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Intersecting Technology and Folk Belief in Posthuman Spirituality

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Minor Gestures of a Cyborgian Left Hand

> *What will the climate crisis bring? What kind of future lies ahead of us? In front of the seeker was the screen, and a deck of digital tarot cards was laid out. After a question was asked, the seeker reached out for the mouse with her left hand. She navigated to her desired card and clicked on it. The card flipped in swift animation and revealed a title. The card chosen was Extinction …*

What question would you pose in front of an oracle for the climate crisis? The *22Mirrors* Project by the Digital Witchcraft Institute was presented for the first time in front of an audience at the V2 Institute for Unstable Media in Rotterdam in May 2022, where participants sat in a circle awaiting the wisdom of the tarot oracle. Artist Danae Tapia and writer Javier Bertossi joined hands in writing a series of speculative literary fiction based on key archetypes found in the climate debate. Drawing on commonly evoked tropes that have come to play an increasingly important role in climate discourse, they created narratives from such figurations as "The Child," in reference to the activism led by Greta Thunberg, the "Space Colony," in reference to the dream of the ultra-rich to build new habitats and colonise other planets in the hope of escaping an uninhabitable Earth, and "The Cow," a nod to the dairy industry's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. The affective discourse and talking points around these archetypes were reworked literarily into short speculative narratives, and in the presentation, Tapia and Bertossi read out these stories and generated readings of the tarot cards in relation to the questions posed by the participants.

As a project, *22Mirrors* represents a growing field of practices in the crossovers between technology and spirituality, which can be grouped under the phrase "digital witchcraft."[1] Healers, mediums, artists, and other practitioners who self-identify as witches make use of digital devices, algorithmic automation, and social media platforms in order to re-enchant technology as a tool for empowerment against dominant capitalistic structures. *22Mirrors*, for instance, is part divination,

part storytelling, part community-building around ways to rethink approaches to the unfolding climate emergency of our times. Funded by the Climate-KIC International Foundation, the project aims to open up alternative climate conversations through speculative fiction and spirituality. Rather than presenting statistics and scientific information, the speculative climate stories appeal to the imagination, folk beliefs, and affective responses.

Throughout the evening, the artists emphasised that the cards had to be selected with the left hand, a practice that is common to traditional tarot reading with cards – transposed to today's digital setting as a left-hand click. The left side is the preferred hand to use for card shuffling and selection, as it is associated with intuitive and receptive energy. The repeated instruction of clicking with the left hand struck me throughout the evening as an audience member. Why is the left hand imbued with such importance for a spiritual practice? What potential does the left hand open up that the right hand, the one associated with logic and reason, fails to address?

This chapter is premised upon the potentialities of the left hand as a minor gesture. Erin Manning proposes the term "a minor gesture" after the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) on minoritarian becomings, which challenge the status quo of majoritarian norms and structures. Minor gestures are "sites of dissonance, staging disturbances that open experience to new modes of expression" (Manning 2016, 2). Minor gestures are speculative in nature:

> From a speculatively pragmatic stance, [a minor gesture] invents its own value, a value as ephemeral as it is mobile. This permeability tends to make it ungraspable, and often unrecognizable: it is no doubt difficult to value that which has little perceptible form, that which has not yet quite been invented, let alone defined.
>
> (Manning 2016, 22)

The left-hand click is a minor detail in the process of *22Mirrors*, and yet a highly emphasised aspect of the performance. Following Manning's invitation to read the politics of minor gestures, the left hand works in this chapter as an invitation, a hand extended towards the unknown futures of speculation and divination, and a hand extended towards a history of folk beliefs, spiritual traditions, and alternative cosmologies. It is a left hand that perhaps gestures towards the left-hand path in occultism, "in rejection of religious authority and societal taboos" (Beyer 2018) and in defiance of the right-hand path that is more aligned with religious dogmas and rules. It is a left hand that has historically been seen as the sinister hand, and the hand associated with the Devil. But it is also a hand rewired to click on a mouse and navigate digital interfaces. A cyborgian left hand, if you will.

This cyborgian left hand connects spiritual practices with our radically interconnected posthuman digital world. Here, I take on Francesca Ferrando's invitation to think about spirituality as "the genealogical source of the posthuman" (Ferrando 2016, 243). Spirituality, she explains,

> refers to the human tendency to conceive existence more extensively than the individual perception. Existence, in a spiritual sense, contemplates a non-separation between the inner and outer worlds. It is a connectedness between the self and the others: within the spiritual realm, there is no division based on caste, color, creed, gender, age, nationality, religion, or species.
>
> (Ferrando 2016, 244)

Through a historical overview of non-Western religions and practices, she proposes a spirituality-based posthuman view that sees the human merely as one entity in an entire ecology of other beings, things, and energies. What I extract from Ferrando's work is also the emphasis that spiritual practices (like that of witchcraft, or indigenous rituals) have been wielded as tools against capitalist expansion and colonial domination by communities of tribes, slaves, and women – "a history of beliefs, visions, prayers and rituals have accompanied the historical outcomes of the most oppressed categories of human beings, and can be recollected during the most challenging times" (Ferrando 2016, 253). Against this backdrop, the cyborgian left hand is raised in defiance of capitalist and colonialist systems, a minor gesture against such forms of oppression.

