

Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson

seeing together  
in the dark matter  
of the image



Cover: Nocturnal Committee at CAMP Studio rooftop, Bombay 2018.

Many thanks to the members of the Nocturnal Committee who have shared their visions and time with us: (in Tuscania) Ayreen Anastas and Carla Bottiglieri and Léa Bouaroua and Corrado Chiatti and Joanne Clavel and Claire Doyon and Marlene Fantoni and Rene Gabri and Giulia Gabrielli and Thomas Greil and Anne Lacoste and (in Lecce) Julien Boyer and Cinzia di Meglio and Emilio Fantin and Uta Gerullies and Nikolay Oleynikov and Johannes Pfister and Alessandra Pomarico and (in Aubervilliers) Flavie Pinatel and Mariusz Grygielewicz and Nicolas Boone and Mathilde Villeneuve and Alexandra Baudelot and Josep Rafanell i Orra and Fabrice Reymond and Farida Gillot and Ariane Leblanc... and all the many others whose voices came from the night.



# Dark Matter Cinema Tarot

## Prelude



## Notes towards a Vernacular Technology

How do we open up spaces for sharing thoughts and conversations that facilitate the creation of different ways of being together, talking, seeing, inhabiting the relation between “selves” and “others”?

How can we break free of the trap of individualistic, proprietorial subjectivities and move towards the construction of transversal, common visions?

How can we unmoor ourselves from normative models of time linked to productivity and efficiency to let in heterogeneous forces and multiple temporalities?

What can we do to extricate ourselves from coloniality and capitalism so we can dream our own dream? And how can we refuse the kind of power “that has been refused to us”, and for which in any case we would have no use?

The Dark Matter Cinema Tarot is part of a broader research project

that tries to confront some of these questions through the construction of a new tool of conviviality. An investigation that seeks ways of unlearning conventional uses of language as part of a collective effort to re-enchant images that we began to develop during our Artist Residency “common infra/ctions” at Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers in 2015 and whose trajectories are still in progress.

Obviously, we borrowed the notion of “dark matter” somewhat provocatively from physics in an invitation to try to see together parts of the image that remain invisible, latent, marginal, forgotten or that simply elude perception.

More specifically, the idea to conceive a tarot from cinema images in parallel to our filmmaking practice came out of a deep passion for films and the potentials they harbour. But also from a desire to make tools for speculative thinking and collective storytelling - tools that give space to different temporalities and rhythms that can resonate and sometimes “dissonate” within a collective conversation, a gathering or an event.

We like to think of the Dark Matter Cinema Tarot as a “vernacular technology”, a tool for exploring images in order to open up new channels of perception while sharing personal, aesthetic and political experiences. It’s also a tool that can help us unlearn our habitual ways of speaking and spending time together that will



hopefully foster collective modes of enunciation as well as a shared field of relations based on care, solidarity, perhaps even magic. And we have come to think of these coming communities as a Nocturnal Committee.

When a Nocturnal Committee is summoned, participants are invited to pose “burning” questions to the Tarot and read the cards together. In sharing their visions the members of the Nocturnal Committee often imagine alternative narratives and histories, weaving together associations, dreams, memories and reflections into non-hegemonic forms of knowledge and non-knowledge. Each time in this nocturnal temporality a community, however temporary, comes into being.

Once a question has been posed, the constellation of cards appears as an ever-changing composition that looks at the same time towards past and future, opening up possible new paths of thought through the interplay of figures, gestures, forms and forces.

Rather than a definitive answer, together we often discover further questions that lie buried within the original question, entering into a convivial process of speculative description and collective fabulation, sym-poiesis (or making with) and tentacular thinking, while making room for flights, drifts, pauses or moments of intense silent concentration.

In creating the Dark Matter Cinema Tarot, we have reimagined the

78 cards of the Marseille Tarot using a selection of still frames from cinema. Through its proximity to daily life, cinema provides us with powerful images that can expand and complicate the symbolic meanings and functions of the Tarot's archetypes.

The nature of the question and the montage of images the cards form in their response can profoundly alter the sense of what these film stills convey and make visible. For this reason, as an artwork that unfolds and reveals itself over time and in different spaces, the Dark Matter Cinema Tarot is indissociable from collective engagement with it.

When we start to pose questions to cinema images, they can reveal things to us that aren't immediately visible in the context in which they normally appear. These invisible potentials inspire and channel conversations and discussions in ways that help free us from the impasses and rigid subject positions in which we sometimes become entrapped when talking about important issues.

The multiple voices of the Nocturnal Committee connect, narrate and speculate upon myriad echoes, correspondences, symmetries and oppositions that traverse the cards, giving rise to a proliferation of perspectives on the question that expand its horizons in unforeseeable ways.

It isn't necessary to know which film an image comes from, although this can contribute to creating new, sometimes destabilis-

ing relations between archives, memories and stories of everyday life. Different cosmologies, cultural assumptions and experiences, both personal and political, can all enrich the reading of the images and help create a convivial and magical environment. In this sense we can also say that the cards gain a healing power through the community that uses them and vice versa.

A reading of a single question may go on for a considerable time, a time in which the manner of our being together intensifies and opens itself to other, perhaps non-communicative forces.

Long after a reading has ended, participants can find themselves mentally returning to the responding constellation of images, as though they were being called upon by the palinopsia of this memory to uncover further meanings and interpretations.

We have now conducted a number of collective readings in many parts of the world, in venues and situations ranging from museums to film festivals, from cinema and art schools to intimate small groups of friends and activists, from conferences to improvised street gatherings, each time inviting those present to pose burning questions on the issues closest to them:

Where can one look for hope?

How do we want to live together?

Are we going to exit from the state of emergency?

How do we get out of this cage?

What is the worst that can happen?

How can we live a life in common that preserves, and enhances, our singularities while not neglecting the political challenges that we are facing today?

What forces can combat the current resurgence of fascism?

Will technology destroy our communities?

How might one reconcile the call for action with the need for meditation and reflection?

These are some of the questions we have addressed together through the years. The collective enunciations they gave rise to on each occasion sketched a dynamic portrait of a coming community...

We have taught each other to discern signs in the spaces between stars and to read the intervals between images. To the many eyes of the Nocturnal Committee, the smallest detail flickers with the aura of a hidden knowledge, a glimpse of a multiplicity of narratives and communities to come.

