psychical sciences used the professionals of divination as laboratories for

experimental study, their outcomes were even more positive. Medical men generally regarded the mental states associated with clairvoyancy as pathological because of their relation with the degenerate hysteric type (Edelman 2003): from this viewpoint, the Swiss professor of psychology Théodore Flournoy observed the séances of Elise Müller in Geneva between 1895 and 1899, while in Italy the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso treated the trances of the medium Eusapia Palladino as neuropathological cases, and psychiatrist Gaëtan de Clérambault classified one of his hysteric patients as a "seer" (*La fin d'une voyante*, 1920). Against this wideaspread tendency, practising psychologists such as Nicholas Vaschide (*La psychologie de la main*, 1909), Eugène Osty (*Lucidité et intuition*, 1913) or Nikola Kostylev (*Le Mécanisme cérébral de la pensée*, 1914) followed "the exploits of fortune tellers, card dealers and prophetesses of the tarot" (Vaschide 1909: 433) aiming to uncover neurological workings behind divination and the role of the tarot cards. For instance, after experimenting on several clairvoyants, the doctor Eugène Osty hypothesised that the tarot was an "intermediary object" between the "radiating thought" of the card reader and the electro-magnetic vibrations emanating from the consultant, thus acting as a means for two brains to communicate without nervous connections and to create a hypnotic relay between them (Osty 1913: 300-5). And once again the comparison was made between the time-shifts in the clairvoyant's mind, the divining deck of cards and the modern time-machine of the cinematograph:

> There is a complete similarity between the artifices of subconsciousness and those of cinematographic films. [M.me M.] has the impression that the materialisation [of her visions] occurs in front of her eyes, next to her hand, and that she can almost touch the phantoms of her spirit, as if with her fingers. (Osty 1913: 385; our translation)

By contrast, Nikola Kostylev looked into the role of the tarots in the processes of creative imagination and examined the novelist Paul Adam and the tarots that he kept on his table, using a deal of cards to enter into the skin of the characters he was creating (Kostylev 1914: 289-91). This interconnection among medical science, tarot divination and aesthetic creativity was by no means restricted to

the writing process: in the performing arts, the somnambulistic dancer Madelaine G. (Guipet), whose medical trance shows contributed in the 1890s to the invention of a thoroughly modern dance form, appears in a series of photographs in doctor Émile Magnin's *L'art et l'hypnose* (1914) while she dances tarot pictures, performing unconsciously the gestures and poses of card images such as The Bateleur or the Devil (Magnin 1914: 202-203). Doctor Magnin attributed the phenomenon to the dancer's body acting as a projection screen for the invisible tarot-messages imprinted on the "astral light" (Magnin 1914: 202); an explanation that might also account for the widespread attraction of many modernist painters, from Paul Klee to Masson, both to the visual features – flatness and symbolic abstraction – and to the screen functions of tarot cards. These painted surfaces could indeed conceal *as well as* reveal the cosmic and psychic invisible, offering them a new model of pictures as interfaces for image-capture and projection. Reviewing Picasso's works for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1932, art critic André Lhote even jettisoned the myth of African primitivism and preferred to describe him as "a painter of out-sized tarots" (Lhote 1932: 228).

What was the status of this epidemic of the use of tarots? Whatever we might now make of Eliot's Madame Sosostris, this handing around of cards from Magi to magicians, from medical laboratories to "laboratories of faith" and then again to the arts, places occultism and primitive magic as one of the constitutive elements of modernity, inviting us to interrogate the competing cultural formations that contributed to its making.