Here we must also connect Ferrando's post-dualistic characterisation of the posthuman with Donna Haraway's cyborgian vision of human enmeshment with technology as a potential emancipatory route. Ferrando writes that "the human itself is seen as a process developing within a material net, a hybrid, a constant technogenesis" (Ferrando 2016, 248) with reference to Haraway's ontology of the cyborg (Haraway 1991). Science, technology, and spirituality can be aligned along a natural–cultural continuum that reconnects these seemingly disparate fields. From this perspective, the cyborgian left hand is an opening to think about how these perspectives might indeed intersect. Alongside the left-hand click featured in this work, I will also make reference to another instance in the history of technology where the left hand came into prominence. This anecdote will take us into a minoritarian moment in history of the first transatlantic telegraph cable in 1857, the feasibility of which was threatened by the left-hand lay (a counter-clockwise twist) in its construction and almost caused the unravelling of the telegraph connection. The left hand appears to be a hand of undoing, and of defiance against order.

In the rest of this argumentative and speculative account, I will use the cyborgian left hand to open a door to the intersections of posthuman technology and spirituality, and reflect on how minor gestures through folk belief and posthuman spirituality might offer resistance to capitalist and colonialist "progress."

The Left-hand Click: Digital Witchcraft as Posthuman Spirituality

To raise a cyborgian left hand – I am reminded of the hand featured in performance scholar Rebecca Schneider's lecture performance *Extending a Hand* (2018). The lecture departs from a Palaeolithic hand print forever preserved in rock, and asks how we might respond to this ancient hand in the geological time of climate change and in the face of the devastating effects of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene. Schneider writes:

> Gestures necessarily jump off of themselves and onto another – I, here, was greeted as other in the space of this hail – time, space, and bodies change places because gestures, to be gestures, become themselves in reiteration […]. So I was both other to and, to the degree that one meets one hand with another, one. Gestures, like greeting, inaugurate relation […] and relation inaugurates both distance and proximity.
> (Schneider and Rae 2018, 16)

The minor gesture of the left-hand click inaugurates the relation between spirituality and technology, and enfolds the history of witchcraft with its present digital, cyborgian reincarnation. The left side represented a connection with the Devil, one that was allegedly celebrated by witches (Federici 2004, 184). In *22Mirrors*, the left-hand click opens up the connection to the spiritual realms, in the amalgamation of the human with the divine, mediated through a digital interface. According to the artist, digital witchcraft is evoked here as a way to explore the role of speculation and imagination in the design and application of digital technologies (Tapia 2022b). Magical thinking acts as "advanced prototyping" (Tapia 2022b) that brings other potentialities of technology into being. Such explorations use technology in affirmative and activist manners and may open up technology from its otherwise capitalistic registers.

But what is digital witchcraft in the first place? *22Mirrors* is one specific artistic example, but the practice itself is flourishing in digital spaces like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. In the last decade, scholars from a range of fields have identified the resurgence of witchcraft in times of uncertainty, and its interconnection with the digital. Along with her colleagues, Nadia Bartolini has situated alternative practices around witchcraft and spirituality in uncertain economic times (Bartolini et al. 2013). Their paper is set in the economic downturn in London after the

2008 credit crunch, prompting an investigation of what they term "esoteric economies" around spiritual practices. Others have situated growing interests in magic after Donald Trump's election to office in 2016, where a degree of political resistance took shape through "magical activism and resistance witches" (Fine 2020, 68). This resistance emerged "in a high-stakes situation of great anxiety" (Magliocco 2020, 46) around political order and the Republican government in the United States. A minor gesture against Trump, spells appeared on blogs and instructions were shared on social media profiles. Magic practitioners responded to calls circulated on Facebook and other networking sites and gathered in person to perform group hexes and rituals, which were then recorded and circulated online.

For the uninitiated, circles of conjurers murmuring chants may seem far removed from real life, and TikTokers self-identifying as "baby witches" may sound like a passing fad for Gen Z. But rather than debating whether magic and the supernatural is "real" or makes any sense, this chapter considers (digital) witchcraft practice as a minor gesture that has its own practices, norms, and values, and observes how these spiritual beliefs and their associated cosmologies situate practitioners in a more-than-human world that challenges post-Enlightenment rationality. Despite the varied practices of digital witchcraft, several key traits (discussed under the headings of "networked kinship," "vibrant matter," and "political entanglements") may be observed across its repertoire, which allows one to elaborate on the posthuman nature of this minoritarian spiritual practice.

Networked Kinship

Firstly, digital witchcraft is usually a network of practices with social media presence, appearing on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and often includes a hybridised mix of rituals. Religious Studies scholar Chris Miller analyses the "WitchTok" phenomenon on TikTok, and describes a digital subculture of witches across multiple Pagan traditions, such as Wicca, Druidry, and Heathenry (Miller 2022, 118). He observes that posts on WitchTok may reference several hashtags, including #PaganTok, #NorsePaganTok, #BrujaTok, or #CrystalTok, all of which signal a variety of origins of the practices on display. Media Studies scholars Berit Renser and Katrin Tiidenberg term this "eclectic neo-Paganism" (Renser and Tiidenberg 2020, 4) in their study of witches networking on Facebook. They observe that folk beliefs, indigenous beliefs, New Age, shamanism, Eastern religions, and monotheist religions intersect with a sprinkle of self-help advice. This is similarly observed in Frampton and Grandison's study of identity construction in contemporary witchcraft and how online communities enable witchcraft-related identities. They point out that "the digitisation of group rituals collapses hierarchy within

witchcraft knowledge exchange, as practitioners are now able to blend vast sources of individualised knowledge" (Frampton and Grandison 2022, 18). In other words, rather than seeing digital witchcraft as a homogenous practice with clear lineages, it is clear that it is an umbrella term that represents a re-invention of traditional practices adapted by contemporary practitioners.

