

the magician



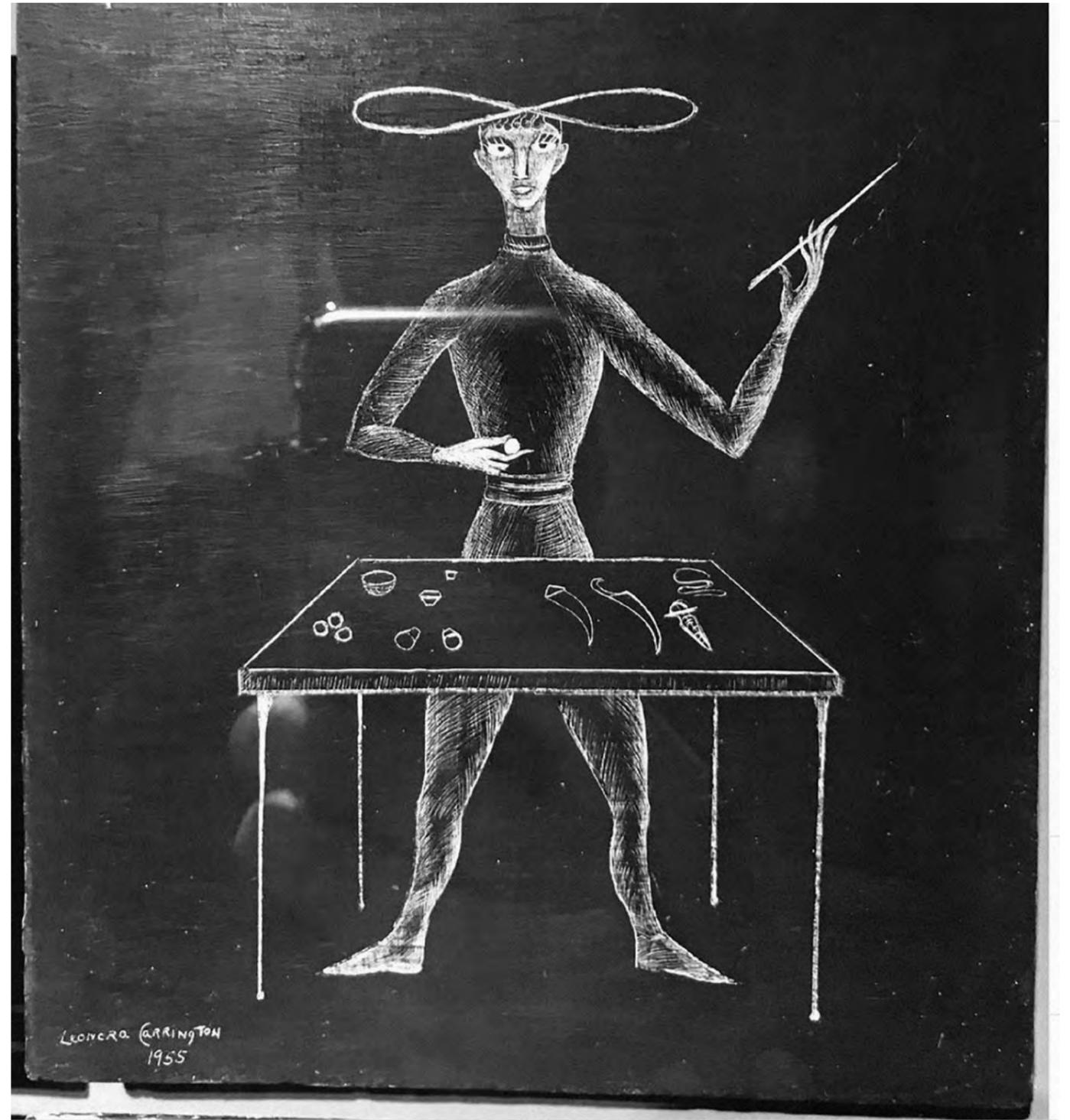
the magician



Magic  
spring / summer 2021

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the magician



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Inked Fabric

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Negative / Positive.