After a first gathering in Aubervilliers (Paris), Nocturnal Committees have so far taken place in Athens, Madrid, Bombay, Barcelona, Lussas, Palermo, New York, Lille, Tuscania, Eindhoven, Lecce, Bilbao, Marseille, Lüneburg, Nantes, Yerevan... and more are being organized.

We have also published a limited edition of the cards, with a booklet featuring ideas and methodologies to share. Anyone can organise a Nocturnal Committee, and we often receive messages with surprising photos and insightful reflections from these readings.

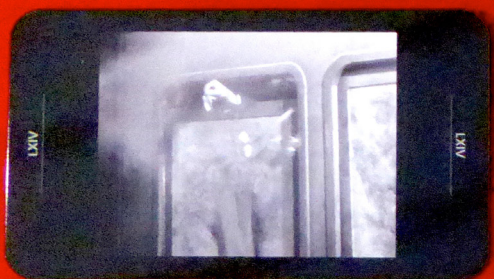
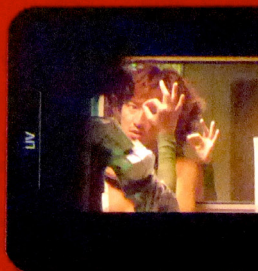
Here we present transcriptions of three collective readings. We hope that as you follow them, further visions may reveal themselves to you and so carry on the infinite conversation.

Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson



Nocturnal Committee - Aubervilliers (Paris)

“Are we going to get out  
of the state of emergency?”







– In the first image... it seems we have a slightly open train window, with a hand protruding. It appears to be a woman's hand, dropping what looks like torn fragments of paper out of the window, 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, who knows. Maybe a letter to the president... or a letter that the writer has torn up, or perhaps the tearing up of the response... An image of futility, in any case. Such a small hand.

– What strikes me in this image is the idea of journeys, border crossings and identity papers... Someone prevented from travelling might decide to tear up their papers, or might be beckoning us to tear up our own papers, as a way of resisting the state of emergency.

– But who has the luxury to tear up their papers? Those who already *have* papers.

– And also those whose papers are invalid, worthless.

- It seems to be an old train, therefore an image of slowness as opposed to high speed trains that are made for bureaucratic efficiency.
- Maybe it's our 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 to a mysterious place. It's taking the passenger somewhere else, not where they want to go...
- The train establishes the direction of travel according to specific, regulated routes. Here the torn ticket, or letter, seems to escape the idea of a fixed destination. The journey is aleatory, multiple, unpredictable...
- Scattered to the winds.
- For me this train window is an image of oppression, imprisonment, preventing someone from leaving... like those millions of people on the planet who cannot go anywhere.
- 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 might be confirmed by the second image... a guy with his hands up... as though someone were threatening him. Maybe someone with a gun. There's also the question of the reflection here...
- Somebody in the foreground we can't see is wearing what look like rubber or latex gloves. It's a bit menacing. Or 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 in these cards. The gradual revelation of a person through the disclosure of different limbs. Hands in particular. And in the second card, you see the body, the presence of a whole person.

– So, in terms of gesture... in the first card the hand gets rid of a torn document, in the second the person has his hands up and in the third card... it's a 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 this is the size of the space of freedom we have left, 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 guy remains unconvinced.

– It depends where you live. In Brazil, I believe that gesture means something completely different...



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

– 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 Manuel Valls...



– The other guy might have his hand in his pocket.

– There's also the question of the size of the figures. And the Greek statue behind them...

– The statue could refer to the origins of Western democracy, on which the two men have turned their backs.

– So... they're like figures of power in front of a Greek statue...

– Maybe it's Aphrodite, the 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 a luxury good, a museum piece. As I believe Rancière said, the

hatred of democracy is manifested in the adulation of its fossilized institutional forms.

– There's also a pattern of disruption, zigzagging or fractured lines, like a cartoon image of TV interference.

– Yes, 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. Perhaps something to do with the camera angle, like a surveillance camera.

– And 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 trumpets, so it's more like a half-baked apocalypse...

– Because obviously we have to make cuts.

– Yes, it's the austerity apocalypse!

– Now we have to pick a fifth card...

- In this image there is a man lying down and beside him there is a dog...
- It seems to me that the dog is eating the guy. He's like a corpse the dog is feeding on.
- Somebody who sleeps in water is someone who's obviously not doing too well.
- At first glance, I thought the dog was aggressing the man but then I realized it wasn't the case.
- The man is in a foetal position.



- Is it an image of helplessness?
- He looks afraid.
- Again, there are broken lines. The rippling water 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 to the water... trying to listen to something below that is also echoed by the direction of the two trumpets in the bottom card, which as we said could be like megaphones pointing up...
- The dog is watching over him.
- Or he's listening...
- It's quite ambiguous.
- But the guy is suffering. He's in a kind of marshland, a swamp.
- It could also be a man-made canal or a gutter... a sewage outlet. Something toxic at any rate.
- It's like the swamp we're stuck in!
- But the man 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 it's protecting him.
- Is the man 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.

– At the same time his posture again evokes the image of a train. A missing image... 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 card, and he's trying not to hear. Or to listen to something else.

– He seems somehow exhausted, folded into himself.

– Lying on waves... listening. The idea of listening is 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.

– 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 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.
- 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.
- And from that opaqueness, we pass to transparency. But here the gaze is caught by the deceiving mirror that only reflects back the self who looks.
- This reminds me of the images we are given on the news... they 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.
- Yes, perhaps it’s a question of switching off our devices and trying to listen to the undercurrents.

