

***Fatum and Fortuna:* André Masson, Surrealism and the Divinatory Arts**

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Abstract

This paper situates André Masson's pre-surrealist imagery of game playing within the context of divinatory practices; an interest that appears to have extended to surrealism in the following decades. It identifies iconographical similarities between three 'portraits' by Masson and the most powerful card in the tarot pack, the Juggler, thus illuminating a sensibility for lyrical analogy shared by initiates of the occult. The paper goes on to explore a fascination for tarot cards within the surrealist coterie, positing that the lyrical potential of the tarot's symbology and the concomitant auto-hypnotic techniques rendered tarot reading a praxis that promised to enhance the faculties of the mind and enable adepts to become the 'recording instruments' of visions.



Fig. 1, André Masson, *L'homme à l'orange*, 1923, 31 7/8 x 21 1/4 inches (81 x 54 cm).
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Fig. 2. Nicolas Conver, *Le Bateleur (The Juggler)*, Le Tarot de Marseille, 1760.

One might say that, in terms of iconography, the game of chance pervades the visual lexicon of surrealism. Yet, when considered individually, these familiar images of dice and playing cards are generally thought of as no more than arbitrary motifs. It is perhaps for this reason that this corpus of images is so often marginalised in the accepted canon of surrealist visual material. I would argue however, that the fact that these motifs are consistently repeated suggests that they are unlikely to be without meaning for the surrealists. This becomes all the more significant when we learn that the game of chance shares symbiotic origins with the divinatory arts, marking the transition from chance to necessity. If the surrealist motif of the game of chance might be traced back to the pre-surrealist years of André Masson, this paper seeks to situate Masson's paintings of 1923-1924 against a backdrop of divinatory practices in order to posit new insights germane to arcane systems of thought; an interest which appears to have extended to surrealism in the following decades.

The mystery behind the archaic origins of the humble playing card, inextricably linked as it is with the history of tarot, bestows upon the playing card an esoteric aura, endowing it with an ambivalent quality and allowing for a deeper interpretation of it as a pictorial motif: are cards to be seen simply as material for play or might they instead be considered as instruments for penetrating the deepest secrets of life? Gérard van Rijnberk points out that this esoteric quality does not lie with the playing card's mysterious origins alone, but also arises from an innate consequence of the play element of all games of chance, including dice:

All games in which chance plays a part, be it a game of cards or dice, have an inherent esoteric, divinatory element. The game is played out to know which of the players will be the most favoured by fate or providence. All games imply therefore, a sort of interrogation of an oracle that will demonstrate divine intention or the dictates of fate. This is in full evidence when the cards are employed to read the future, but is also the case when it is a matter of a pure and simple game.¹

Likewise, in *Les Jeux et les hommes* (1958) Roger Caillois posits that superstitious practices have grown out of games of chance leading to the corruption of chance and the coercion of destiny, so that chance is no longer understood as a blind indifferent force. Following this definition, cards and dice cease simply to symbolise 'blind' chance and instead take on the role of the diviner's instruments, thus becoming icons of predestination:

Numerous indications of the association between games of chance and divination are easily found. One of the most conspicuous and immediate is that the very same cards used by players in trying their luck may also be used by prophets to predict the future. ... At every point there is a quite natural transition from chance to superstition.²

It is Grillot de Givry however, who perhaps best sums up the ambiguous role of the playing card in society; simultaneously an instrument of ruin where gambling is concerned *and* a source of enlightenment with regard to occult practices:

For others the tarot is a mysterious door opening on a gaping and unfathomable future of illusions and hopes; when they handle the same cards which have brought gamblers to the verge of hell and damnation their eyes light up, their mind brightens, their soul rises into the eternal spheres, and they see into the future and are possessed of that prophetic spirit which we foolishly laugh at, but which the wiser Orientals valued so much that they considered it the highest recompense that man might expect from God here below.³

Givry's explanation of the ambiguous power inherent in playing cards, is, I feel, important in another respect, as I believe it holds the key to understanding the latent ambiguity embedded within several of André Masson's paintings of the early 1920s, which I shall now discuss.