2. Divining modernity

The key role played by the occult in modernist culture has of course been emphasised before. Revolving around Max Weber's famous pronouncement, in 1917, that Western modernity's rational and secular tenets had produced a "disenchantment of the world", critical (and especially literary) debates on the culture of modernism have often tried to rehabilitate the subordinate 'other' in the binary opposition "modernity *vs* enchantment". Thus, in Leon Surette's revisionist study aptly entitled *The Birth of Modernism* (1993), the late-19th century appeal to occult beliefs is mostly identified with

a high tradition of "noumenal wisdom" (Surette 1993: 26) – from the *Corpus Hermeticum* to Renaissance Neoplatonists, through non-Western religions down to *fin de siècle* Theosophists – and characterised as the reactionary response of a whole pantheon of modernist thinkers (Nietzsche, Yeats, Pound, Eliot) to the scientific and secular trends of modernity. In the light of the antimodernists' "belief in the 'spiritual' superiority of archaic and primitive culture" (Surette 1993: 253), the Eliotian pack of cards is interpreted via the mediation of occultist scholars such as Jessie Weston and G.R.S. Mead or of folklore expert A.E. Waite, whose short treatises *Key to the Tarot* (1910) and *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (1911) popularised the notion that the magic cards were the bearers of a secret code which had been materially handed down over the centuries to be deciphered only by a coterie of initiates.

Historian and philosopher Michael Dummett has, nevertheless, amply demonstrated that the divinatory function of the cards was a byproduct of the Enlightenment, when it was literally *invented* by a French mythographer called Antoine Court de Gebelin: in 1773 de Gebelin, in his *Le monde primitif analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne*, faked the cards' magical origin in the occult lore of the ancient Egyptians, turning the 22 images of what had been, since the 15th century, banal playing cards, into the hieroglyphs from the sacred book of the Egyptian god Theuth (Dummett 1996). Out of this grew their 19th-century occult pedigree. In *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1855-56), the French magus Eliphas Lévi added cabbalistic meanings to the cards' 'Egyptian hieroglyphs' and made them the ruling key to all the 'occult sciences', to such an extent that, in his groundbreaking anthropological study on *Primitive Culture* (1871), Edward B. Tylor listed tarots among the relics of ancient divination in the modern world (Tylor 1977: 82). Seen in this light, the magic tarot falls perfectly into the category of the many 'primitivisms' construed (and constructed) by modernity as its antimodern 'other', revealing more about the enchanted and mythic project of Western modernity itself than about any 'ancient wisdom' that it was supposed to have 'lost' or 'overcome'.

This blurring of the opposition between modernity and enchantment characterises the approach to the occult that Michael Saler (2006) calls "dialectical", identifying it primarily with the

Frankfurt School of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and their indictment of Western capitalism and its magic of commodity fetishism as "globalizing enchantment" (Saler 2006: 699). In his "Theses Against Occultism" (1946) Adorno dismissed astrology, spiritualism and divination as "the metaphysics of dunces" (Adorno 1974: 240), and pioneered an association between the occult and fascism that set the agenda of subsequent cultural investigations into the modern occult, now regarded as the mystic root of European totalitarianisms: Yeats and Pound are often mentioned in this key and the occult connections of Nazism have long been recognised. Despite this strong evidence in support of Adorno's thesis, in this historiographic approach, the occult remains therefore a fundamentally primitive, reactionary and antimodern posture at the heart of modernity itself.

Still, as we saw in the first paragraph, the circulation of even a minor occult phenomenon like tarot reading across a diversity of typically *modern* cultural spaces – popular theatres, private consulting rooms, medical laboratories and aesthetic modernisms – makes the claim for a retrogressive occult harder to sustain. Rather, it shows how magical practices intersected with modern processes in a hybrid and perhaps messier way than a unified notion of 'modernity' is happy to accommodate.

Take, for instance, the spurious coupling of clairvoyant divination and medical psychology. At the turn of the century, when the disciplining borders of scientific 'psychology' were still in the making – and encumbered by the residual tag of its being the 'science of the soul' –, the occult made a crucial contribution to inventing modern notions of the "psyche". As Alex Owen (2004) and Corinna Treitel (2004) have shown in their in-depth accounts of, respectively, British and German occultisms and the culture of the modern, the occultists' techniques of astral travel, clairvoyancy and other magical practices for achieving double or even triple "planes" of consciousness and a nontemporal reality present startling parallels with contemporary medical, philosophical and psychic investigations into the nature of consciousness, memory, experience and sensation (Owen 2004: ch. 4; Treitel 2004: ch. 2). To F.W.H. Myers, a pioneer theorist of depth-psychology and founding member of the Society for Psychical Research, the clairvoyant technique of "skrying in the spirit vision", that is, looking into the Astral Light by the mediation