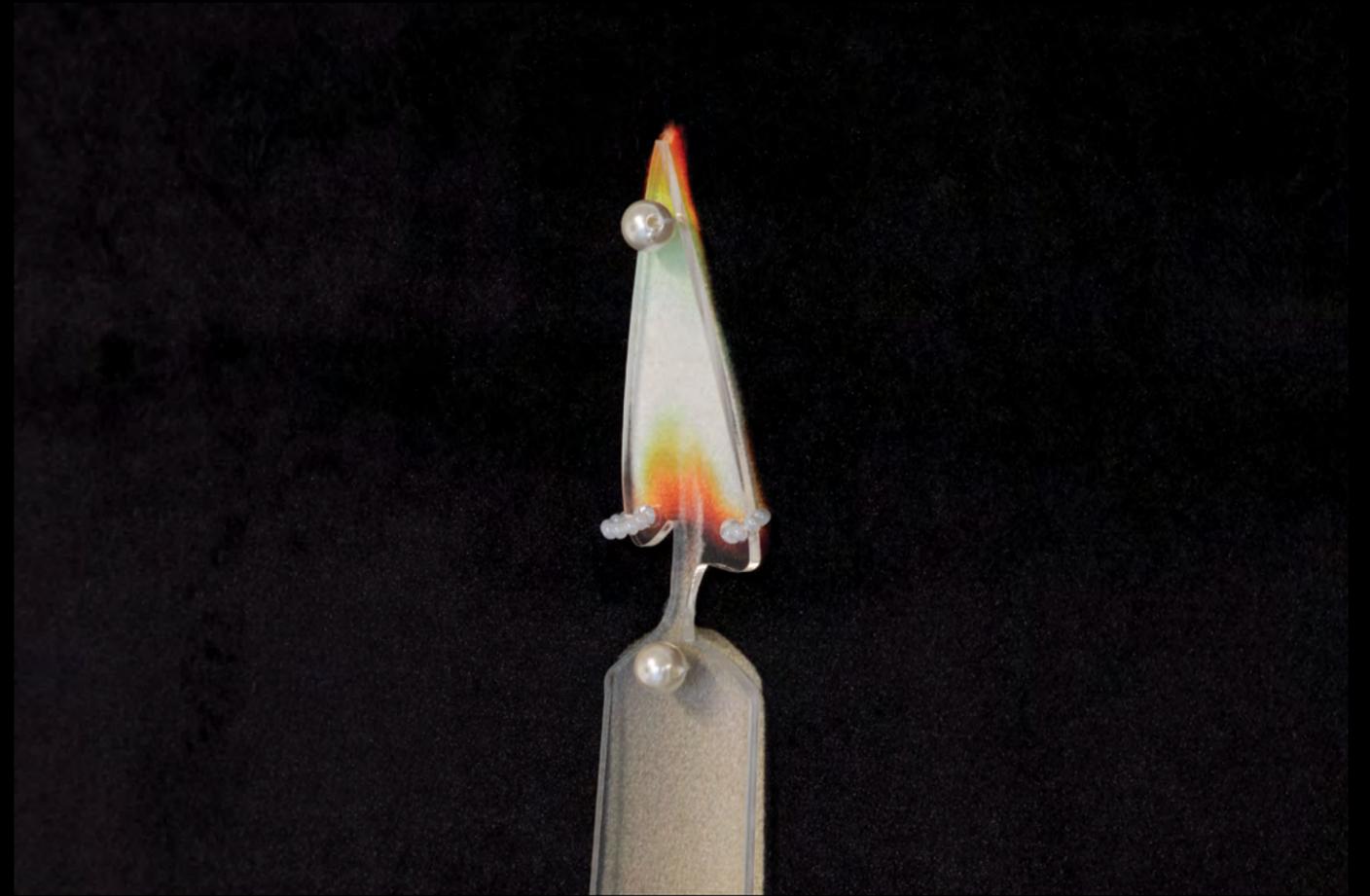
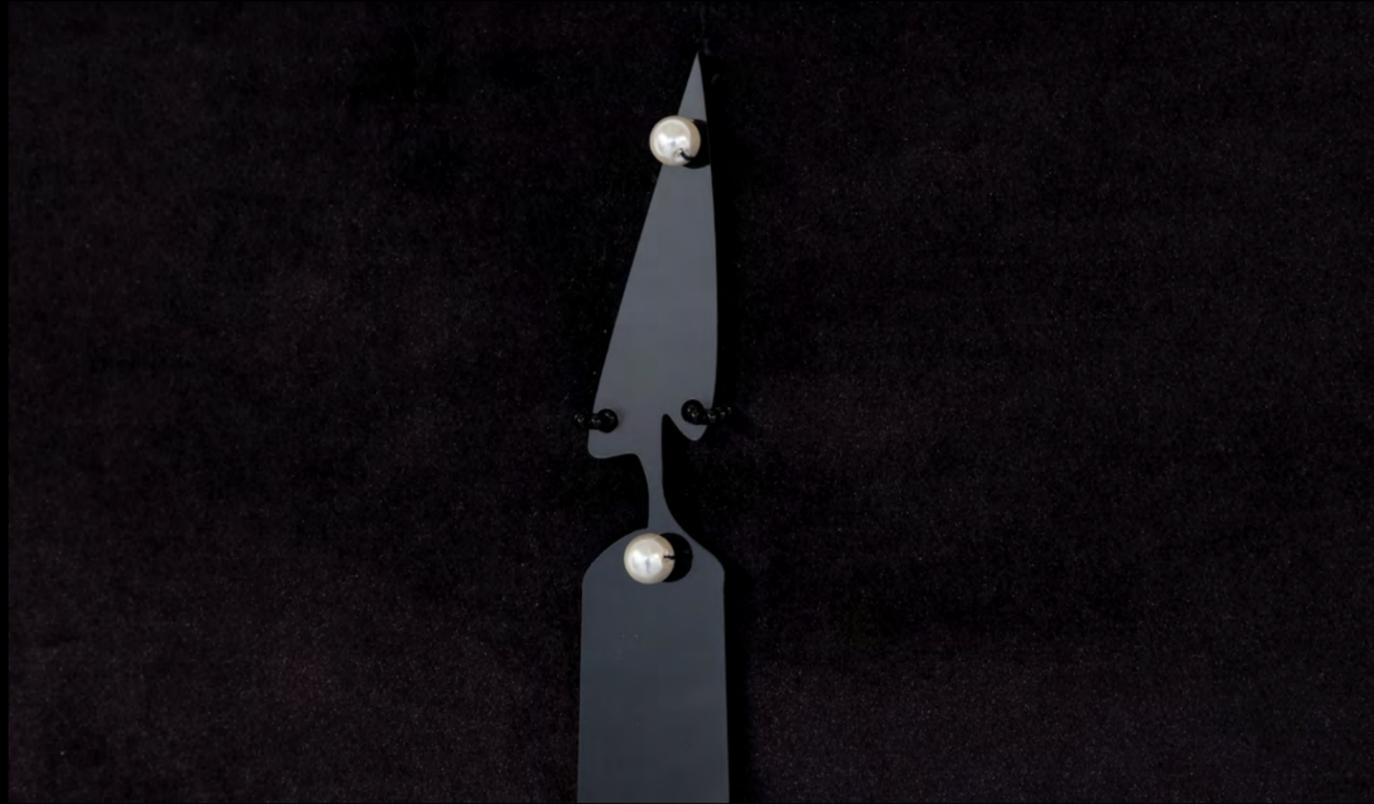
Mary Warner Marien p. 14. Reverse logic