Networked witchcraft, with its associated hashtags and virality, allows for dissemination of hybridised and bastardised practices across social media platforms, as well as their associated cosmologies. A platform like TikTok only encourages the mixing and blending, as the recommendation algorithm automatically associates videos of similar nature and provides them for users based on their displayed preferences. Instagram similarly provides suggested reels and posts based on recorded user activity and interests. Digital witchcraft on such platforms becomes a practice of non-linearity by default, due to algorithmic sorting that draws from multiple cultures and multiple cosmologies by way of association and homophily.[2] This is very different from older ways of transmitting witchcraft knowledges such as through membership to a coven.[3]

Witches, in this sense, are no longer old hags with broomsticks and pointy hats, but savvy tech-wielding young cyborgs looking for networked kinship. Becoming a witch through digital spaces can be a "completely customisable" (Walker 2020) experience that allows for individual cultivation of folk and New Age practices.[4] The community-building in digital witchcraft as afforded by digital connectivity recalls Haraway's mobilising call: "make kin, not babies" (Haraway 2016, 103), where kinship is about being with "something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy" (Haraway 2016, 102–103). Interviewees in Frampton and Grandison's study unanimously recognise the dynamic knowledge exchange in online communities, and emphasise the sense of solidarity and mutual support within groups formed via social media platforms, forums, and online courses (Frampton and Grandison 2022, 13–14). The interviewees conveyed largely positive experiences, citing "alleviating loneliness, improving self-esteem, and affirming practitioners' spiritual beliefs" (Frampton and Grandison 2022, 18) as part of the digital exchange. Friendships are cultivated online, and sometimes extend into the offline world as well.

This sense of openness, experimentation, and networking in digital witchcraft communities seems to echo the emancipatory potential of feminist cyborgian embodiment that is celebrated in Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." Networking, in the manifesto, refers to the "profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (Haraway 1991, 170). Afforded by networked spaces of social media, digital witchcraft builds kinship not only through human-to-human networks. Rather, the network, or the ecology of relations set up, is characteristically permeable and plays host to

a world of spirits, deities, faes, fairies, crystals, spells, tarot cards, cats, and plants, which is decidedly more-than-human in nature. For instance, the West African cosmos, which is influential in witchcraft practices hailing from the Caribbean, "includes interaction between divinities, spirits, ancestors, humans, animals, and natural forces" (Monteagut 2021, 27). In the revival of witchcraft popularised by the internet, not only is there a profusion of witch identities that extends across a spectrum across race, ethnicity, and gender, there is also a profusion of objects and beings which are imbued with magical power.[5] Networked kinship in this sense is not limited to human participants – something that perhaps puts the following quotation on cyborgs in a different light: cyborgs are "constitutively full of multiscalar, multitemporal, multimaterial critters of both living and nonliving persuasions" (Haraway 2016, 105). Cyborgian witches are certainly multiscalar in the more-than-human worlds that they inhabit, multitemporal in their evocation of ancestral spirits and ancient spells passed down the generations, and multimaterial in the various tools (natural and manmade) and companion species (animal helpers that witches keep, also known as familiars) that they use for conjuring magical powers.

Vibrant Matter

The recognition of the magical power of objects and beings beyond the human leads to the important observation that digital witchcraft practice encourages the re-enchantment of objects as well as the re-enchantment of technology. Susan Greenwood proposes that "developing a magical consciousness is learning to see the natural world as vital and alive" (Greenwood 2020, 9). The practice of witchcraft is necessarily premised upon a belief in the agency of magical objects and nature. Crystals are enchanted with protection powers; white sage cleanses a space when burnt; celestial movement of planets affects collective moods and individual decisions.

Material objects, from this vantage point, are recast as powerful agents that mediate between the spiritual and human realms within witchcraft cosmologies. This dismantling of binaries and boundaries can be read in light of today's philosophical movement of new materialism. Magical witchcraft practice operates with what Jane Bennett would term "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010). Bennett discusses "Thing-Power," which is to say, "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett 2010, 6). Bennett's philosophical account challenges the centrality of human agency and instead envisions distributed agency across a complex assemblage of actants and factors from personal memories to bacteria, from weather to noise (Bennett 2010,

23). The re-enchantment of objects and the turn to their power represent a key moment in posthuman philosophy. As Ferrando writes:

> Posthumanism does not recognize humans as being exceptional, nor does it see them in their separateness from the rest of beings, but in connection to them. In such an interconnected paradigm, the well-being of humans is as crucial as the one of nonhuman animals, machines, and the environment.
>
> (Ferrando 2016, 246)