In his early, heavily symbolic oeuvre Masson takes up the theme of card and dice games. An initial exegesis of these paintings is one informed by the psychology of gambling, understanding the playing cards to be instruments of self-ruin. This certainly seems to be a prominent theme in Masson's *The Gamblers* (1923). The painting depicts the frenetic activity in a gambling den where the indomitable, masochistic compulsion once defined by Freud gathers the players around the green clothed table.⁴ The gambler is locked in a futile game, fuelled by an unconscious desire of loss and self-punishment to the point that he dare not look at the dice knowing that the inevitable outcome will be that of personal and financial ruin; a head buried in hands in fear of the outcome of fate. Cards tumble and fall swiftly, automatically even, from a sea of hypertrophied hands as in the coup that Walter Benjamin once described: '... for there can be no game without the quick movement of the hand by which the stake is put down or a card is picked up.'⁵ There are inevitably associations with café life where such games of chance were played out, and the gaming imagery might be

seen in this respect as the legacy of a cubist symbology of cards and dice, forming an iconography of the café. In his notes, Masson himself was to describe these paintings in terms of a modern genre painting, displaying 'gatherings of men: gamblers, drinkers, sleepers: memories, in part, of peasant or military life.'⁶ The bread, wine and fish suppers that accompany these pictorial soirées add to this rustic ambiance.

Masson used his own friends as models as they gathered in his atelier on the rue Blomet. However, as Dawn Ades has observed, Masson once compared these same friends to figures associated with necromancy: Georges Limbour as Lucifer, Roland Tual as the Enchanter, Michel Leiris as the Aeropagist. A possible interest in the occult, therefore, is intimated leading to an ambiguity as to whether these are simply gamblers and card players or whether, at a deeper level, they might also be seen as cartomancers (fortune tellers, especially with cards) or magicians?⁷ Certainly, both Leiris and Limbour's readings of these paintings lean towards an esoteric inflected interpretation, and it may be argued that as Masson's fascination with images of card and dice players evolves the dichotomy between gambling and divination dissolves. On a closer inspection of *The Gamblers* then, an esoteric, metaphysical quality to the painting slowly reveals itself in the rendering of the fractured, collapsed and encroaching space that begins to devour the players. Indeed, the figure on the left hand side of the painting, pipe in hand, appears to be engulfed by an ineffable nebulous phenomenon, as if everything is being sucked into the abyss; Limbour writes: '... how the objects placed on the cloth would slide toward the abyss which no man had dared to bar.'⁸

Drawing on a quotation by Leiris from his text on Masson, *Éléments pour une biographie*, Rubin and Lanchner have carried out an esoterically-inspired reading of another of Masson's gaming scenarios, *The Card Trick* (1923). Here, they posit that the subject matter no longer appears to be that of a mere game, but instead points to the cosmic 'game' of divination that taps into the 'obscure forces of the future':

The Card Trick is a painting about chance in which the card players (interchangeably the painter himself and his poet and artist-friends) are magicians and the instruments of the game 'signs and talismans wherein are condensed all the obscure forces of the future.' The outcome of the game does not depend on the free will of its participants but on the range of possibilities allowed within the immutable structure of cosmic laws.⁹

There is an emphasis on isolated, disembodied hands in this painting, ambiguously evoking the passivity (or relinquished conscious control) of the player in the face of chance *and* the sleight of hand necessary for the 'magician's card tricks. The composition is of particular interest here however, as Masson has skilfully created the illusion that the hands, dice, cards, scrolls and other objects are being governed by unknown forces. In particular, a triangular central point of energy appears to maintain objects in an orbital path, alluding to 'cosmic laws' that are being tapped into.¹⁰ The background of the painting is once again treated in a metaphysical, fragmented style that has the effect of creating a figure-ground confusion, as angular shards of space and swirling energy forms begin to encroach and cut into the central subject matter. The treatment of the surrounding space creates the kind of ineffable energy force that one finds in the tumultuous skies of an El Greco or in Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. The player himself becomes engulfed in this ordered chaos.

In a seemingly related series of three paintings – *The Man with the Orange*, (1923, fig. 1), *Man Holding a Rope*, (1924), *Man in an Interior*, (1924) – the theme of the game of chance is once again taken up. Yet, what is immediately striking about these paintings is that they no longer depict scenes of group gatherings but solitary experiments with cards and dice, alluding to the possibility of divinatory practices. There is also a sense that the central figure in each (modelled again on Masson and his friends) exists in correspondence with the cosmic forces that radiate around him. Indeed, in *Man in an Interior* the central figure sits firmly in place as objects whirl around him centripetally, as if by telekinesis or by some special inner contact with the exterior world. One might say that the surrealist dream of a resolution of the objective and subjective realms appears to have been resolved pictorially in these three paintings, where mind appears to be attuned to matter.