of magic objects such as tarot images or crystal balls, suggested that there might be "something in the nature of Time which is to us inconceivable – some co-existence of Past and Future in an eternal Now" (quoted in Owen 2004: 176). As Owen rightly comments, the notion of time as a human construct, and the concomitant question of our concept of historical consciousness, "are two of the major signifiers of cultural modernism" (Owen 2004: 176) which were being construed along the porous borders between science and pseudoscience. After all, though Myers arrived at this conjecture by magical practice, other *fin de siècle* occultists were often willing to modernise their findings by adopting scientific protocols, as brilliantly documented by Roger Luckhurst with *The Invention of Telepathy* (2002). Medical psychologists meanwhile had to struggle for scientific validation by eradicating any trace of the occult from their work: the paradigmatic case is the well-known rift between Freud and Jung over, precisely, the 'taint' of the occult (Owen 2004: 142-4; Treitel 2004: 29-30). Though they carefully excavate the cultural differences between British and German occultisms, Owen and Treitel's studies thus converge in repositioning (cosmopolitan) magic practices among the "alternative modernities" (Treitel 2004: 51) that were in play at the turn of the century and that invite us "to rethink the ways in which 'the modern' has been conceived" (Owen 2004: 9). In this scholarly reconfiguration of the relation between "modernity and enchantment", the traditional historiographical narrative equating modernity with instrumental rationality and secularism is therefore superseded, encouraging a fresh picture of modernity as characterised by unresolved contradictions and competing epistemologies that undermine any simple opposition between reason and enchantment, secularism and superstition.

3. Shuffling the times of modernism

Yet another connection with popular magic further enriches this perspective on competing modernities. As recent revisionist studies on the archeology of modern media have begun to point out, the dialogue between the occult and the secular enchantments of entertainment magic played a major role in the emergence of modern technologies such as the cinematograph. Tom Gunning has

challenged the teleological account of the cinematic apparatus as a mere effect of technical advances (2004: 32-43), and has illustrated alternative narratives and genealogies, seeing the origin of the movie projection system in the yoking together of science and superstition that we find in the late 18th-century "Phantasmagoria". There the illusionist Etienne-Gaspard Roberstson put on magic shows conjuring up spirits with the aid of technology, thus denying the occult origin of *séances* while turning them into a popular form of visual entertainment. Although they continued to exploit the widespread belief in the supernatural occult for their stage performances, 19th-century professional conjurors such as John Nevil Maskelyne in England, or Robert-Houdin and Georges Méliès in France, were often enlisted by skeptics as experts in those special effects – such as materialising ghosts and astral visions through mechanical devices – that would expose the occult as an illusionistic game, a mere technological trick. André Gaudreault is right, then, to suggest that "we have to invert our way of looking at things, and no longer think of magic as coming to the kinematograph, but rather of the kinematograph being placed in the service of magic" (Gaudreault 2007: 173). In a seminal study on *Modern Enchantments* (2002), Simon During has likewise drawn attention to the pivotal cultural role played by modern stage magicians in their hovering across seemingly contradictory discourses, such as post-enlightenment rationality, the new formations of secular magic *and* the occult beliefs of 'real' magic. As anticipated, the case of Méliès is paradigmatic of these ambiguities: while the mid-19th century magician Maskelyne circulated his exposure of spiritualistic *séances* mostly through publishing (*Modern Spiritualism*, 1879), the modernist Méliès exploited his collaboration with psychic doctors and occultist circles to transform traditional stage-magic into the modern cinematographic *séance.*