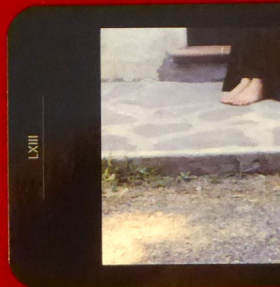
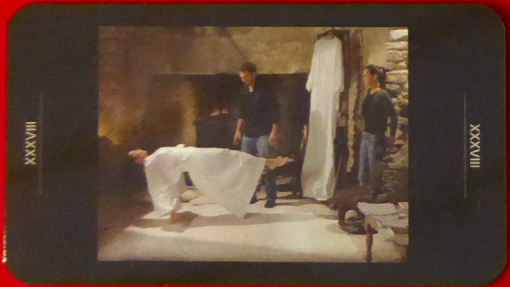
- The situation is troubled, the story hasn't yet been written...
- I see that fifth image more like a corpse in the water. I don't see anything poetic or any hope in that.
- But no, look... there's so much light in that image.
- Reading the horizontal line... if the future is a holdup and the present is a swamp of stopped time, we have to return to the past and take the train to another destination. And the letter we throw out of the window is either our identity papers or it might be like Rimbaud's *lettre du voyant*, something that has permitted 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 aside from the ideological interpellation of individual subjects. And then, there is the other of the other... the dog and the deep water. In this final card the state of emergency is as though somehow over. So we take the train, tear up the ticket to get to that point.
- 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, of 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 all seems 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 saying that we should turn to other kinds of living beings, in a state of emergency...
- A dog isn't a symbol, it's a dog. But there's a bit of multiplicity anyway... the dog, the man, the water...
- Do animals sense the state of emergency?
- They sense our anxiety.
- They feel when something is not right.
- They can also sense it when they're being sent to the slaughterhouse.

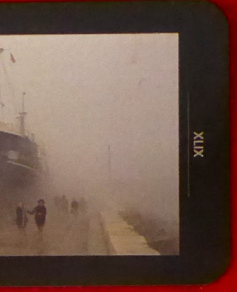


Nocturnal Committee - Tuscania

“How can we live a life in common  
that preserves and enhances our singularities,  
while taking into account all the political challenges  
we are facing today?”







– I see patriarchy, I see torture... can we have more light? Ah, I can see better now... It could be a theatre of some sort. It might also be some kind of game... I'm trying to figure out what this is... It shows a person, most likely a woman, who's been tied up... is she tied up?



- No, she's possessed...
- She's floating.
- She's levitating!
- It looks as if she's on a table.
- But there's nothing underneath.
- That's because the levitating is happening on a horizontal plane.
- While the second card, the one on the right, feels like an integration of the senses through a kind of electromagnetic field.
- Let's say, a hands-on TV... therapy.
- The first image is one of weightlessness, of levity, of a body that is

not supported, that is suspended, floating. And the second is an image of weight, of a body supported... So there is something weightless and something taking the weight.

– What I find amazing is that we've just done a body exercise that had to do with gravity and levity, and the first card seems to be connected to where we are coming from...

– This idea of levity could be very positive for the commons because of the question of lightness, while gravity... I associate it with the heaviness of everything.

– But in somatics we say that to feel light you have to feel your weight... And if you don't feel your weight you don't feel light, only if you have a sense of your weight can you feel light.

– The first card makes me think of the idea that we can accompany singularities in this process of levitation, this inner world that can tell us many things we didn't know. We can accompany people in having other types of visions. And then, on the TV, the image is also blurred... and yet the vision is coming from the screen...

– But it's like static, electricity or a white noise sort of effect...

– Electric and magnetic.

– If I experience levitation in the realm of dream, which is very real to me, I am floating, and it's an amazing feeling. And that realm of the poetic, of the dream in relation to the body and the electromagnetic

field for me is more a kind of disturbance of this field, in the cells...



– This magnetic field is exerting too much control over our lives, all these fields of invisible signals are in opposition to another sphere, other fields – like dream and spirit... Also in this second card we have a person alone, left with the TV, while in the first there are some writings to the side, costumes, books, plays maybe...

– To go back to the question of levity and gravity and the dimension of collectivity and levitation... How difficult it is in a group to be light, to let go, not to feel the need to hold the weight, just let yourself be supported. Because you think that it is hard to bear the weight but sometimes it is even more difficult to do the other thing, to let go of responsibility, and to know when the group can carry it collectively and construct an ecosystem of levitation where the weight is distributed. That takes a lot of time and trust and care... So this image of levitation is a very interesting image of lightness...

– I would like to go back a minute to what I was imagining at the beginning... I understand now why I mistook the first card and I saw an image of torture while it's possibly the reverse... It was because at that moment I saw torture transmitted through television, and I reprojected that mental image straight away onto the first card, without paying attention... So the idea that the common, if we are not paying attention, if we bring an image that we already have from something that is...

– ... weighing on you?

– Yeah, that is not the common, that is more the spectacle, something we've inherited, some kind of powerful force, whether ideology or... We really have to pay close attention to what we have in front of us.

– I was also thinking that in the first image nothing is touching anything else, in the sense that the woman is floating, the guy is standing over her, observing, there is another woman at the side... and then there is this strange dress, maybe it's a nightgown...

– Extra...

– Extra... an extra-presence, an extra-thing that we don't know exactly what it is...

– But there is a level of the unknown as well. Because we have these two people... it feels as if they had just entered the space, and they are a bit surprised. Of course the atmosphere is slightly eerie, as the dress is also something impossibly long for a person and...

– It's unwearable so it doesn't correspond to any body or anything like

that...

– ... or just maybe that it will enable an even higher form of levitation, it's inviting us to wear it...

– Going back to the second card, we have an image of weight, and then we have this image of touch. And I was thinking about the haptic, and the relationship between touch and seeing. And here there's a hand on the screen, which implies a relationship between touch and vision, I mean the person in the image is not actually seeing the screen, is not in the position to see it, but is touching it...

– But there is a table supporting it, the guy is not lifting it, he kind of holds it, embraces it...

– To me it's like a touch that collapses... because it's an intimate touch but it's also collapsing, somehow...

– ... it feels desperate...

– ... an embrace but of something that is not organic at all...

– ... and the screen is like a kind of skin, although when you normally touch skin it evokes visions... but here I see it as evoking words, words that are scrambled, without any sense...

– It also reminds me of the fact that when you used to touch a television screen you would feel some static and now you don't, with the digital you don't feel anything... but here you feel the static, like a tickling or a tingling.