The objects that surround the three figures are charged with symbolic and poetic content, albeit one that is iconographically hermetic and vague. Leiris writes:

From the start, Masson's art was always full of symbolism. For, what else are the loaves of bread and the pomegranates, the glasses of wine, rolls of paper, clouds and other objects, which cluster together in his earliest pictures, but an array of emblems brought together as it were by an alchemist?¹¹

As Dawn Ades has pointed out, this plethora of disparate objects often comprised repeated motifs of a knife, a wooden triangle, a ball or playing cards, objects which, according to Leiris '... are attached to some ancestral symbolism.'¹² As we have seen, the playing cards and dice can be associated with divinatory practices, and the scrolls that sometimes irrupt into the paintings (*The Card Trick*, *The Man with the Orange*) might be compared to the sibylline scrolls of ancient Rome.¹³ The juxtaposition of disparate emblems can be said to be contemporaneous with the surrealist embrace of the fortuitous meeting of disparate objects, as inspired by the Comte de Lautréamont's poem *Le Chant de Maldoror*. This clash of disparate objects, creating iconographical tensions, might also be seen to be the product of a specific aesthetic doctrine on the part of Masson which appeared to favour conflicting forms. In Masson's oeuvre one finds the deliberate opposition of curves, angles and sinuous twisting forms. Limbour understood this formal discord as symbolic of the antagonistic 'life of the universe':

Discord, which has since become one of his [Masson's] favourite themes, already existed between these elements, though in a purely formal manner. For example, against the supple curves of some fish would be aimed the aggressively straight lines of the triangular blade of a knife, the same kitchen knife indeed which figures in so many of the later massacres and sacrifices. Thus a conflict was set up between curves and angles, and the opposition of some rigid saw with fiercely pointed teeth to the feminine litheness of a loosely draped, thick piece of rope became a lyrical event. And this conflict kept on reappearing, until at last one understood that the life of the universe, of art and of the emotions consisted exactly of this antagonism.¹⁴

If Masson understood the universe in terms of conflicting, antagonistic forces, he also appears to have believed that this underlining conflict was nonetheless counteracted by hidden relationships, made manifest through the resemblance of things. Georges Limbour writes: 'He is gifted with that universal intelligence called poetic genius, that is to say an intuition of the forces and secret correspondences of the world.'¹⁵ Thus, if Masson was to depict universal antagonism by portraying the clash of disparate forms, he was equally to conjure up the notion of universal order and analogy via aesthetic devices that saw the rhyming of pictorial forms. In this respect, the sphere is of particular import and significance to

Masson's vocabulary of forms, as for him it represented, interchangeably, the earth (the globe) and the bounties of nature (embodied in the spherical nature of many fruits).¹⁶

The 'terrestrial' sphere that Masson was so fond of is represented by an orange in *The Man with the Orange*; a rhyming of spherical forms may then be found in the cloud-like formations receding from Masson's ear. In *Man in an Interior* the ubiquitous spherical object is the pomegranate, whose form is then echoed elsewhere in the painting. In *Man Holding a Rope* a pierced sphere can be found hovering on the left hand side and reappears at the back of the man's skull and then again at the level of his eye. Here, the sphere is analogous to an eyeball in its socket; which is significant, as in all three 'portraits' the eye sockets appear hollow, suggesting inner power and introspection. Indeed, in *Man Holding a Rope* the sense of vision appears to come from within, suggesting that the man is a seer, a revelation which in turn sheds new light on the three dice (lined up in a perfect diagonal line and in numerical order) on his table which suggests that the outcome is other than the product of chance and possibly related instead to an act of divination.

At its most universal then, the sphere embodies nature and points to Masson's eagerness to lift the veil of Isis where nature's inner turmoil finds itself counteracted by its hidden correspondences. We might say then that what we find in these paintings are men (never women) who occupy a site where discord (symbolically represented by the juxtaposition of conflicting, disparate objects and forms) opposes order (evoked pictorially by the repetition of forms, such as the sphere). Referring to another of Masson's early paintings, *Les Quatre Éléments* (1923-24), it has been suggested that in his attempt to capture the elements within his paintings, it was as if Masson had hoped to 'hold the Earth in his hand, or have it at his disposal on a tabletop,' an ambition which seems to have been played out pictorially in these three paintings.¹⁷ A superior knowledge of nature and the cosmos such as the one Masson sought through his painting would inevitably place somebody in a position to master nature and this leads me on to the character of the *Bateleur* (fig. 2).

Given Masson's assumed interest in divination, an interest shared by other members of the Parisian artistic milieu (Guillaume Apollinaire, André Derain and Max Jacob were all adepts of divinatory practices) it is highly likely that he was familiar with tarot cards and the three aforementioned 'portraits' bear similarities with one of the most powerful figures in the