In the 1890s, choosing the "alternative modernity" of cinema as a machine for playing magic rather than scientific time-capturing, Méliès turned the screen into an occult mental scenario, where the inner workings of trance, clairvoyancy and time travel were displayed to the audience by means of the magic tricks of cinematography (Gordon 2001). Thus, looking at a screen which often reproduced the flat-looking symbols of tarot images (see, from the Marseille pack, The Tower in Méliès' films *Barbe Bleu*, 1901, and *L'équilibre*

impossible, 1902; or The Moon in *Le cauchemar*, 1896 and *Voyage dans la lune*, 1905) became the profane equivalent of a clairvoyant practice, a "skrying in the spirit vision". What to Myers was the supranatural intuition of the "constructedness" of time (see again Owen 2004: 176), to Méliès was the surprising similarity between the mechanism of divination and the cinematographic trick of montage, of which he is famously regarded as the inventor. What makes the tarot pack an instrument of divination is its infinite combinatorial power: like a single film frame, each tarot card takes on meaning only in contact with those that precede and those that follow it. Yet, even though the contact can form a chronological and narrative sequence – thus divining past, present and future – the cards themselves are timeless or outside time, and thus ever ready to generate new sequences and to change their symbolic meaning at each shuffling or cutting of the deck. In this way, the practice of divination implies a continuous montage of meanings and of temporalities, a combinatorial mechanism that Méliès used above all as a trick for magical metamorphoses, but that was also suggestive of the mixing of past, present and future in the clairvoyant's mind. As we saw earlier, doctor Eugène Osty had already picked up the analogy between the artifices of cinematography and those of clairvoyancy as early as 1913, at a time when the first cinema theorists were comparing film images to Egyptian hieroglyphs. Well before Eisenstein made the comparison explicit in the 1930s, American writer Vachel Lindsay dedicated a chapter of his 1915 book *The Art of the Moving Picture* to this analogy, describing film as a game of cards that begins with cutting out the eight hundred Egyptian forms in black cards and shuffling them as if they were a pack, while on the white back of each card its abstract sense should be annotated (Lindsay 2007: 118-20). Call it postmodern *avant la lettre* if you wish, but this is cinematic montage as a deconstructive game of tarots, a device for jumbling and crossing time-lines which was elaborated by (so-called) 'primitive cinema' long before Italo Calvino made it thoroughly 'modern' in his tarot novel *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973).

In this respect, it is telling that card divination as a magic montage of Time was adopted in another sphere of modernist visual culture, namely that of art history, to replace the progressive narrative of modernity with the shuffling of temporalities that the tarot game

allowed. Between 1923 and 1929, art historian Aby Warburg, who has achieved in contemporary visual studies almost the status of a postmodern hero of alternative modernities, combined his scholarly expertise on Renaissance magic with the modern visualising techniques of cinematography to conceive his (incomplete and uncompletable) project *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a cultural history of images charted as a montage of cut-out pictures laid out on black panels. As art critic Georges Didi-Huberman has recently shown, Warburg's *Atlas* was largely inspired by the practice of divination, putting the art historian in the role of a diviner who would "play with the cards of art history" and shuffle their temporalities, endlessly re-combining them in new decks to map out alternative cartographies of time (Didi-Huberman 2011: 59-62). So, for instance, the dark screens of the *Atlas* lay out primitive astrological symbols next to modern flying machines (the god Mars and the Zeppelin, plate C), characters from ancient mythology next to those of contemporary popular adverts (Medea and a woman publicising toilet paper, plate 77), interrogating modernity and enchantment as entangled times within the same 'hand of cards'. Plates 50-51 show us the magic technique at work in this alternative historiography: two packs of tarots and other playing cards appear under the title *Handbarmachung*, meaning "making handleable" or "manipulable", which points, as we have attempted to show elsewhere (Grespi, Violi 2012), to a different handling of the cultural archive in the light of its time-knots and material contingencies.

4. Madame Sosostris at the movies

A deck of tarots on a table, a gramophone and a telephone: these are the media of communication and reproduction that are insistently shown together in *Borderline* (1930), the avant-garde film that modernist writer H.D. made with her partners in the Pool group, director Kenneth Macpherson and Bryher. Herself a committed believer in occult doctrines and practices, H.D. features in the film as the clairvoyant Astrid, a name reminiscent of the 'astral' light that she often skries into by consulting a pack of cards. It is her tarots that act as the screen on which Astrid foresees her own death, a prediction that marks a turning point in the movie and that will soon be made true (for the spectators) by the filmic cards.