- Perhaps it's also telling us that we are losing our sense of touch because we are always behind a screen.
- To me it feels very lonely, you are left alone with this old TV which is not even a tactile screen... and he is trying desperately to hug it...
- ... and there is also something like in Cronenberg, the TV is becoming part of his big belly, and he is holding the belly because it's painful, and he has really bad cramps...
- It feels very urban, with artificial lights, whereas in the first image we are out of the city...
- ... maybe in a castle?
- ... on a day like today, in the countryside!
- It's like a basement... it could be skylight, from a window, or it could be night. Yes, it's definitely night.
- I was thinking of these two images like a shot/reverse shot. Not to create a binary opposition. But in the sense that one has an upward trajectory, towards the sky, while the other's is downward. So one is rising and the other is falling... it's like the yin and yang movement. And I was thinking about Chris Marker's "Le fond de l'air est rouge" and how we would play with this and say that "the base of the air is common"... But then with this image I was thinking it's like: "the base of the common is air"... or let's say something immaterial.
- Yes, because there is also a lot of debate around the common in terms

of whether it is something with a material or immaterial base. And some of the “materialist” commons people want to equate it to forests and trees and lakes and... ultimately something that in the worst case could just be reduced to resources, strictly speaking. And then there are others who want it to be very immaterial, something that risks being like nothing.

– Thinking about these two images, the traction of the immaterial sphere, because the electromagnetic waves of the TV might anticipate the digital commons... it’s interesting that an image like this should have this kind of falling movement, something that would ostensibly be totally immaterial is burdened with the weight of gravity. So perhaps there is something here about what kind of relation we should maintain to this sort of immateriality of the common... not to think that it’s simply a question of the digital, of data flows... And I wonder: can we relate to a common whose foundations are like air, like the air we breathe, that is immaterial? And if there is something rich in that kind of air, which is not necessarily the same kind of immateriality as what we could call digital life...

– But then of course on a TV of this period we would talk about “air time” as well, so air would have this double sense... as being also a kind of space. The TV set carries the memory of media as something that once existed in a delimited space and time, one that “closed down”, that was not infinite as in the same way as the digital.

– If we read the image dialectically, I mean it’s not necessarily good or bad, it’s more like a parable, two faces of a coin, or something like a



lesson... so we have to try to figure out what the lesson is...

– And if we imagine that the woman who is levitating gets sucked into the screen? I mean, that her levitation goes so far that it transforms her into this field of immaterial electromagnetic waves. And the man is desperate because before, at least, she was levitating but now she is somewhere in another dimension, in this box...

– She's static...

– Ex-static...

– White noise...

– The conjugation of the material and immaterial dimensions of the common is quite interesting. How do you conjugate the two things so that one doesn't disappear, so that you don't lose the body, or you don't lose the lightness – what the immaterial air gives you in terms of circulation, a lightness that is not just material... It's a question of conjugation, of how you produce a kind of grammar, and what kind of grammar would it be that puts those two things together. In a way this question is present in the very relation between these two images...

– Is it maybe a question of coordination with the air? A balance where you need the air...

– I was also thinking about the question of belief, the role of belief in the distribution of lightness and weight.

– In both cards there is an element of ritual. One is more linked to the

idea of the magic of the body, or being connected to natural forces, and the other is more related to solitude, but through another dimension...

– But what I see in the second card is also the problem of wanting the immaterial to be material. But then you have the disactivation of the television... because it's not someone sitting in front of the TV but doing something else with it...

– Maybe he's desperate because he lost the image!

– He's trying to fix the TV.

– That means losing memory too...

– Well, what is important is what kind of narrative we tell ourselves.

– Losing sight...

– Losing the spectre...

– That's something both material and immaterial.

– He doesn't want the image to come back!

– Or maybe it's some kind of shamanistic practice, shaking the TV to allow different images to emerge...

– And so a new image can appear... the third card. Where we have the mist, and the boat arrives.

– There's definitely fog there... and water.

- I hope it's a good situation...
- We don't know...
- It's not clear if the ship is arriving or leaving... but it seems like a dock.
- I think they are definitely leaving. And people are saying goodbye.



- They seem to be running...
- This would connect to the question of migration. People being forced to leave... and how can we share, how can we imagine a process of commoning with people who arrive, with people who are running away from something...
- The image of the boat... I can't help but think about images of boats from the Armenian genocide. I don't know if this is just a regular ship but the fog allows me to think about these images... sometimes certain

images cannot leave your imagination...

– The mist... that reminds me of the white noise of the television...

– I was thinking about the expression “grasping at thin air”... It’s interesting to consider how in these images even the air has a kind of materiality... so you could see these images as containing, through different manifestations, the same lesson of a certain kind of physicality to the air. So the juxtaposition between material and immaterial might be false... to go back to this divide, in relation to the common.

– What do you mean by “grasping at thin air”?

– It can be many things... It can mean that you are making things up, or it could be an act of desperation but still something comes out of it... Like a desperate hope, and then at that moment something happens. You know, like by chance, you are grasping at thin air and then something is caught.

– So that also connects to the question of belief in a way, belief that you can catch something, that your idea would bear some kind of fruit, however preposterous it may seem...

– This idea that something could happen in this way reminds me of the question of collapse and desubjectivation and the experience of working with mentally fragile people who undergo continual collapse... When nothing is possible, when you just break down, this collapse can be the moment when something actually becomes possible, when something can actually happen, but you have to go through it... And

we have a tendency in our society to avoid this total collapse, always to maintain some hold on something that would bring you back, that would return you to the dominant reality, you keep your grasp on it – however small that grasp is.

– So then the question of the collective is really crucial because... could you do that alone? Can you collapse alone? How can you exit from a lonely collapse? We have to imagine spaces where we can collapse together...

– Or consider the importance of holding space in allowing vulnerability and collapse... that's another question to think about.

– There can be a relationship between the first two images. After having a collapse alone, a levitation is possible. In common, ritualised...

– Or maybe the levitation happened before the collapse.

– But again, if we look at the dialectical image, what appears to be falling is also levitating. So this experience of falling is also the experience of being held... it's like the sense of the collapse, it's to feel that something is holding you... and try to build up a sensual framework to feel what is actually doing that, which we are normally prevented from experiencing.

– That question of collapse and holding, or supporting, is very present in the fourth image...

– It looks like a flood.

– Well, if the first pair of cards is strongly oriented toward the air, or the immaterial, in the second pair water plays a crucial role... We have a ship, we have the sea, we have a river...

– ... and movement.

– Movement, flow, something like a voyage. And running even...

– Disaster maybe?

– Not necessarily.

– It's in my mind...