Major Arcana tarot pack, the *Bateleur*, otherwise known as the Juggler.¹⁸ Reading Masson's portraits in relation to this figure makes for an interesting interpretation of the three paintings. Compositionally speaking the Juggler has much in common with the iconography of Masson's paintings, as he too is positioned behind a tabletop upon which are displayed an array of disparate, emblematic objects. According to different authorities on the tarot, the table can be interpreted as symbolising the universe or the material world. The legendary character of the Juggler then, is literally able to realise Masson's ambition to hold the world in his hand or have it at his disposal on a table. In terms of iconography there are similarities too. The Juggler's attributes include a sword that sometimes takes the form of a knife (a knife can be discerned in all three of Masson's paintings), and a cup (a cubist-style glass in *The Man with the Orange*). In one version of the tarot the Juggler holds a spherical object (a coin) in his left hand which is also the case with Masson's *The Man with the Orange* (the coin has been replaced by an orange). The conflicting interpretations that have been made of these seemingly polyvalent and arcane emblems by historians of the tarot are too numerous to carry out any specific exegesis, however, the Juggler's attributes might be interpreted as relating to the elements: the coin (earth): the sword (air); the cup (water). The fourth attribute of the Juggler, the rod or sceptre that the Juggler carries in his hand, might be seen to represent fire; although there is no rod in Masson's paintings, the lighted match in *Man Holding a Rope* might allude to the element of fire. In some versions of the tarot the Juggler also displays dice (as in *Man Holding a Rope*, while dice are replaced by playing cards in the other two paintings). However, there is an ambiguity here as to whether dice represent the element of instability and uncertainty in the world or, as Paul Marteau believes, indicate alternatively that there is no such thing as chance given that divine intelligence always intervenes.¹⁹

The sophisticated compositional skills of Masson are such that the objects radiating around the figures in Masson's three paintings give the impression of prestidigitation (in Masson's case a kind of psychic juggling); a certain dexterity which is again in keeping with the characterisation of the Juggler who is believed to have evolved from the kind of magician that would carry out illusions and tricks at fairs. Like Masson's characters, the Juggler is capable of coordinating contradictory elements. At an elementary level then, the Juggler

represents mastery or command. At a deeper level, this mastery might extend to encompass a command of the self and the universe. The divinatory readings of the Juggler's character, though many and often conflicting, are interesting when considered alongside Masson's interest in cosmology and the dynamics of nature. For Paul Marteau, at its most basic interpretation the Juggler represents man in the presence of nature, who, in the face of adversity, learns to master nature's hostile and tumultuous forces.²⁰ For Rijnberk the Juggler is 'the true Magus in the highest sense of the word,' particularly due to his mastery of his faculties and his knowledge of the law of analogy: as Above, so Below.²¹ Oswald Wirth proposes that the Juggler has the kind of generative omnipotence of a god, the master-spirit of the universe, while the former surrealist Kurt Seligmann sums up the qualities of the Juggler as follows:

He is the aleph, the master-spirit of the universe, which stretches before him like the Juggler's table. All things of creation are tossed about by him as if they were the Juggler's objects. He is pointing at the above and the below, confirming the teaching of Hermes Trismegistus that here below all is like that which is in heaven, that the little world, man, contains all the elements of the universe, and that the study of man will make us understand the wonders of the whole creation.²²

As with each character in Masson's three aforementioned paintings, the Juggler can at a superficial level be interpreted as a simple prestidigitator, at a deeper level however, he can be seen as the supreme Magus with knowledge of the self and the universal laws of analogy, a position that has given him divine powers equivalent to that of a master-spirit.

Here I would like to introduce a second potential model for Masson's 'magus,' Apollonius of Tyana. Masson was to acknowledge his interest in this character in an early correspondence: 'The long, leisurely evenings allowed me to read Diodore de Sicile and enjoy the company of the legendary Apollonius of Tyana.'²³ Apollonius was a pagan seer, exorcist and healer from the first century. However, according to one of the most authoritative chroniclers of the prophet's life, Philostratus, he was also considered by his detractors as nothing more than a magician or a charlatan, comparable one might say to the fairground magician out of whom the Juggler emerged. According to Philostratus's account however, Apollonius was a divinely-inspired sage, and was even said to be an incarnation of Proteus,

an Egyptian god with the gift of knowledge of both past and future. Philostratus explained that wizards wish to change the course of destiny whereas ‘... Apollonius submitted himself to the decrees of the Fates and only foretold that things must come to pass; and his foreknowledge was gained not by wizardry, but from what the gods revealed to him.’²⁴

The art of divination is a recurring topic of conversation in the chronicles of Apollonius’ life. ‘As to the subject of foreknowledge,’ writes Philostratus ‘they presently had a talk about it, for Apollonius was devoted to this kind of lore, and turned most of their conversations on to it.’²⁵ Oblique references to Apollonius’ interest in divination might well be discerned in the symbolism of games of chance that pervade Masson’s ‘portraits.’ However, it must be noted that cartomancy and divination with other props such as dice are nowhere discussed in Philostratus’ chronicles and he was said to be particularly cynical with regard to practices that involved the barbaric slaughter of animals in order to interpret the entrails.²⁶ Instead, he seems to have been practiced in divination via astrological methods or through more direct, unaided means, such as prophetic dreams. It is understood that he devoted four books to astral divination and believed that ‘... many things are revealed in the disc of the sun at the moment of its rising.’²⁷