However, it should be noted that animist ontologies have long existed in indigenous cosmologies, and Western scholarship is only just catching up with these long-standing beliefs through philosophies such as new materialism and posthumanism.[6] Indeed, some of the popular witchcraft practices promoted on social media, such as "smudging" with white sage, draw on indigenous rituals and shamanic medicine in the Americas, which shows the prominence of indigenous beliefs in contemporary witchcraft and folk practices. These practices, though at times rife with accusations of cultural appropriation, represent the practitioners' recognition of the Thing-Power and sacred potential of these objects. In *Brujas: The Magic and Power of Witches of Color* (2021), Lorraine Monteagut analyses Bruja witchcraft, which connects to "traditions of West Africa that made their way to the Caribbean and the Americas through slavery, and to the traditions of the Indigenous people of the Americas, who were displaced and forced to assimilate to the cultures of European colonizers" (Monteagut 2021, xii). Bruja practices, often carried out by witches of colour, tend to draw from cosmologies from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. In a way, to call these practices posthuman is to recast them within a European way of knowing. In this sense, I side with Ferrando's comment that in the spiritual sense, humans have always been posthuman, and that these spiritual practices have long been situated in interconnected paradigms with their ecological environments.

In digital witchcraft, the vibrancy of matter is not limited to altar objects and ingredients for potions and spells, but is also extended to technology itself. Artist Ginevra Petrozzi, who self-identifies as a witch, proposes a techno-divinatory practice that she calls "digital esoterism."[7] For a tarot-like reading, she makes use of an individual's smartphone, and looks at the algorithmic predictions materialised through targeted advertising, predictive text typing, and suggested songs on Spotify. The imagery and content would be used to read the individual's fortune, like one would read the imagery and content of tarot cards. Petrozzi draws parallels between the "mysterious processes" of algorithmic prediction with divinatory practices – technologies are used to predict the future with only the expert control of computer

engineers and software developers, reminiscent of the all-powerful sorcerer who is able to foretell what is to come and manipulate forces beyond our control. She also recognises the uncanny moments when algorithms are able to provide extremely accurate predictions in targeted ads, as if they are able to read our deepest desires. This is also sometimes experienced in card readings, where cards reveal secrets in the unconscious of the seeker. Petrozzi's project focuses on reclaiming practices of the digital to rebel and heal from modern technological structures of control (Petrozzi 2021b). Her identification as a digital witch involves "reclaiming the archetypal role of the sorceress as a healer, and as a political rebel" (Petrozzi 2021). This continues a long line of tradition where the disenfranchised use magic to reclaim power against institutionalised forces – something well recognised by Ferrando.[8]

Tarot cards often appear on YouTube videos as digital witches offer free standardised readings for anyone interested in picking one of the pre-selected cards on display. Others do a card pull for new moons and full moons as a way to read the collective energy in a planetary sense. Tarot cards demonstrate their Thing-Power as spiritual guidance from beyond and are celebrated as future-telling oracles. This, of course, is also the practice from which the *22Mirrors* project discussed in this chapter draws, and is reliant upon in its artistic and dramaturgical design.

From the perspective of performance studies, Natalia Esling and others have previously argued that the future-casting performance of a tarot reading might be seen as a "diffractive practice," drawing from the philosophy of Karen Barad (2014). Tracing the speculative history of tarot, Esling postulates that tarot functions in a decentred way with no authoritative single origin in defining how the cards ought to be read. In her analysis, tarot makes use of images, signs, and symbols and helps seekers discover meaning and purpose by way of an "intra-active exercise relying on the agency and dynamism of forces within – but not bound by – a process, beyond any individual actor" (Esling et al. 2020, 11).

A tarot reading emerges in the intra-action between reader, seeker, symbols, and meanings of the cards, the order in which they are drawn, and how they are laid out in the spread. Near infinite possibilities arise in the combinations and recombinations of questions, cards, and potential answers. For this reason, Esling suggests a Baradian frame of reference in order to highlight the "innumerable and as-yet indiscernible orientations and possibilities" of a given reading, which forms a "productive instability" (Esling et al. 2020, 11) that diffracts the many futures and potentialities of the future. In this process of future-casting, the agency and Thing-Power of the tarot cards are emphasised:

> if we can learn to sit quietly enough, "turn off the thinking brain" for long enough, the card will "speak" through a quiet voice or through a

vivid mental image – an image that speaks so fully that it can be felt. […] The full materiality of the card, its symbols, and its elements can communicate.

(Gregory 2016, 231)

Both Petrozzi's *Digital Esoterism* and the Digital Witchcraft Institute's *22Mirrors* take inspiration from the diffractive possibilities embodied by tarot symbology and cards, and are built upon years of experience of listening to and communicating with tarot cards and the intimate knowledge fostered through their relationships with their decks.

Political Entanglements

22Mirrors's direct engagement with climate politics is emblematic of yet another common feature in digital witchcraft. Various practitioners are driven and motivated by political causes or identity politics. Aside from the example of hexing as a response to the Trump administration, strands of other political questions are also found. During the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2020, the hashtag #WitchesForBLM was trending with spells, hexes, and calls for donations and activism. One of the digital witches explained how the spells work in an interview with *Bustle*:

> These spells work in the form of asking our Ancestors – those who have been subjected to the injustices of this land, stolen Africans, murdered revolutionaries, martyrs and innocent lives taken during the Civil Rights Movement – and our own ancestral background [for help].