"Until the advent of digital photography,  
the negative was the element of photography in  
which many photographers took the most pride

reverse logic

Reversibles.







the magician



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# A Magician For Everyone

by Charlie Gere

It is something of a cliché among commentators on the Tarot that the cards act as a kind of psychic mirror. In the foreword to his book *Tarot: Mirror of the Soul: Handbook for the Aleister Crowley Tarot* Gerd Ziegler suggests that 'Just as we use a mirror to observe our exterior, we can use the images of the Tarot to approach our inner reality'.<sup>1</sup> If the Tarot is a mirror, then what interests me here, in relation to Stella Baraklianou's work, is its tain, the silvery materials that make mirroring possible. Stella's construction of metallic, reflective versions of the Tarot card the Magician offers new understandings of the Tarot that go beyond the new-age metaphysics offered by Ziegler and others.

Stella describes her own encounter with the Tarot and with the first numbered card of the Major Arcana, the Magician, and how he appeared both in readings of the cards and on her screen, and became a close companion, especially during the strange times we have been living in.

The Magician appeared, in Tarot readings and on my screen. During this past year, a lot of wonderful things happened, amongst other bad occurrences. Comet Neowise appeared to be seen in the dusk sky; the planets aligned, Saturn and Jupiter. Mostly it was a difficult year. The Magician became a close companion: Mercurial, like the planets in the night sky. Capricious, playful, volatile: was he leading me or was I leading him? Which way around? Obviously, I always preferred to see him upright. But there were days when it was impossible and I had to accept that he would appear reversed, in a downward mood.