Apollonius is also known to have been a follower of Pythagoras who developed quasi-mystical beliefs that aimed to reveal nature’s secrets through mathematical study.²⁸ Although Philostratus’ account concentrates on the ascetic side of Apollonius’ Pythagorean beliefs, covert pictorial allusions to the Pythagorean laws of mathematics might provide one explanation for the many triangles that constitute the emblems of Masson’s paintings, although they equally point more generally to ideas of measurement and geometry.

The characters of the Juggler and Apollonius of Tyana might, I posit, be conflated; the fusion of the magus with the seer, resulting in supreme knowledge and mastery. I do not wish to suggest here that Masson directly illustrated Apollonius, or slavishly copied the *Bateleur* (although I would not rule out the possibility that Masson was familiar with tarot cards, given the interest in ancient and arcane belief systems of his milieu). I do believe, however, that these two important characters and their attributes can, at the very least, provide an intimation of the kind of character that Masson was endeavouring to depict, and offers the spectator a *modus operandi* in terms of accessing the loaded and arcane symbolism found in Masson’s

paintings, often encoded in seemingly banal everyday objects. Michel Leiris expands on this thought process:

All objects are a mystery unto themselves. A doorknob contains the same potential lyricism as a starry sky. However, we are drawn to objects that are linked to some ancestral symbolism that has been passed on to us through education or atavism: a cross, for example, a knife, a torch, a wooden triangle, a ball or playing cards.²⁹

By reading such interpretations of the *Bateleur* tarot card in relation to Masson's early oeuvre, we encounter the kind of lyrical associations the spectator might make with regard to the iconographical content of Masson's paintings, bringing us one step closer to understanding these equally esoteric paintings which reveal their secrets over time. Hence, one may interpret the shifting signifieds in Masson's three paintings so that each figure might be read interchangeably as a) a gambler/cardsharp b) a diviner/seer and c) a supreme Magus/Master-spirit intimately connected to the underlying laws of nature. In other words, as with the *Bateleur* tarot card, which can be interpreted simultaneously as a simple prestidigitator *and* a master-spirit, the various layers and meanings of Masson's 'portraits' can be built up from the ordinary to the occult.

Masson's interest in divinatory practices might be said to prefigure an interest in tarot and divination that is evinced in later years by the surrealists. In his ambitious book *L'Art magique* originally published in 1957, Breton was to articulate the important aesthetic value of the tarot: 'A single divinatory and apodictic system had the fortune to inspire multiple representations, which are well preserved and of considerable aesthetic value: the Tarot.'³⁰ By way of example he referred to the magnificently opulent tarot deck of Charles VI, one of the oldest extant set of tarot cards. For Grillo de Givry, however, the real beauty of the tarot resides in the fact that its origin remains shrouded in mystery:

The tarot has no origin whatever. It remains a mystery, an enigma, a problem. At most it harmonizes with the symbolism of alchemy, another intangible doctrine which has beaten a subterranean path through the centuries, avoiding both religion and science and yet establishing itself in their domains.³¹

The tarot then seems to be a language and a set of beliefs unto itself, at a remove from the strictures of religion and science. The mystery of its origins and the independence of its

doctrines is perhaps reason enough to explain the tarot's appeal as an alternative system of thought for the surrealists and a potential avenue to explore. However, a further explanation might also be discerned in the lyricism of its pictorial vocabulary (based on a system of analogy), and the potential of divination as praxis to stimulate the imagination and bypass the constraints of conscious control in ways that recall surrealist automatist practices.

As tarot cards are iconographically polyvalent and multilayered in meaning, the cards become sites of suggestibility alluding to potential meanings rather than givens. Oswald Wirth talks about the unique evocative magic of their symbols and explains that interpretations of them (which are, according to him, windows on to the infinite) can only be indications, as they are never exhausted.³² It is for this reason that tarot reading might be seen as an exercise that heightens mental illumination, and in particular contributes to an expansion of the capacities of poetic imagination. Divination therefore is envisioned by Oswald Wirth as an 'exercice d'assouplissement de l'esprit', a hypothetical flexing of the mind so that the mind's faculties may become more supple, allowing the diviner to make use of his/her liberated and heightened mental faculties to probe the opaque and discern the concealed, as opposed to relying on the strictures of the rational faculties of our mind.³³

