

EXTERNAL FORCES

Finance, money, systems of prediction. Looking at these terms, they don't feel as arcane as magic, spell, prophecy. Nevertheless, they are part of a system that feels similar: setting rules, insinuating fears or superstitions, deciding for one's future. Johanna Hedva, in the lecture "How to tell when you're going to die: Astrology for writers" said something I can't forget: "Isn't Capitalism just a pernicious magic trick, that could link money and time forever?" Elena Esposito, in her lecture "Future and uncertainty in the digital society" raises important questions on how predictive systems, especially algorithms would have substituted gods and spirits in the shift from fate to future: "The attitude around big data is not so new. It seems that algorithmic predictions revive an ancient divinatory attitude, from Mesopotamia to the Chinese world. The idea was that in ancient times the future appeared to be unknowable to humans, but not to divinity, not to God. As for today the future appears to be unknowable to humans but not to the algorithms" Predictive analytics, algorithms, artificial intelligence (AI) have taken up the post of divination tools to fit in a cosmos that is digitally regulated. We thought the open future would allow us to make up our own destiny, but algorithmic predictions are actually depriving the future of its open possibilities. The cells and atoms of modern predictions' organism are Data; provided by human behaviors, machines, services. Since they work on past information, it should be technically impossible that these pieces of information would uncover secrets and claims about the future. But, even if algorithms cannot foresee futures, as divinatory tools claim to do, they can manufacture them.

In 2013 Cambridge Analytica data scandal broke the crystal bowl around those who decide which future could be imposed over others. The company harvested data from 87 million profiles on Facebook without their consent through an app called This is your digital life, created by Aleksandr Kogan. If around 2013 one of your Facebook friends took the personality quiz on this app, it most certainly also took your information to create targeted advertising regarding the presidential elections, amongst other things. "A small number of people who logged into This Is Your Digital Life also shared their own news feed, timeline, posts and messages, which may have included posts and messages from you," the company told affected users. The locations of users were also used to create psychographic profiles, to suggest advertisement that would persuade people into a particular location, where maybe a political event was taking place. Eshun Kodwo, in "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" discusses why and who is directing people towards certain futures: "Today, however, power also functions through the envisioning, management, and delivery of reliable futures.[...] The powerful employ futurists and draw power from the futures they endorse, thereby condemning the disempowered to live in the past." The powerful that Kodwo speaks about are stuffy lawyers, app makers, Data mining companies, that for a future that keeps on presenting itself as fate. The threat is ending up in a past cul-de-sac that doesn't provide alternatives, nor the possibility to imagine something that hasn't happened yet. Whilst algorithms operate within the fixed capitalist future, witchcraft and magic raised to resist and live within boundaries set by power structures. Magic has a way of re-ordering oppressed realities, and making its way through them by its own rules. The witch, the archetypal magic practitioner, also represents political rebellion from many points of view. From refusing to put the body to work, to honouring female knowledge, to hexing oppressors.

My proposition is to reclaim these tools, and the witch's archetype to navigate the modern systems of oppression operated by Surveillance Capital, and own back the right to future. Tracing back to the history of Tarots and the way they served in claiming agency over a fated reality, I developed a practice called Digital Esoterism, which uses the infinite flow of images, videos, memes, numbers, advertising that our algorithms generate on our smartphone as modern Tarot cards, to talk about one's self and one's future. As Kenric McDowell states "Seeing symbolic and predictive systems as potent, empowered, extensions of mind into matter brings a gravity and sense of responsibility to one's work."

Interpreting and decoding the simbology of targeted ads, suggested posts may not break algorithmic governance, but it could create a new way of accepting them in our life, by seeing them as new important projections of ourselves.