– Points of arrival, points of departure, points of arrival... Here, some people have arrived, it seems.

– But we don't know if the ship is stopping or if it will continue on its way.

– I was thinking again about "thin air", because it seems to me that the third image is a thickening of the air. The fog is air that is thickening to the point that it actually becomes water. The air itself is something that you can see, that gains substance.

– This really touches upon the third aspect of our question, the challenges of politics, of external reality... it evokes the situation of refugees, and how we can conjugate it with the other images. The fourth card looks very strange. It seems like people abandoned in the mud...

– But they are holding each other...

– Yes, but there is something close to catastrophe for me. Between the boat and this image... – I can see the catastrophe but I also see that the bodies are really supporting each other.

– There is a profound sense of imbalance. Also the land is slightly askew.



– The cards seem to raise a number of questions. How can I regain my verticality, how can I stand up on my feet when I feel I'm sinking, when I feel I'm almost dead? How can I deprogram myself from the weight of the media? In other words, how do I let go of the sense of obligation that I have to be always informed? It's very difficult and painful... And then, if the common is a journey, it will have to involve some risks because I don't know what the landscape is, I don't know if I'm on the boat and if I took the right luggage with me... And in the fourth card there is the question of the family, I see our family...

– Talking about the continual feed of media and information... one thing that is quite interesting in relation to the second card is the col-

lapse of the image, the image not being able to support itself anymore. I have a feeling that we are reaching a moment when this kind of ideological quilting of “business as usual” is reaching a point of collapse, it cannot sustain itself any longer. Everything in the image is falling apart, the image of politics or even the spectacle of politics in Schmitt’s sense of the state as a loop of self-acclamation is disintegrating. But the question is, how long this unsustainability can sustain itself? So in this image of the TV there is a kind of nostalgia for a time when there was no feed but there was a point where it could just go off... and you could sleep.

– And dream.

– And empty yourself.

– And it becomes white noise.

– Because the feed is not nourishing. I don’t feel nourished by the feed. It’s toxic.

– White noise is like cutting off.

– But I was thinking about the question of water flowing in the fourth image. That it flows through... the people are in the water, I think they are all in the water... and there is one person standing.

– Is there a chair in the water?

– Yes, there is a man sitting, and a woman standing, just at the side.

And the water is flowing through this scene. And it’s also quite shallow,



I mean it's not deep water. So when you are talking about the flood, it's almost like you can sit in that water and let it flow through. There is something about letting go, you can actually let it flow through, and it would pass, and it passes...

– It may go to the sea, this water flow... what we see is part of the bigger image that we don't see, it depends on how we see the bigger image...

– The off-screen.

– But she doesn't look happy, holding the other body...

– So it's like a burden?

– The water is also memory, the place where memories are stored. There's something about these two girls and the stream of memory... For me it's to do with the memory of the earth through the water, through the river, the currents...

– Also the top and bottom pair evokes a dual face. One has a locality, the other one is in the open, in the unknown, in the uncertainty of fog. This relation between a journey and a very specific place. And in this sense also two of the figures in the fourth image are looking at you. So there is a kind of responsibility invoked through this gaze. Because you have a coordinate that says, in this journey there is also a very specific place that holds you, and yet it connects you because of the water.

– The sense of connection created by the direct gaze is also interesting... The first thing I thought was that it resembled a family grouping... like a family photo gone wrong. So this evokes an aspect of commons

and commoning in terms of a non-nuclear family: is this family grouping the image of a kind of interiority, where the question of care is always present? Who is holding, who is supporting, who is taking the weight, and who isn't...

– ... and who is collapsing. Who is standing. Who is vertical. Who is horizontal. All the different ages...

– Yes, because the eyes that look out seems to say that it isn't just an interior group, it also evokes the possibility of expansion. The relationship of the inside to the out. Zones of inclusion, and how they open up to widen the field.

– In this image there is something very peculiar... it's in-between... nobody is really holding or standing... everybody is a bit off... on the edge of collapsing...

– Some seem to be sleeping.

– That's another way of seeing horizontality... I see a strength in the woman who is horizontal in the first card. That position is a strong position. It may also refer to singularity. That singularity means also preserving some kind of potentiality that is not always active... And the relation between the white dress and the sleeping figures is also like saying that singularity isn't me but the element of the unknown in me...

– I was thinking about this clothing being too big... in a way it's interesting to see that it's bigger than a body, so I see this dimension of potentiality in it. It's almost as if it becomes a road, or a path...

- You can stand on top of each other to wear this dress!
- It's like the dress is too big to fill, you would need another body, another life... and then it's also like an arrow to the sky... like infinity. We can talk about processes of singularisation here. I mean, that can be multiple. Yeah, so this dress is interesting because of its oversizedness in relation to the common.
- It's like a promise, but it's in the middle of the fog...
- For me it can be intimidating because it's too big, I will never be able to fill it...
- Or maybe it needs to remain empty, unfilled, it's a question of potentiality, of the possible. - Yes, the potential is always greater than the realised.
- So perhaps we are ready for the fifth card, the synthesis...



- Here I see a figure of the threshold, the border, between inside and outside... I can't help talking about the actual film it comes from now.

The woman is part of a group of people who have lost everything during the war and decide to settle in a village in ruins, and live a life in common. But their autonomy and resistance to “progress” proves intolerable to the state... as well as the fact that they occupy land that they don’t own, even if it is abandoned, disused. If I remember well the film was shot not far from here. Similar paving stones, same kind of light...

– It’s almost as though we have come full circle. The image here is of a woman with her bare feet on the ground, in contact with the earth. So the question of gravity is very present, but perhaps more important is the question of presence itself, of being in and occupying a place with the determination to hold to it. To perhaps sink roots into the earth, yet at the same time we have the question of elevation, of being slightly raised from the ground by virtue of the paving stones and the step.

– Perhaps this elevation is the result not of fugue or mysticism as appears to be the case with the first image, but of construction, of building... the way the community have built their own homes. Which is not to say that it is necessarily a corrective to the images of suspension, precarity or imbalance. Perhaps it’s more of a complement as much as to say that the commons, whatever it consists in, whatever its modality, must also in some sense be co-constructed...





Nocturnal Committee - Lecce

“How do we want to live together?”