(Wylde 2020)

From a decolonial perspective, such activities of spellcasting align with the activism of Black Lives Matter and actively recognise colonial violence in its engagement with the legacy of slavery. In Monteagut's account of brujas, she argues that being a bruja is "inherently political" (Monteagut 2021, 117). Quoting an example from Puerto Rico, Monteagut points out how the practice of witchcraft was used to keep Indigenous and African traditions alive amidst the imposition of Catholicism by colonisers as "private modes of healing and dissent" (Monteagut 2021, 5). The continuation of Bruja practices is important today as the legacy is carried on by younger generations. Brujas, together with other witches of colour, can make use of magical practices to fight against the internalised colonisation that has devalued indigenous ways of knowing. Ancestral wisdom, such as plant medicine, spiritual systems of healing, and divination provides a way out of the binds of capitalist and patriarchal ways of living (Monteagut

2021, 63). For these practitioners, magic becomes a stand-in for resistance against the coloniality of knowledge, and an opportunity to heal generational trauma inherited from histories of systematic oppression.[9]

In addition, Frampton and Grandison observe that "being drawn to witchcraft often came in tandem with participants' experiences of being socially ostracised or stigmatised by mainstream standards" (Frampton and Grandison 2022), usually in relation to disability, neurodiversity, sexuality, and gender. Many of their interviewees experienced depression, anxiety, and grief, and some also attributed this to the ills of society, which the practice of witchcraft may have helped to heal. As observed by Jane Barnette, there is a general desire among young adults to use (digital) witchcraft to solve problems of today – "from global warming to the 'endless wars,' to racial injustice and misogyny, the problems of the twenty-first century appear insurmountable without divine intervention" (Barnette 2022, 102).

While it would be naive to suggest that magic and witchcraft could be a cure-all for the ills of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonial violence, it is necessary to establish how magic and witchcraft have been subjugated in Western history, and why their revival is appealing as a potentially powerful set of instruments for their practitioners. What is helpful here is perhaps a return to Silvia Federici's authoritative analysis of the history of the witch-hunt in early modern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which provides insight into why magic and witchcraft were banned in the first place. During this period, magic was seen to be at odds with a scientific and rationalistic worldview, and for this reason an unwanted interruption to the developments of a changing episteme that was underwriting an emerging capitalist economy. Put another way, magic challenged capitalist ways of living:

> At the basis of magic was an animistic conception of nature that did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit, and thus imagined the cosmos as a *living organism*, populated by occult forces, where every element was in "sympathetic" relation with the rest. […] Every element – herbs, plants, metals, and most of all the human body – hid virtues and powers peculiar to it. Thus, a variety of practices were designed to appropriate the secrets of nature and bend its powers to the human will. From palmistry to divination, from the use of charms to sympathetic healing, magic opened a vast number of possibilities.
> (Federici 2004, 141–142)

The cosmology of magic depends on the lively, animist materiality of nature, of objects, and of the human body. These entities are situated in dynamic relations to one another. Magical beliefs are predicated upon a world that

is unpredictable, where the winds of fortune blow in particular directions, and there are lucky and unlucky days: "days on which one can travel and others on which one should not move from home, days on which to marry and others on which every enterprise should be cautiously avoided" (Federici 2004, 142). Within such a belief system, one could hardly expect men to follow an instituted system of work, to follow a schedule, come rain or sunshine, or ignore the signs and signatures of bad fortune. In magic, the human individual is seen as powerful – magical incantations allow the possibility of manipulating invisible forces at work, whether it is to make someone fall in love, or to win a battle at war. Eradicating magical practices was therefore necessary in order to institute a work discipline, for magic was seen as the trick that could allow one to "obtain what one wanted without work" (Federici 2004, 142). In short, capitalism realised that "the world had to be 'disenchanted' in order to be dominated" (Federici 2004, 174).

But neutralising the power of magic was only one step in the process of capitalistic domination. Federici further proposes that the phenomenon of the witch-hunt not only destroyed women's bodies, but also our human connection to nature in order to make way for capitalist progress. Witches stood for the wild, uncontrollable side of nature; they held knowledge of folk medicine and worked with herbs as healing remedies; and they were guardians of birth and reproduction as midwives. Quoting Carolyn Merchant's work, Federici argues that the persecution of witches allowed for a paradigm shift in scientific revolution towards a Cartesian mechanistic philosophy.[10] This shift replaced the "organic worldview that had looked at nature, women, and the earth as nurturing mothers, with a mechanical one that degraded them to the rank of standing resources" (Federici 2004, 203). Witches and their female bodies represented the wild side of nature that seemed "disorderly, uncontrollable, and thus antagonistic to the project undertaken by the new science" (Federici 2004, 203). Control over their bodies signified the domination over nature and land, and nature could be exploited as commodity, valuable only for its use value and exchange value, rather than appreciated and embraced as nourishment and habitat.