She starts to manipulate his image, reversing, masking out, Photoshopping, wondering always which was the right way.

Manipulated and reversed, as on a screen encounter, the Magician is then digitally transformed and laser-cut onto

black, white, silver materials. He plays with ideas of perfection and the digital, alongside chance, mistakes, fate. He doesn't live in the screen anymore, he's found a way out, appearing in real-time, through the silvering materials and the mirrored surface. I am curious to see what will happen.. will other people see things too? Everyone can have their own Magician.

As this suggests the Tarot is a great vehicle for a kind of radical hermeneutics. 'Everyone can have their own Magician'. This is particularly appropriate for the Magician, which is often understood to be a representation of the god Mercury, who is also known as Hermes, the god of borders, communication, trickery, roads, thievery, and writing, from whom we get the term hermeneutics.

As he is transformed through Stella's alchemical processes, the Magician changes and shifts. 'Depending on the angle of the viewer, different things appear, each viewer can have his/her own unique interpretation that they wish for from this encounter with the Magician.'

The Magician is therefore 'mercurial', changeable, unpredictable, quick like mercury, 'liquid silver' or 'quicksilver', the only element that is liquid at room temperature.

In the Marseilles version of the Tarot the card bears the name '*Le Bateleur*', which can mean juggler, but also street performer. It suggests someone who might manipulate their audience into seeing things that are not there, with a sleight of hand. The Magician, *Le Bateleur*,

thus makes a perfect figure for a world of digital image manipulation. The table before which they stand is covered in their tools some of which resemble those found in Photoshop, including the Magic Wand in their hand, as well as the various means of sharpening and dulling surfaces. Their hat contains, wittingly or not, the symbol for infinity, the lemniscate, which can also be seen to allude to the infinite combinations of elements made possible by digital image software.

Thus, the Tarot might be understood as a form of *ars combinatoria*, in which a finite number of elements can be recombined to produce new arrangements and reveal new truths. Perhaps the first thinker to consider such an *ars combinatoria* was the Catalan monk and mystic Ramon Llull, whose work influenced the philosopher Giordano Bruno and, later, Gottfried Leibniz. The last's engagement with these ideas, along with binary logic, anticipates modern computing and thus Photoshop and digital image manipulation. The English magus John Dee also admired Llull. According to Harvey Hames, Llull was also influenced by the Jewish Kabbalah and his work can be seen as a kind of Christian version of the Kabbalah.<sup>2</sup> The Kabbalah is a form and practice of Jewish mysticism, and for some at least, it is connected to the Tarot.

It was thought by 19<sup>th</sup> century occultists that the origins of the Tarot were to be found in Ancient Egypt. In *The Book of Thoth*, his work on the Tarot, written as a companion for his own version of the Tarot pack of the same name, Aleister Crowley suggests that 'The origin of this pack of cards is very obscure. Some authorities

seek to put it back as far as the ancient Egyptian Mysteries; others try to bring it forward as late as the fifteenth or even the sixteenth century. But the Tarot certainly existed, in what may be called the classical form, as early as the fourteenth century'.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to make the claim that 'it is an admirable symbolic picture of the Universe, based on the data of the Holy Qabalah'<sup>4</sup> (though this in fact has no more historical basis than the claim for Tarot's Ancient Egyptian origins, and can be seen, perhaps, as an example of the hermeneutics of the Tarot). Later on in the book he suggests that 'the whole of the Tarot is based upon the Tree of Life, and that the Tree of Life is always cognate with Tetragrammaton'.<sup>5</sup> The Tree of Life is the diagram used in Jewish Kabbalah. It is comprised of ten nodes, *sephirot*, representing the divine emanations of the universe, with twenty two connecting lines, or columns. The Tetragrammaton is the mystical name of God, comprised of four letters, YHWH (Yod, He, Vau, He), representing archetypical masculinity, or the father, archetypical femininity, or the mother, physical masculinity or the son, and physical femininity or the daughter. The numerical values accorded to the letters in Jewish numerology, 1 +2 +3 +4, add up to 10, the number of *sephirot* in the tree of life.