- The first card... I see a mother, a family... mother and children in a poor home... Yes, there is poverty there, some sort of deprivation but also simplicity and a sense of... dignity. It seems like a place where time has passed and has seen the passing of many layers of stories and histories. I also see a child playing an instrument, a flute. Maybe there is another mother too, holding a child in her arms... It could be a place where women live together with their children. There is scarcity but they seem tranquil... I don't see suffering but I see poverty, maybe...
- It's a mysterious card. With this door, and the frame of the door...
- Someone entering through a door is just the perfect beginning for us. A great dramatic way of starting to read the cards together.
- Yes, it's important for us to start with someone entering a space.
- But maybe the flute is a kind of invitation to exit the room...

– You mean to enter?

– No, to exit.

– Or to pass from one space to another. In fact I see two rooms...

– The woman standing seems to be waiting. And the child invites her to come into the second room, where the atmosphere looks more pleasant.

– I see the sunshine coming in.

– And perhaps the flute is a symbol of happiness, connection...

– Annunciation!

– I have three different visions here. The first is a phantom, a ghost. The second is related to a gypsy kind of situation. And the third is Maria Tsvetaeva, the poet, the way she was living during World War I...

– I see... two different spaces, and the door is crucial here, the question of passing through the door... I think the woman carries a great tension in her body. It may relate to whether she wants to go through the door or stay in the space she's in. Also... it's difficult to tell whether she feels entitled to come in, or even welcomed, invited to come towards us... she seems to be hesitating, wondering whether to come towards us or not.

– She's looking at us!

– And she is also looking towards the other room, where the child is playing the flute. We don't know if the child is aware that she's there, if he and the others are aware of her presence, because they're not look-

ing at her, they're immersed in their own concerns... But the woman seems to be dressed for the outside. So we don't know whether she's coming in or going out. And it must be quite cold because she's wearing a heavy coat.

– How do we want to live together? Something I find very striking in relation to the question is that everybody seems to be... together but existing in a different rhythm. So I was thinking about the relation between time and rhythms because each person seems to be doing a different thing. Another remarkable aspect is the material quality of the surfaces, of the walls... they are extremely varied. Sometimes one has the tendency to uniform a wall or a house whereas here the card shows us all these different material textures. The layers are all there, they've remained with time, you can almost see the work of time...

– A crucial question here is whether we want to invite people experiencing different degrees of poverty to live together with us... in a kind of community. Whether Europe invites them to come in or not.

– I see a threshold... The threshold is a key symbolic moment. And what is interesting here is that the woman is at the centre, still deciding whether to pass the threshold or not. And the quality of light gives this idea of morning becoming noon so... who knows? There is hope there.

– I feel much more an invitation to leave, to go out.

– The fact that she is looking at us involves us immediately. Because her gaze is directed towards those who are looking, not the other people in the space who are all self-absorbed... She is looking straight at us.

– But sometimes one can listen without looking at a person... In that way you can listen better to what's happening around you. And the child playing the flute makes me wonder what kind of music he might be playing. If he's playing a tune that he learned or if he's improvising or inventing a new tune... This can relate to our question because it makes us think whether living together involves improvisation of new melodies, new harmonies, new musics of cohabitation or whether it will inevitably mean playing tunes that we already know. Or maybe both?

– But the gaze is predominant, she looks straight into the camera, she looks straight at us and we are on one side of the threshold while she's still there, on the other side.

– Another thing I notice is that everybody apart from the woman is close to the ground so... thinking about the invitation to join the space... is it a question of sitting down, of lowering oneself in order to be closer to the ground, the earth? Her standing position indicates that there's a kind of tension which has to do with dignity, her singularity perhaps, but her body is also in tension with the other bodies on the floor... And this being close to the ground takes us to the second image, on the right, which opens up the question of being connected to the ground or taken away from it.

– In the second card there is a force that is sweeping the girl away, and she seems to be wearing a school uniform.

– So that can relate to education.

– A monster...

– The hook of a giant umbrella.



– The relation between education and the idea of kids being taken away or kidnapped even... They are taken away by one force or another. Because the question of school contains this complex tension, and it may relate to the desire to stay close to the ground. Does education help one stay close to the ground or is school and the school uniform somehow connected to being pulled away from an intuitive connection with the earth?

– And from childhood...

– It's a violent gesture.

– The sun is bright and promising here but at the same time there is something tragic happening. A removal... from a kind of paradise, from a playground where people can relax.

– The girl doesn't have the same posture of dignity as the woman in the

first card, she's completely passive.

– And her body is bent.

– I was thinking about the way we dream of the life we want to live together... I wonder if there is some material external force that prevents us from building something... from living in the way we would like to live. A force that removes us from the ground.

– But maybe we want to be taken away from the paradisiacal moment, we don't want to be completely there nor to belong to it, we want to lose this paradise...

– Where do you see paradise? It's a banal scene with rubbish strewn around... I see plastic, old toys, maybe it's a playground but not so paradisiacal...

– The gesture is very ambiguous... on one hand it could be a force that is interrupting something, tearing it away quite violently... but at the same time it could be a very interesting break.

– Like a rupture...

– A rupture which produces some kind of change.

– So we're in the middle of learning something and we are taken away from a place we thought we belonged to, but probably didn't...

– Maybe from our planet that we destroyed and now...

– The whole thing looks quite artificial. If one was pulled away, the

natural reaction would be to try to hold on.

– It's almost a dance gesture...

– But also a gesture of not wanting to leave...

– It looks like something mechanical... like a merry-go-round.

– To me this card is linked to the first through the fourth, at the bottom. I'd call it "initiation".

– So what would the fourth be for you?

– Maybe "sacrifice"...

– Yes, the first and second card are linked... They both convey a sense of suffocation or exhaustion, the need to escape something... To me this perhaps illustrates the idea of unlearning.

– It could also symbolize something artificial that is pulling us away from a more authentic form of life.

– Yet at the same time the landscape doesn't seem natural. And in the schoolgirl uniform there's a sense of non-belonging...

– Actually, the artificiality of the posture produces a strange kind of linkage between the girl and the "force". The girl's form seems to reproduce the form of the "thing" that is taking her away, this hook...