Further, the act of divination ideally requires a state of passive receptivity in order for the mind to pick up the confluence of endogenous visions (generated by enhanced psychic faculties) and exogenous images (emanating from the consultant via electro-magnetic vibrations). According to Wirth, the diviner should be intellectually passive, and in a state of receptive neutrality so that his or her imagination becomes a sort of 'appareil enregistreur' (recording instrument). Comparisons might then be made here with surrealist automatist practices and experiments in trance states that require the same state of passivity and receptivity so that the mind might become, as Breton put it, 'silent receptacles' or 'modest recording instruments.' 'Let your state of mind be as passive and receptive as possible,' Breton was to declare.³⁴ It is perhaps the automatic and semi-automatic practices of Masson and Max Ernst that show the closest affinities with divinatory practices. José Pierre posits that Masson's ritualistic and revelatory mode of working led naturally to automatism that was 'in its turn conceived as a divinatory practice.'³⁵

To recapitulate on the tarot's many virtues as a source of artistic inspiration, it represented many things at once: a system of invaluable beauty; an 'intangible doctrine' divorced from the strictures of religion and science; a lexicon of symbols that exudes an 'evocative magic'; and an 'exercise in suppleness of mind' that enabled the surrealist to become a 'recording instrument.' These are just a few potential reasons that might explain the surrealists' fascination with the tarot. However, more prosaically, this interest appears to have also been fostered by the publication of Grillo de Givry's seminal book *Le Musée des Sorciers, Mages et Alchimistes* in 1929. This book was familiar to the surrealists and provided chapters on a range of hermetic topics, devoting a chapter to the divinatory arts. Michel Leiris reviewed it in *Documents* that same year and claimed that the sections devoted to tarot were of particular interest for him in terms of the insights it gave into the doctrines and origins of certain traditions.³⁶ Leiris chose to illustrate his article with two cards from the Tarot of Charles VI depicting *La Maison de Dieu* ('The House of God') and *Le Soleil* ('The Sun'). The same year Breton called for the profound, true occultation of surrealism in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. In a footnote he acknowledged the potential avenues of exploration of those sciences that had been marginalised, particularly those of astrology and cryptesthesia (a hidden supra-sensibility which explained the phenomenon of clairvoyancy.)³⁷

This occultist ferment immanent within the surrealist milieu manifested itself pictorially in 1933 in the form of the front cover of *Minotaure* that had been designed by André Derain and depicted four tarot cards. This was accompanied by a highly recondite reading of four ancient playing cards by Derain entitled 'Critérium des As,' which reads as a delirious, poetic extemporization: a perfect example, one might say, of the evocative magic of their ancient symbology. The cards chosen were in fact the four aces, which depict the attributes of the Juggler: the cup, the sword, the coin and the rod (or in this case the club). Derain was an adept of tarot reading and a source of transmission of arcane beliefs to Breton. Breton spoke fondly of the hours spent in Derain's studio at the rue Bonaparte whilst Derain read tarot cards.³⁸

Indeed, Breton himself recounts in detail the strange rituals of his own experiments with cartomancy in *L'Amour fou*.³⁹ It also seems to have been a popular pastime with the female contingent of the surrealist milieu. Valentine Penrose was also adept in the art of tarot reading

and according to Anthony Penrose took card reading very seriously. He describes her as having '... a natural air of mysticism, which was compounded by her fascination with Eastern philosophy, her closeness to nature, and her understanding of the arcane, which included using Tarot cards to foretell the future with disturbing accuracy.'⁴⁰ Gala too frequently read cards as a means to predict the future, prompting Salvador Dalí to indulge in his own series of tarot cards.⁴¹ M.E. Warlick has pointed out the similarities between Leonora Carrington's portrait of Max Ernst (1940) and the arcane figure known as the 'Hermit,' suggesting a possible familiarity with the tarot.⁴² Finally, interest in tarot extended in particular to two male members of the surrealist group, albeit relative latecomers, Kurt Seligmann and Victor Brauner.

Seligmann's admirable attempt at a study of the history of occultism and its practices, *The History of Magic and the Occult* (1948), would rival that of Grillo de Givry in its scope and ambition. Seligmann, like Givry, devoted a section to tarot cards in which he writes:

No calculation or scientific observation is necessary for the Tarot game. Its entire magic theory rests upon the belief that in nature there is no accident – that every happening in the universe is caused by a pre-established law. The most insignificant event is subject to this fundamental rule: cards mixed at random do not yield haphazard results but a suit of figures bound magically to the diviner and the inquirer.⁴³

It is the clairvoyant aspect of divinatory practice that Seligmann seems to have decided to concentrate on in his account of tarot reading. He understands the practice of tarot as 'a prophetic gift' which manifests itself through a 'special condition' recognized as clairvoyancy by the occultist and identified as hyperaesthesia by the scientist.⁴⁴ The important element of tarot reading to Seligmann is the stimulation of the imagination in such a way as to promote an auto-hypnotic state:

There are people specially gifted with such prescience or premonition, the born diviners. They stimulate their abnormal sensibility in many ways. Gazing at the crystal produces an autohypnotic condition; in fact, any glistening or colourful object, when stared at for a time, may become equally stimulating to the imagination. ... The primary function of the Tarot cards seems to be this sort of stimulation. In scrutinizing the vividly coloured images, the diviner will provoke a kind of autohypnosis, or if he is less gifted,

a concentration of the mind resulting in a profound mental absorption. The Tarot's virtue is thus to induce that psychic or mental state favourable to divination. The striking Tarot figures, specially the trumps or major arcane, appeal mysteriously and waken in us the images of our subconscious.⁴⁵

By associating the visions received by the diviner with images of the subconscious, Seligmann gives a surrealist inflection to divination, thus rendering it conducive to surrealist practices. Indeed, on reading Seligmann's description of the act of divination we are struck by similarities with the kind of passive-receptive state that Max Ernst would incite via the exploration of aleatory techniques such as collage, frottage and decalomania in order to induce a heightening of his hallucinatory faculties (a subconscious interpretative faculty)⁴⁶ that sparked 'visions' fed by the mind's eye; he even began several of his titles with the words 'Vision induced by...'.⁴⁷

Seligmann was to choose one tarot card from which to carry out a sustained analysis, and it was the *Bateleur* (or Juggler) that proved to be of most interest to him. The same character would provide the inspiration behind two major pieces by Victor Brauner in 1947. Brauner seems to have conflated the figure of the Juggler with that of the poet in *The Surrealist*.⁴⁸ The same character was then transposed onto a symbolic portrait of Breton by Brauner in *Les amoureux, messagers du nombre*. For Brauner the Juggler represented the archetype of the poet, a master creator of intellectual authority.⁴⁹ The enigmatic figure of the Juggler seems to have made an impression on the surrealists, either intentionally or subconsciously, perhaps because he appears to embody the notion of mastery, especially through recourse to primal powers, and I wish to conclude by suggesting that for the surrealists the tarot and the divinatory arts might well have represented another potential means through which to achieve a more direct relationship with nature and the self.

¹ '... toute sorte de jeu où le hasard entre pour une part, qu'il soit jeu de cartes ou de dés, contient un élément divinatoire ésotérique. Le jeu se joue pour savoir lequel des joueurs sera le plus favorisé du sort ou de la providence. Tout jeu implique donc l'interrogation d'une sorte d'oracle qui manifestera la volonté divine ou les décrets de la fatalité. Cela est de toute évidence quand les cartes sont employées pour lire l'avenir, mais ce l'est aussi quand il s'agit purement et simplement d'un " jeu," Gérard Van Rijnberk, *Le Tarot: histoire, iconographie, ésotérisme*, Lyon 1947, 13.

² Roger Caillois, trans. Meyer Barash, *Man, Play and Games*, New York 1961, 48. Originally published as *Les Jeux et les hommes* in 1958.

³ Grillot de Givry, trans. J. Courtenay Locke, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, New York 1971, 280.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', *Art and Literature*, London 1990, 435.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' *Illuminations* (trans. Harry Zohn), London 1992, 173.

⁶ Masson cited in Dawn Ades, *André Masson*, New York 1994, 9.

⁷ Ades, *André Masson*, 11.

⁸ '... et comment les objets placés sur le tapis glisseraient vers l'abîme qu'aucun homme n'avait osé barrer,' Georges Limbour, 'L'Homme-plume' in Michel Leiris and Georges Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, Geneva and Paris 1947, 25. English translation by Douglas Cooper cited in William Rubin and Carolyn Lanchner, *André Masson and Twentieth Century Painting*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1976, 93

⁹ Rubin and Lanchner, *André Masson and Twentieth Century*, 99.

¹⁰ For an in-depth analysis of this painting see William Rubin and Carolyn Lanchner, *André Masson and Twentieth Century Painting*, 99.

¹¹ Michel Leiris, 'Mythologies' in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, viii.

¹² Michel Leiris, *Journal 1922-1989*, Paris, 1992, 45, cited in Dawn Ades, *André Masson*, 11.

¹³ Louis Chochod, *Histoire de la magie et de ses dogmes*, Paris 1971, 214.

¹⁴ Georges Limbour, 'Scenes of Everyday Life,' in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, v-vi.

¹⁵ Georges Limbour, 'About an Exhibition,' in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, ii.

¹⁶ Michel Leiris, 'La Terre,' in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, 101.