As Susan Stanford Friedman remarks, *Borderline* is a provocative experiment made by H.D. to "articulate a modernism of the margins" (Friedman 1990: 89), and cut across the binary distinctions of modernity by juxtaposing characters and cultures that occupy borderline spaces, whether in terms of race, psychology, sex or politics. But, as Laura Marcus and other commentators have more recently pointed out, the cultural theorising of *Borderline* depends crucially on the performative use of montage as projected vision, on combining colliding shots – as H.D. put it, on "the cutting and fitting of tiny strips of film" (H.D. 1990: 119) to make shots of polar oppositions interact – as if they were "hieroglyphs" of the unconscious (Marcus 2007: 360-67). In addition to being the creative force behind the film, H.D. took material care of its cutting and editing, producing the thoroughly disjointed and "clatter montage", which she described in the *Borderline Pamphlet* accompanying the film as a way of reconfiguring the tensions within modernity through palimpsestic temporalities, images and concepts. Thus, for instance, questions of race, gender, or cultural conflict are rendered by montage through sudden flashes and juxtaposed shots of hands, "a flash of white hand or the high light across the knuckles of a black hand" (H.D. 1990: 111), a hand that holds a knife, puts a record on the gramophone or reads tarots. This is how montage turns film into the projection of "a dream": "*Borderline* is dream and perhaps when we say that we have said everything" (H.D. 1990: 121), and this is what most strongly indicates that H.D. positioned herself mid-way beetween cinema and the modern(ist) technique of Freudian psychoanalysis.

More fundamentally, however, in *Borderline* H.D. was shuffling the cards of modernism, still making use of the alternative modernity of the occult at a time when its 'primitivism' was otherwise being fetishised by the surrealists as a reserve of the 'marvellous'. André Breton decked the 1933 cover of his journal *Minotaure* (n. 3-4) with a hand of tarots, inviting the reader to join in on a venture into the enchanted world of dreams and female mediums, at the very moment that surrealist photographer Brassaï was portraying *Les mains de la chiromancienne* (1933) as magic instruments for interpreting the secret wheel of life, and exactly when director Jacques Feyder was exploring the fatalistic implications of tarot reading in his film *Le grand jeu* (1933).

By contrast with both the surrealists and psychoanalysis, when H.D. recounted the therapy she underwent with Freud in 1933-34, it was to divinatory tarots that she compared both her visions and her dreams. The "picture-writings on the wall" that she hallucinated and that made her similar to "psychics or clairvoyants" (H.D. 1956: 61-5), effectively recapitulated the technology of cinema as magic projection and card-reading: at first the patterns on the wall seemed like shadows, flat silhouettes cut out of light as if "stamped on picture-cards or even […] on playing cards" (67); then they became static images thrown with "a pictorial buzzing" (71) as if by a magic lantern; and finally they turned into moving pictures, drawing themselves on the screen of the wall (77). H.D. then offered up these picture-cards to Freud as a symptom, so that he could "tell [her] fortune", thus challenging the Professor's claim to have divested himself of the 'taint' of the occult:

> My own skinny hand would lay the cards on the table – here and now – here with the old Professor […]. If he could not "tell my fortune", nobody else could. He would not call it telling fortunes – heaven forbid! But we would lead up to the occult phenomena, we would show him how it happened. […] I have said, with the Professor, that I would lay my cards on the table. These were those cards […] Here is this hieroglyph of the unconscious, […] the hieroglyph in operation before your very eyes. (H.D. 1956: 59, 67, 70)

To H.D., the other modernity of primitive magic was still resilient, encapsulated in the borderline gesture of a hand that lays tarots on a table to divine time; not as a surrealist flight into the ahistorical realm of enchantment, but as a subversive interrogation of the narrative time-lines of modernity and modernism, be they those of subjectivity, science, technology, or history. Her complex comings and goings between the expectations of 'modernity' and the 'unmodern' occult can thus be seen as paradigmatic of a concrete 'experience' of modernity as the overlapping of different and conflicting epistemic models or temporalities, whose relations we have only just started shuffling into new patterns of understanding.

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