As Mercury or Hermes, he is 'the messenger of the gods', which means he is also connected to the Egyptian equivalent of Hermes, Thoth. As such he transmits the will of the gods 'by hieroglyphs intelligible to the initiate, and records their

acts; but it was seen from the very early times that the use of speech, or writing, meant the introduction of ambiguity at the best, and falsehood at the worst'<sup>6</sup>. Jacques Derrida invokes Thoth in his essay 'Plato's Pharmacy' to show Socrates' and Plato's complex and ambivalent relation to writing, as something that both is a remedy for the shortcomings of memory and a poison, inasmuch as it substitutes for interior memory and thus compromises understanding. Thoth cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.'<sup>7</sup> This 'god of calculation, arithmetic, and rational science also presides over the occult sciences, astrology and alchemy. He is the god of magic formulas that calm the sea, of secret accounts, of hidden texts: an archetype of Hermes, god of cryptography no less than of every other -graphy'<sup>8</sup>, (including, perhaps, photography).

Invoking Plato's myth of the cave, Derrida asks us to 'Imagine that mirrors (shadows, reflections, phantasms, etc.) would no longer be comprehended within the structure of the ontology and myth of the cave-which also situates the screen and the mirror-but would rather envelop it totally, producing here and there a particular, extremely determinate effect'.<sup>9</sup> Later on, writing about Mallarmé and his engagement with mime, he writes that 'We here enter a textual labyrinth panelled with mirrors'.<sup>10</sup>

It is in the work of his friend Philippe Sollers that Derrida finds the most cogent textual example of such a mirroring. Sollers' novel *Nombres*, a key text in French postwar literary experimentation, is composed of sequential monologues by four different voices, all numbered, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1.5, 2.6, 3.7, 4.8, and so on, adding up to one hundred numbered sections.<sup>11</sup> The book's title refers to the organisation of the text in set theory and mathematical terms, and also to the book of the Hebrew Bible known in French as *Numeri*, which deals with the census of the Hebrew tribes. Sollers explicitly invokes the Kabbalistic calculation as the source of the book's arrangement, 1+2+3+4 = 102 = 100. As Derrida puts it 'You had just recognized, crowning the formula 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10.... The text's card had been played, was beginning to sketch out its outlines.'<sup>12</sup> In the section entitled 'wriTing, encAsIng, screeNing', Derrida invokes both the Kabbalah and the Tarot..

Numbers are of such a cast: their ink is drawn from this tain, a sort of metal covered with liquid mercury (the 10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4, which is the number of the letter in the Kabbalah and of the Sphinx in Tarot, is also the number of Mercury in astrology and these Numbers filled with "quasi-stellar sources" could be read, will soon begin to be read, as an astrographical constellation). The mercury, the tain of this ink, forms a screen. It shelters and conceals. Holds in reserve and exposes to view. The screen: at once the visible projection surface for images, and that which prevents one from seeing the other side.

The structure of this screen-mirror, this tain, this "stray verso lined with metal" (4.100), entails that it give itself out-this is the case in Numbers-as something that must be broken, absolutely gone through en route to the true source, toward which it lures you, for

"3 . 95 . . . / 'A mirror is not a source' /..."<sup>13</sup>

This is, as far as I can tell, the only mention of Tarot in Derrida's work. The card numbered ten in the Major Arcana is the Wheel of Fortune, which does indeed feature a sphinx-like figure at the top of the eponymous wheel. Derrida sees in the quaternary arrangement of the text as closing up the traditional schema of representation in which the fourth wall is open to the spectator, who is outside the structure of mimesis.

The old theatrical organization has become unjustifiable, is no longer answerable to anyone; the old phantoms called the author, the reader, the director, the stage manager, the machinist, the actor, the characters, the spectator, etc., have no single, unique, fixed place (stage, wings, house, etc.) assigned to themselves by themselves, except in the representation they make of it to themselves, of which an account must be given.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida continues that in 'representing representation, it will reflect and explain it in a very singular mirror'. The fourth opening is, in fact, a false exit, a mirror. Furthermore this mirror is turned towards

the back of the stage. He quotes Sollers from *Nombres*, in section 4.8, which offers a description of the book's representative schema and the operation of the fourth wall, which is 'oblivion closed by the frame'.<sup>15</sup>