In Federici's narrative, witches were midwives or were seen as "wise women" – the holders of reproductive knowledge and control. The witch-hunt allowed for the expropriation of women from control over their own bodies, which was a first step in ensuring state control over the reproduction of labour power. Female friendships were "an object of suspicion" (Federici 2004, 186), and captured witches were forced to denounce their friends as accomplices in crime, effectively destroying kinship bonds in the community.

As such, the revitalisation of witchcraft today signifies the important return of the power of magic and the vibrant materiality of nature and other

beings, and the reclaiming of the label of witches connects with ongoing feminist struggles to reclaim agency over bodies and reproduction against capitalist expropriation. Cyborgian connections through digital witchcraft and the sharing of magical tools also carry the potential to revitalise kin-making and community-building across geographical and cultural borders.

Witchcraft Re-enchanted

In strong alignment with Ferrando's characterisation of magic and spirituality as a source of rebellion and struggle, one might view today's digital witchcraft as the return of earlier themes which were suppressed in the process of instituting capitalist control by government and church in the European history of the witch-hunt. How might animist and new materialistic magic, indigenous and posthuman ecologies, and feminist and decolonial politics join hands through such a reloaded practice and popularisation of digital witchcraft? Artists working in this domain wish to reclaim "ritual-making, spell-writing, and prophecy-telling as an embodied, relational and collective practice that occurs in symbiotic communion with one's environment" (Collier Broms and Calderón 2021, 7), where magic and mysticism are approached as "a feminist, ecological practice of receiving, listening, collaborating, and composting" (Collier Broms and Calderón 2021, 7).

Through the three pillars of networked kinship, vibrant matter, and political entanglements, I see digital witchcraft as the revitalisation of a once-feared practice that was violently eradicated through witch-hunting in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. It is a spiritual practice that sees tapping into the energy of the natural world as ally and as resistance, one that is now also taken up in the digital realm, mediated through technological networks. It is a re-enchantment of the world that allows us to see beyond Anthropocentric control, where humans are but one node in a series of interconnections with other beings, animals, spirits, stones, or otherwise. As Greenwood argues, "re-enchanting the world […] means learning to see nature as alive and also as having a spiritual dimension; this type of thinking is not possible within a cosmology that conceives the world as de-spirited or as a machine" (Greenwood 2020, viii). The "unscientific" nature of witchcraft is perhaps precisely why it is a valuable perspective – it is the death of magical thinking and belief that paved the way for rationality and early modern science in the Enlightenment, and it is the literal death of witches, as Federici would argue, that allowed for the emergence of capitalist control of land, nature, and labouring bodies.

There is no promise that digital witchcraft can bring about the divine intervention that would solve the problems of today's world, even if "baby witches" in the US get together to hex the patriarchy. Yet there seems to be an observable attempt to make use of this spiritual practice as a

means of political organisation.[11] TikTok and Instagram, although subservient to the logic of algorithmic control, seem to offer the possibility of (re)kindling new relations of kinship through shared interests of users in witchcraft and related spiritual practices.[12] One might even suggest that there are glimpses of collective consciousness raising and political protests in the cyborgian politics inaugurated, as evidenced by movements such as #WitchesForBLM. Artist, herbalist, and witch Cy X suggests that digital witchcraft practice opens up the opportunity to re-examine the politics of using technology:

> How can this perspective, one that is steeped in deep listening, one that is relational, one that moves beyond human-centred ideology offer new frameworks of being that move beyond fear and offer new methods of entry for those who have been systematically erased and harmed in a multitude of other capitalist tech spaces?
>
> (Cy X 2022).

22Mirrors is taken here as a prime example of a project that capitalises on the affordances of the digital to bring together ecology, divination, kinship, and a more-than-human cosmology. Technology becomes the conduit for this new form of witchcraft and magic, through which the issue of the climate crisis and the Anthropocene is addressed, and ecological consciousness cultivated. The archetypes evoked in the Arcana and the process of deciphering a tarot reading are not unlike Haraway's discussion of figurations in her book, *Staying with the Trouble*. SF is a recurring acronym that appears in the book: "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far" (Haraway 2016, 2). SF is a figuration that opens up possibilities and connects facts with fiction, speculations with images, politics with possibilities. It is not a one-size-fits-all type of answer, but a type of speculation. A reading of the future is about potentialities and openings, and the tarot reader's task is to string together a narrative that fits these various components: the seeker, the question asked, the card's imagery, significations, and its position within the spread. A skilled tarot reader needs to understand not only the card drawn, but also the intentions of the seeker, sometimes in combination with other sets of techniques such as astrology and numerology. What results from the reading of the card spread is a story, a narrative, a worlding that connects these different components together. It is in essence a kind of "figuring" akin to the SF practices Haraway espouses (Haraway 2016, 3). Haraway writes:

> I think of sf and string figures in a triple sense of figuring. First, promiscuously plucking out fibers in clotted and dense events and practices,

> I try to follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times. In that sense, sf is a method of tracing, of following a thread in the dark, in a dangerous true tale of adventure, where who lives and who dies and how might become clearer for the cultivating of multispecies justice. Second, the string figure is not the tracking, but rather the actual thing, the pattern and assembly that solicits response, the thing that is not oneself but with which one must go on. Third, string figuring is passing on and receiving, making and unmaking, picking up threads and dropping them. sf is practice and process …
>
> (Haraway 2016, 3)