¹⁷ 'Tenir la terre dans sa main ou l'avoir à sa discrétion sur le plat d'une table,' Leiris, 'La Terre,' in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson and His Universe*, 102.

¹⁸ The Major Arcana is one half of a deck of ancient cards. It is now more familiar as the modern tarot. The Minor Arcana, the other half of the deck, evolved into the modern playing cards we know today.

¹⁹ Paul Marteau, *Le Tarot de Marseille*, Paris 1949, 10.

²⁰ Marteau, *Le Tarot de Marseille*, 9.

²¹ '...vraiment le Mage dans le sens plus élevé du mot,' Rijnberk, *Le Tarot*, 227.

²² Oswald Wirth, *Le Tarot des imagiers du moyen âge*, Paris 1927, 101, and Kurt Seligmann, *The History of Magic and the Occult*, New York 1975, 281 (first published in 1948).

²³ 'Les loisirs des longues soirées m'ont permis la lecture de Diodore de Sicile et la compagnie fort légendaire de Apollonius de Tyane,' letter to Leiris dated 6 March 1923 in Françoise Levailant, ed., *André Masson, Les années surréalistes: correspondance 1916-1942*, Lyon 1990, 34.

²⁴ Philostratus, trans. F.C Conybeare, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: The Epistles of Apollonius and the Treatise of Eusebius*, London 1969, 489.

²⁵ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 323.

²⁶ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 321.

²⁷ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 519.

²⁸ Peter Whitfield, *Landmarks in Western Science: From Prehistory to the Atomic Age*, London 1999, 30.

²⁹ 'N'importe quel objet est mystérieux en soi: un bouton de porte recèle le même lyrisme virtuel qu'un ciel étoilé. Cependant nous sommes touchés de préférence par les objets qui se

rattachent à quelque symbolisme ancestral, à nous transmis par l'éducation ou l'atavisme: une croix par exemple, un couteau, un flambeau, un triangle de bois, une boule ou des cartes à jouer,' Leiris, *Journal*, 45.

³⁰ 'Un seul système divinatoire et apodictique a eu la fortune d'inspirer des représentations multiples, bien conservées, et d'une haute valeur esthétique: c'est le Tarot,' André Breton, *L'Art magique*, Paris 1991, 163.

³¹ Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, 281. Interestingly, Leiris also made use of the same quotation in his review of Givry's book.

³² '...l'unique magie évocatoire des symboles,' Wirth, *Le Tarot des imagiers du moyen âge*, 20.

³³ Wirth, *Le tarot des imagiers du moyen âge*, 100.

³⁴ André Breton, 'What is Surrealism,' in Breton, ed. Franklin Rosemont, *What is Surrealism: Selected Writings*, New York 1978, 123.

³⁵ José Pierre, *Surrealism*, Geneva 1970, 42.

³⁶ Michel Leiris, 'A propos du 'Musée des sorciers',' *Documents* 2: 1, 1929, 109-116.

³⁷ André Breton, 'Second manifeste du surréalisme,' *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris 2002, 128. For more information on Breton's interest in cryptesthesia and parapsychology see Jean Bruno, 'André Breton et la magie quotidienne', *Revue Métapsychique*, February 1954, 97-121; Christine Pouget, 'L'Attrait de la parapsychologie ou la tentation expérimentale', *Mélusine 2* (ed. Henri Béhar), Lausanne 1981, 70-97 and Yvonne Duplessis, *Surréalisme et paranormal: L'aspect expérimental du surréalisme*, Agnières 2002.

³⁸ André Breton, *Perspective Cavalière*, Paris 1970, 18.

³⁹ André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, Paris 1937, 23.

⁴⁰ Anthony Penrose, *The Home of the Surrealists*, London 2001, 16. According to Breton, Valentine Penrose was also the first to introduce to him the rudiments of astrology.

⁴¹ M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth*, Austin, Texas 2001, 146.

⁴² Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 162.

⁴³ Seligmann, *The History of Magic and the Occult*, 271.

⁴⁴ It is possible that he in fact meant cryptesthesia here.

⁴⁵ Seligmann, *The History of Magic and the Occult*, 272.

⁴⁶ I am grateful for a discussion on this subject with Jeremy Stubbs.

⁴⁷ *Vision provoquée par les mots:le père immobile; Vision provoquée par une feuille de buvard; Vision provoquée par l'aspect nocturne de la porte Saint-Denis.*

⁴⁸ For a more detailed analysis of *The Surrealist* see Nicolas Calas and Elena Calas, *The Peggy Guggenheim Collection of Modern Art*, New York 1968, 123.

⁴⁹ Brauner cited in Jean-Paul Clébert, *Dictionnaire du Surréalisme*, Paris 1996, 321.

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