– Yes, it's like they're hooking each other, a very weird linkage because it cuts against the idea of a violent removal from nature and moves



more towards the idea of mutation, metamorphosis... The “thing”, the hook produces a mutation in the person being removed. The very act of removal implies a process of mutation.

– Which is painful.

– It may be painful... but from the image it’s hard to tell.

– The fragile body of the girl being swept away from a place she knows by this metallic hook... and being taken who knows where... it’s very traumatic.

– Perhaps she’s being taken away from habit.

– From her comfort zone.

– Daily life!

– But the hook seems violent.

– If we think about it, the word “hook” conveys a sense of pleasurable dependency. You’re hooked on something. The way digital devices, networks, all these hooks function... you get hooked on stuff that actually takes you away from being here and now, in the present... with the lure that the present moment exists more fully and vibrantly online, in the network, because the information flows are continually renewing and updating that sense of what is now.

– I also feel a rotation, an oscillation, a kind of swing.

– While in the first card there is a sense of perfect stillness.

– I see a connection between the second and the third card, at the top... another removal from daily life, from the comfort zone. A jump without net into the sea, into the abyss.



- The guy is wearing work clothes...
- Here too there is a hook, at the end of a fishing line... An idea of suspension, but the movement is different. It's downward here while in the second card it's upward.
- At the beginning I thought it was a tightrope-walker who had lost his balance and fallen into the abyss... which means that he's made a radical choice to walk on the line, with the risk of falling.
- I am moved by the parallel between the third and the fourth card... water and fire are two forms of initiation or baptism...
- Two challenges...

- ... and they both require considerable courage.
  
- Maybe it's about defying gravity because the man is falling but he still has his hat on.
  
- I see this card as a result of the others... at the beginning we have a sort of epiphany and then, through sacrifice, there is a kind of initiation. And the consequence is a dispersion of the ego... For me this is the key to be able to live together.
  
- I was thinking of a text by Roland Barthes, the one on how to live together... and these two images, the second and the third, are very relevant. One shows someone being extracted from a situation and in the other we have somebody falling alone in the abyss. They are both scary moments, they suggest that the question is not really "how we want to live together" but what kind of challenges we have to go through in order to arrive at this. And our individualism is clearly going to suffer.
  
- Like a loss of orientation, losing the ground under your feet... maybe there's the small hope that the rope will hold, that it will not break.
  
- But the rope also indicates a controlling force. You're falling from a height and there's a rope around your leg... and in the end perhaps you will lose your leg, you will lose part of your body... that's even more scary.
  
- In the second card the girl doesn't want to be swept up whereas here the jump seems voluntary...
  
- It's a bit like bungee jumping... and if the rope is elastic you're not

going to lose a limb.

– So this might mean that you need to retain some small part of your ego in order to survive.

– But jumping into the cold water doesn't need to be fatal if there is someone holding you.

– Dialectically speaking, the one who holds you can be your saviour or your torturer, it depends...

– This question of falling and the dissolution of the self in the oceanic expanse... Falling, collapsing, going down... somehow it relates to the impasse of our society. It seems that we need to fall, collapse, hit the bottom in order to understand that a radical change has to be made... and yet we are continually being held back, suspended, there's something that prevents the fall from fully happening... We're always pulled back by the system of "security" or arbitrary power on one hand, and this smiling reassurance that the economy can be relaunched on the other...

– Like the green new deal, this optimism that capitalism can be saved and that we can continue more or less in the same way... We can change something but we cannot provoke a fall that will finally destroy the residual belief that the system will resurrect itself. And people continue to vote, still thinking that one government will do better than another, they continue to hold onto this thing that suspends them and prevents them from hitting rock bottom.

- But maybe if the man detached himself from the rope he wouldn't crash into the ocean but land in the first card.
- It's interesting how the other images are framed more or less at eye level whereas in this third card the perspective is either that of a drone or god...
- Or a bird?
- Or a helicopter.
- To me he looks like a superman in a tuxedo who's going to save someone... It's kind of comic.
- But this is not a human being, it's a puppet. It gives you a sense of lightness because it's fun, like the circus.
- I think these cards are more about what we have to go through in order to arrive at the question of how to live together rather than offering a straight answer.
- They speak about obstacles, challenges, leaps in the void that you make believing that something will save you, you may lose something in the process... but there is always something you can hold on to, although you need the courage to jump. Forces that don't allow us to go in the direction we desire... There is violence and pain in these processes but if we look at the fourth card it's very oneiric, with the child in white outside the burning circle.
- A child and a horse and a circle of fire, symbolically it's very powerful.

But who is the man on the horse? It feels like we're entering another dimension here.



– I think that the fire relates to the question of climate disaster. You've got a ring of fire, this guy on a horse, who looks like a knight, a figure of relative power... but he is still in the service of some higher authority and is trapped in the circle of fire. This reminds me of Australia, of Scott Morrison... there are bush fires raging everywhere in New South Wales, many people and animals have died, and this guy is still in total denial about climate change. I see the complete imperviousness of the political order to the situation... and the kid is outside, a bit like a Greta Thunberg saying: "The house is on fire and you don't even see it, you're just standing there in the middle of it."

– I think that the child is looking at the horseman because he thinks he should be there, on the horse, and someone has taken his place. But there is fire around the horse that prevents the child from entering, from taking back his place.

- It doesn't seem too difficult to cross the line but at the same time the two figures look so distant from each other. And the horseman is imprisoned by the fire.
- Actually, all the cards show different forms of prison, different types of cages... family, school, work...
- Or borders to be crossed.
- Comparing the first and the fourth card, the relation of the higher to the lower figures is different in each case. In the first image there seems to be a possibility of change, a shift, an understanding, a conjunction, a potential passage across the threshold. But here, in the fourth, the situation seems fixed, petrified, as if there was no possible passage. Maybe it has something to do with the feminine component in the first card...
- But it's also because the first image is the only collective situation.
- As we said referring to Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble*...
- The idea of the idiorhythmic community, people living together but each following their own rhythm.
- Though in the fourth card at least there is some eye contact... a reciprocity of the gaze, that seems to imply a questioning of the border.
- At the same time the fact that the child and the horseman are looking at each other contributes to the insuperability of the barrier... while in the first image there is no direct confrontation of the gaze between people, you don't have this call saying "recognise me, recognise my

group, my tribe”. And somehow this call demanding recognition is one of the things that impede the possibility of living together. There is a moment when recognition becomes overdetermined, and is no longer a process...