In the presentation of *22Mirrors* at V2, the artists read out the speculative stories they wrote around the particular card drawn, and collectively co-constructed a reading to the question posed by the seeker. The interconnections drawn were always open to interpretation, modification, and discussion, and were speculative in nature. Like the figuring described by Haraway, the question of the seeker was revisited and unpacked, the reading contingent upon the tangles and patterns the artists drew upon in constructing the speculative stories. These stories, written from a first-person perspective of the archetype, bring yet another subjectivity onto the scene – that of the figuration of the card. The often non-human archetype (Glacier, Oil, Cow, Lithium, Drought, the Amazon …), in turn, stood for different things for the artists and seekers, and enabled "multispecies storytelling, multispecies worlding" (Haraway 2011, 5). Knowledge around tarot in general also played a role in the interpretation. One of the seekers brought up that the card Extinction, which was mentioned in the opening anecdote of this chapter, corresponds to the tarot card of Death, and in effect could mean rebirth and a new beginning as much as death. This spurred on another round of interpretation and discussion, providing fertile materials for the speculative unfolding of what the oracle, through the agency of the technological interface, was telling the audience. These tarot readings functioned as Haraway's SF that allowed the audience to trace diffractive relations to the Anthropocene.

It is a performance that fits well with Manning's concept of the minor gesture in the larger domain of climate activism. This appeal to the spiritual, to the intuitive that is governed by the left hand, to digital witchcraft, is no doubt an unconventional way of advancing the climate cause. But as Manning reminds us, "while the grand gestures of a macro politics most easily sum up the changes that occurred to alter the field, it is the minoritarian tendencies that initiate the subtle shifts that created conditions for this, and any change" (Manning 2016, 1).

22Mirrors gestures towards the ecological consciousness embedded in cosmologies of witchcraft-based spiritual practice, and is a rather fitting step in reclaiming the agency of land and nature from the extractive politics of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. As such, digital witchcraft holds the promise of an alternative engagement with climate politics through generating new posthuman kinship ties with the natural and the supernatural.

The Left-Hand Lay: Minoritarian Potential of Folk Belief and Spirituality

But let us once again return to the minor gestures of the left hand. In answering the call of the cyborgian left hand, this chapter would not be complete without evoking another instance in history in which technology and spirituality intersected, and where superstition around what the left hand stood for played a role in technological development. As argued by Jeffery Sconce in *Haunted Media* (2000), the history of communicative technology has long been imbued with spiritualist overtones. He observes the twin development of telegraph communications and the spiritualism movement in the US, where the telegraph cables laid between New York and London fostered the imagination of being able to communicate with other people at long distances. This translated into enthusiasm about another type of communication – spirit communication, also known as the "spiritual telegraph" (Sconce 2000, 23) or "celestial telegraphy" (Sconce 2000, 28). The concluding section of this chapter therefore turns to the telegraph cable as an object of curiosity. In this concluding discussion on the cyborgian left hand, I connect the left-hand click of digital witchcraft with the left-hand lay, which refers to the directional movement when twisting the metal wires of a telegraph cable. The left-hand lay was almost a source of failure in the series of experiments that led up to the first successful laying of the first transatlantic telegraph cable. Much like the left-hand click of *22Mirrors* that inaugurates the interconnection between spirituality and technology, the left-hand lay also brings together folk belief and superstition with technology. I return to and deepen the engagement with the intriguing power of left-handed minor gestures through this anecdote.

In "The Left Heresy and Directional Preference in Early Science and Technology" (1982), Blake-Coleman links the curious tendency to avoid leftward (counter-clockwise) directions in the design of early machines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to folk beliefs about the left. It is an observation that coincides with Federici's statement that the witch was "the living symbol of the world turned upside down" (Federici 2004, 177), with their backwards and counter-clockwise dances, as well as nocturnal rites that challenged the capitalistic regularisation of worktime. The left is

associated with the Devil – the folk tradition of throwing salt over one's shoulder, for instance, is done on the left:

> Christian beliefs hold that the devil hangs around behind your left shoulder, waiting to take advantage of you. If you spill salt, the devil sees it as an invitation to step in and do evil. Throwing it over your shoulder into his face blinds him and renders him helpless.
>
> (Ronca 2021)

Likewise, leftward, interpreted also as counter-clockwise movement, is considered "ill-omened, malevolent, destructive, unlucky, unclean – in a word, 'sinister'" (Blake-Coleman 1982, 151). Directional preferences might seem innocent enough until one looks at the history of witch-hunting and recognises that a woman walking counter-clockwise in a churchyard several times could be reason enough to persecute her as a witch. Counter-clockwise movement was seen as deviant and potentially dangerous. Counter-clockwise movement is important to witches as it represents movement against the direction of the sun – a movement that generates the friction and therefore energy necessary for the conjuring of spells. In 1591, a Scottish witches' dance (with explicit counter-clockwise directions) came to prominence during the North Berwick witch trials. The witches were accused of purposely dancing in a way that had raised storms that had caused a menace to King James and Queen Anne's sea voyage from Denmark back to Scotland. Leftward and counter-clockwise dances were to be suppressed in the process of witch-hunting, further solidifying folk belief around directional preference in the early modern period.