*This fourth surface is in a sense carved out of the air; it enables speeches to make themselves heard, bodies to let themselves be seen; consequently, it is easily forgotten, and that is doubtless where illusion and error lie. Indeed, what is thus too easily taken to be the opening of a stage is nonetheless a panel that distorts, an invisible, impalpable, opaque veil that plays toward the other three sides the role of a mirror or reflector, and toward the outside (i.e. toward the possible but consequently always repelled, multiple spectator) the role of a negative developer on which the inscriptions simultaneously produced on the other planes appear inserted, righted, fixed. As if the hypothetical actors came and traced or pronounced their text backwards, in front of you, without your being aware of it-nor they, either-by virtue of the apparatus in question. Whence the impression of witnessing a projection, whereas it is ultimately a matter of the very product of the surface of the darkroom transformed into a surface.*<sup>16</sup>

Let us look at Stella's Magician again, which is reversed and rendered in silver, in black and in white. It mirrors itself rather than anything outside of it, and signals

the hermeneutic labyrinth of mirrors. In the beginning of *On Photography* Susan Sontag famously claims that 'Humankind lingers unregenerately in Plato's cave, still reveling, its age-old habit, in mere images of the truth'.<sup>17</sup> For Sontag photography may offer us 'mere images' but they are still 'of the truth', still capable of being restituted to something real. Sontag can still claim that 'Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it'.<sup>18</sup> But if the analogue photography Sontag is writing about remains attached to the cave of traditional metaphysics, with the digital it is replaced by something else; no longer a darkroom, or the interior of a camera, a camera obscura, but the black box of the computer in which Stella Baraklianou performs manipulates, inverts, transforms the Magician, the card that is itself all about manipulation, inversion, transformation, as is digital photography, which foregrounds the *graphia*, the writing of its operations. Through her work on the Magician Stella demands that we look behind the 'textual labyrinth panelled with mirrors' and see the tain, the silvery materials that create illusions that surround us.

- 1 Ziegler, G., 1988, *Tarot: Mirror of the Soul: Handbook for the Aleister Crowley Tarot*, 1988, York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, ix
- 2 Hames, H. J. 2000. *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century*. Amsterdam: Brill.
- 3 Crowley, A., 1974, *The Book of Thoth*, York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 3
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Ibid, 54
- 6 Ibid, 72
- 7 Derrida, J. 1981. *Dissemination*, London: Athlone, 93
- 8 Ibid
- 9 Ibid, 41
- 10 Ibid, 195
- 11 Sollers, P., 1968. *Nombres*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- 12 Derrida, *Dissemination*, 306 - 7
- 13 Ibid, 314 - 5
- 14 Ibid, 296
- 15 Ibid, 297
- 16 Ibid, 312
- 17 Sontag, S. 1973. *On Photography*. New York: Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 3
- 18 Ibid, 6

Extract from *Nombres*

4.52. (however, in the end, it is the limit itself seen in the continuous permeability of an increasingly hidden life... There is a rule for this lack of knowledge, for this fusion that can read everything again and die, and the lack of exposure, of method, indicates the impossibility of classifying, of affirming, and the numbers that keep running under each composition, their evident and voiceless suffering... You have before your eyes the blank sequence of the present, its reversal, its inversion to be lived at the same time,

that is to say, from one surface to its opposite

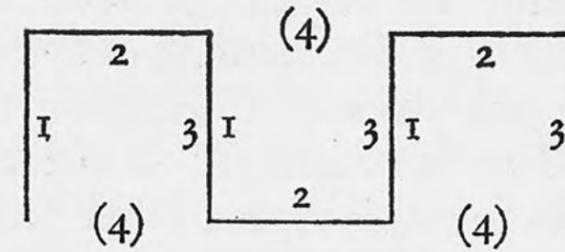
that is to say, from one set to another, from a blank to a repeated blank

that is to say, in short, the superimposition of scenes, the emergence and progressive but perfect articulation from the beginning, the evolution if you think of a beginning but also the huge constellation, and thus a swarming of crowd and nothing, nothing which in fact is each thing and the same thing as nothing... You pass through it with as much reality as a stream or a connection, as a membrane enveloping another membrane, as a changing and endless current from one side to the other of any drawing... Your white face is itself only the trace of its own