– Because a real process is about other types of movements... it’s about inclinations, it’s not just “I am this and you are that”.

– In the bottom image it seems the child is calling for the attention of someone who is superior.

– But it’s also the horseman who demands that the child recognise his authority.

– Perhaps we can draw a fifth card, the synthesis? As a way of renewing the circulation of energy that passes among the cards.



– Ah, here in the fifth card at least we have a net!

– Again, we have two figures who are separated, and again a force that prevents a fall.



- But here there is definitely a relationship, the woman wants to help the guy, there is dialogue.
- It's ironic, the Renaissance background looks like a painting of an annunciation.
- The man could be angel...
- Or a slave, who's been captured.
- And there's the idea of being trapped in an elevated space, a space far from the ground.
- It's oneiric, atemporal...
- To me it's very theatrical, very constructed.
- Perhaps it speaks of how difficult it is for women to be on the same level as men, and symbolically about the need to balance the female and male components within us.
- The safety net suggests that the guy has fallen but again, he is suspended. The net makes me think of the digital, the Internet... of being trapped in this unreal, floating suspension. Even in terms of the real things we live, through this mediation we're never completely connected to them, we're suspended over them. No matter how much information we gather, it's never felt in a material way... unless it's something that actually involves us directly.
- Maybe this is truer for men than for women.

– I think that the invention of the web and the way it has enveloped the world has separated human beings from their spiritual dimension...

Here the man seems to be in an abstract situation whereas the woman is in contact with the earth.

– And the woman calling him to come down seems to relate to the image of the child looking at the horseman, as if to say: what are you doing up there?

– And again there is this question of separation.

– More than separation. Incommensurability, I would say...

– This card is kind of crazy, even hopeful. You have this typical iconography from the Renaissance where everything is perfect and in the right place, except of course for this guy which makes it absurd, ironic.

– Irony can be helpful, if we are talking about living together.

– But in Europe the Renaissance was also the birth of the cult of humanism, centred on the self-realisation of “man”, and this pulled subsequent discourses of liberation, human rights etc. in the direction of man, specifically western man, not woman. This is what creates the disequilibrium in the image, because it just shows what was already there.

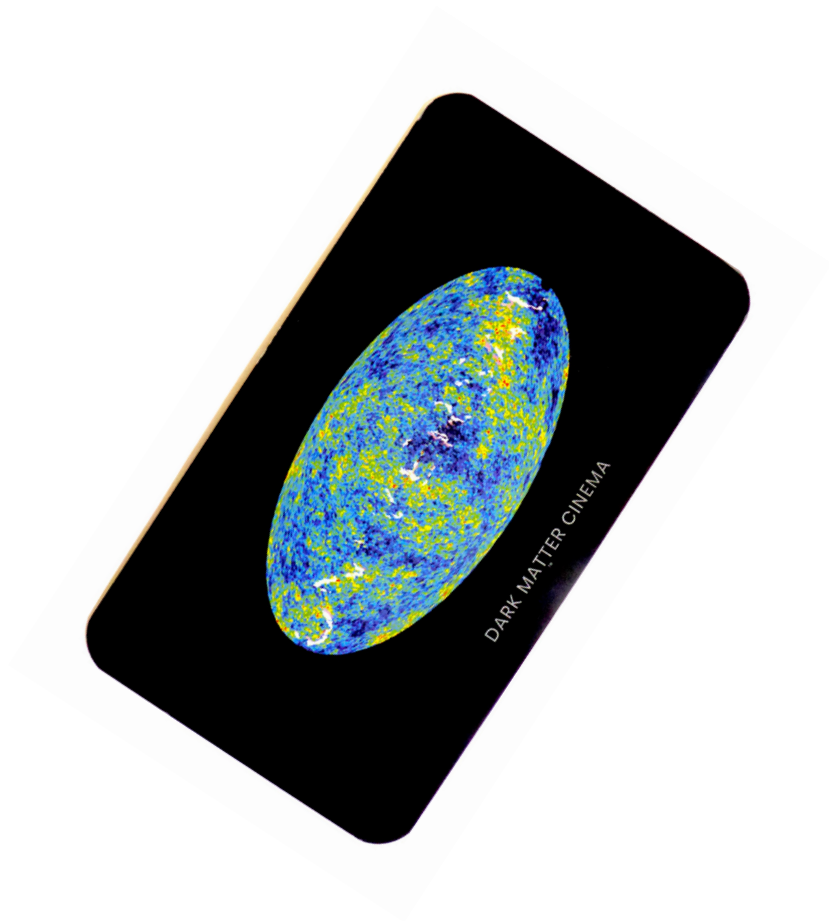
– Nonetheless it also contains an element of the unexpected.

– I don't know... this series of prisons - work, school, family... in a way this image serves to confirm the patriarchy that underpins them.

- But the supposedly superior figures are trapped somehow.
- The first card is the only one that gives a positive indication of how to live...
- Although I don't see much positivity in that poverty, apart from the light.



Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson are filmmakers and artists interested in the porous border between fiction and documentary. Their work often makes use of cinema to reactivate lost or forgotten archives and histories and to foster new modes of collective vision and engagement with politics, literature, the art of story-telling and the power of the sonic. Their practice includes the creation of short and feature films, exhibitions, sound works, film-performances, radio shows, vernacular technologies and books. They recently completed their fourth feature film, *Common Birds* (2019), an experimental reworking of Aristophanes' play "The Birds" set between Athens and the ancient forest of La Gomera, which proposes new alliances and fugitive interspecies relations between sounds, images, languages and lifeforms. Aside from their film work, for several years they have been developing a research project, "common infra/ctions", that forges connections between strategies of unlearning and idiorhythmic play. This includes the Dark Matter Cinema Tarot and the Centre for Language Unlearning, both of which have become nomadic tools. Their work has been presented, screened and installed worldwide and they regularly collaborate with other artists, groups and collectives. They are currently based between Paris and Palermo. Among other projects, they are involved in the development of firefly frequencies, a vernacular radio for insurgent forms of life and (un)learning, in partnership with the Ecoversities Alliance.



*a project in progress, published with the kind support  
of the Ecovercities Alliance.*