Blake-Coleman identifies the tendency to prefer clockwise movement in tools and buildings created during that historical period. According to his research, spiral staircases were generally clockwise in nature, so that the "right-handed swordsman had the advantage of facing an opponent below with a clear cut and thrust" (Blake-Coleman 1982, 157). Tools like hand cranks, wheels, and mills too had a preference for clockwise movement, where some even included extra wheels and gears so that the final motion of the machine would be clockwise (Blake-Coleman 1982, 158-160). He argued that this preference was probably not simply due to the dominance of right-handed workers, but also due to the longstanding folk beliefs around the sinister left hand.

The directional preference for clockwise over counter-clockwise movement persisted into the nineteenth-century development of telegraph cables. During the construction of the very first 1857 transatlantic telegraph cable between Ireland and Newfoundland, the Atlantic telegraph company contracted two firms in London, Newall and Glass & Elliot, each

to create half of the 2,500-nautical-miles-long cable. Newall's half of the cable was made with the traditional right-hand lay (the clockwise twist), while the section made by Glass & Elliot had a left-hand lay (the counter-clockwise twist). Glass & Elliot realised that the act of coiling the cable would be done clockwise (as was preferred) in the storage tanks of the ship that would take the cables out to sea. They decided to twist their wires in the opposite direction so that it would cause less strain on the core and insulation of the cable. Notably, the left-hand lay eventually became the universally adopted directionality of cable-twisting because the reasoning to prevent strain was completely sound. However, as it was not communicated at all during this first construction, a temporary splice had to be put in place to prevent the cable from unravelling on its own when the two ends were joined together.

The *Illustrated Times* of London of 1 August 1857 describes the fix:

> It was not discovered till some time after the work had begun that the two separate halves had been twisted in opposite directions. When joined in the centre the natural tendency of this counter formation would have been to untwist the cable altogether. A very ingenious species of clamp, somewhat akin to the coupling screws and weights used to connect railway carriages, has been devised to counteract the natural effects of this blunder.
>
> (Burns 2021)

Read this way, the left-hand lay in fact threatened to unravel the entire length of the first telegraph cable if a weighted splice was not put in place to prevent the natural tendency for the cable to untwist. In this imagined untwisting motion, the left-hand lay threatened to undo the technological dimension of colonial control – for the same communication technology would have allowed more instantaneous communication between empire and colony, with the speed of administrative control and of orders travelling from the British Empire to its subjects expedited. Despite the fix, the cable ultimately failed due to tumultuous weather conditions that made it near impossible to lay the parts properly. The agency of the natural world is doubtlessly not to be underestimated in such an ambitious endeavour to bring the world into connectivity.

Indeed, it seemed like there was a certain kind of rebelliousness to the left-handed directionality, one that is as connected to the left-hand lay of the telegraph cable as to the leftward, counter-clockwise movement of the witches. In my reading of this historical episode, the left-hand lay embodies the performative power of materiality that threatens to undermine colonialist expansion, represented by the set-up of a colonial telegraph network. Perhaps there was reason after all to fear leftward,

counter-clockwise movement, witches and wires alike. As Manning reminds us, "the minor is a force that courses through [the major], unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards" (Manning 2016, 1). In this case, the minoritarian and unexpected appearance of the left-hand lay in cable-making quite literally unmoored the structural integrity of a colonial communicative system. In this turn to vibrant matter, perhaps there is a power of resistance after all in the minoritarian gesture of the left hand, and the associated folk beliefs and superstitions that designate it as the spiritual hand, the sinister hand, and the hand that defies rational logic.

By bringing together the left-hand click and the left-hand lay, I have attempted to weave a speculative account of the potential of spiritual beliefs and magic against capitalistic and colonialist systems. The cyborgian left hand may be minoritarian, but it is a figuration of posthuman spirituality, one that is attentive to the magical cosmologies of an interconnected more-than-human world, whether through telegraph cables, internet cables, spirit communication, divination, or otherwise. If, as Federici argues that "the world had to be 'disenchanted' in order to be dominated" (Federici 2004, 174), it remains to be seen what the minor gesture of spiritual re-enchantment and the resurgence of digital witchcraft might offer in defiance of the capitalist and colonialist order that rules the Anthropocenic present.

Notes

 1 See Tapia (2022).
 2 Homophily refers to the phenomenon that birds of a feather flock together, and describes algorithmic organisation as a matter of grouping people according to their preferences with the assumption that like attracts like. See Chun and Leeker (2017).
 3 See, for instance, the anthropological accounts of witch covens and memberships in Luhrmann (1991).
 4 Some might argue, however, that these practices shared online are rife with misinformation and that this way of sharing witchcraft is dangerous. See Barnette (2022).
 5 On the profusion of witch identities that extend across race, ethnicity, and gender, see Frampton and Grandison (2022).
 6 See further Todd (2016) and Povinelli (2016).
 7 See Petrozzi (2021b).
 8 See also Campagna (2018).
 9 See further Quijano (2000).
10 See further Merchant (1980).
11 See, for instance, accounts via MacColl (2020), Wylde (2020), Fine (2020), and Magliocco (2020).
12 Digital platforms are caught up in other problems like digital surveillance, but to dwell on these issues would be beyond the scope of this chapter. This line of inquiry may be pursued via Zuboff (2019).

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