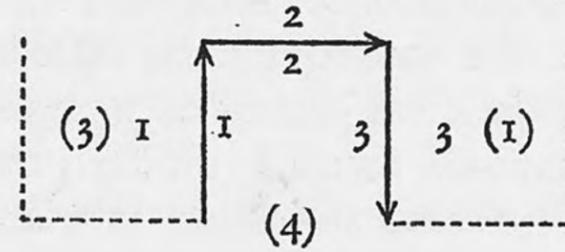
impossible vision, as if you were moving forward, as if you were showing yourself between all that appears and is done and what you will never know how to be, never grasp... 'The net of heaven is large, though its meshes are loosely-woven, nothing escapes' / 'though elusive and vague, there are images within her, although impenetrable and obscure, there are seeds within her' / 'she (he)blunts what is sharp, she (he) unravels what is tangled, she (he) dims what is bright, she (he) equalises its traces' / – revolving and returning (反) permanent, mobile, squared (方) where you are at the same time the one who penetrated from the start the trajectory and the number, where, suspended, mingled, they rotate like grey circles whose barely heard hissing would contain the day – and the one whose throbbing fades away in the route, in the column of numbers, of names in the shadows... Your ancient face... It still produces the energy from which it is borrowed, the rapidity and solidity of the walls where it comes crashing down, eyes extinguished in the blood which in the end is the outcome, matter flowing from one to the other and from empty to full –

*English translation by Sharon Kivland with Frances Haselden*

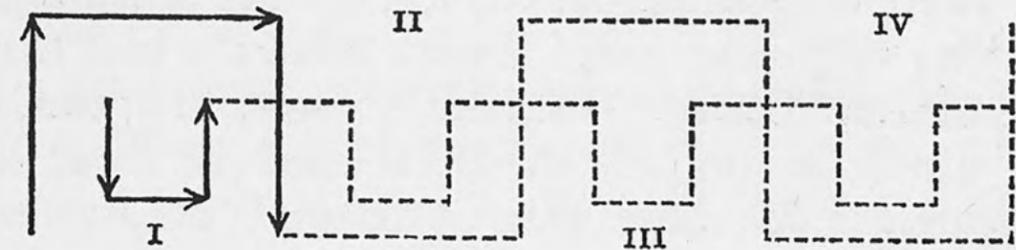
*Philippe Sollers, 1968, Editions du Seuil*



c'est-à-dire, d'une surface à son opposé



c'est-à-dire, d'un ensemble à l'autre, d'un blanc au blanc redoublé,



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the magician

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Research images:

- p. 2-3 *The Conjurer*, 1502, Hieronymus Bosch, Musee Municipal, Saint-Germain-en-Laye
- p. 5 *The Magician*, 1965, Leonora Carrington, Estate of Leonora Carrington, New York
- p. 6 *The Magician*, 1987, Tarot de Marseille, Lo Scarabeo
- p. 34-35 *Vivien and Merlin*, 1874, Julia Margaret Cameron, albumen photographic print, Met Museum New York

Works:

- p. 8 *Black Magician, White Magician*, 60x70cmx-5cm, laser-cut acrylic panels, reflective Mylar
- pp. 8-11 *Levitativel*, 60cmx25cmx10cm, custom made hat: fabric, hand-stitched detail, tassels
- pp. 12-13 *Magician III*, 140cmx102cm, photographic prints on velvet, spray paint
- pp. 14-15 *White Magician*, 60x70cmx5cm, laser-cut acrylic panel, reflective Mylar
- pp. 16-17 *Mercurial*, reflective installation on wall, 110cmx60x50cm, laser-cut acrylic, custom acrylic, reflective material, spray paint
- pp. 18-19 *Magician I&II* (detail), laser-cut stitched details
- pp. 20-21 *Magician I, II & III*, 140cmx102cm, photographic prints on velvet, spray paint, laser-cut stitched details
- pp. 22-23 *Magician II*, 140cmx102cm, photographic print on velvet, spray paint, laser-cut stitched details
- pp. 36-37 *Black Magician, White Magician*, 60x70cmx5cm, laser-cut acrylic panels, reflective Mylar, *Levitativel*, 60cmx25cmx10cm, custom made hat: fabric, hand-stitched detail, tassels
- pp. 38-39, Installation of show, *Mercurial*, reflective installation on wall, *Infinity & Screen*, 160x110cmx0.3cm custom made clear acrylic panel
- pp. 40-41 *Magician I, II & III*, Infinity Screen
- pp. 42-43 Installation of show, *Mercurial*, reflective installation on wall, *Infinity & Screen*, 160x110cmx0.3cm custom made clear acrylic panel
- p. 45 3,99 *Silver Magician*, 40x30cm, spray on reflective surface

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17<sup>th</sup> June – 4<sup>th</sup> July 2021

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