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Divination at art school: A speculative methodology for an expanded reading practice

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Divination at art school

A speculative methodology for an expanded reading practice

Hestia Zephyrine Peppé

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Sheffield Hallam University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2024

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ABSTRACT

Divination at Art School addresses challenges from the neurodiversity paradigm to artists' reading and study practices. I expand the concept of reading to include the history and practice of divination, as encoded, and enacted through the Tarot. By recognising divination as a precursor to mass literacy in this way I engage reading to address underacknowledged issues of epistemological injustice, access, and disability at art school.

To demonstrate the conditions necessitating expanded reading I interrogate Simon Baron Cohen's mindblindness, working with Damian Milton's double empathy problem, danah boyd and Alice Marwick's writing on context collapse, the work of Fernand Deligny, and the field of art writing. As a neurodivergent student, teacher, artist, and researcher implicated and complicit in the systemic effects of art pedagogy's disregard for reading, I trace associated difficulties and dynamics in the context of Sheffield Hallam's Art and Design department and the history of British art education. In response, I appropriate both self- and medical diagnoses for reparatory neuroqueer purposes with reference to work by Nick Walker, M. Remi Yergeau, and other neurodivergent scholars, artists, and activists.

The study's practice element employs autoethnography, drawing, writing, and digital collage, linking art writing and autofiction via calligraphy and textile production to Fluxus influenced traditions of digital mixed media and image synthesis. In thesis and practice I use divinatory strategies as neuroqueer method and analysis, abstracting and recombining their gestural and structural elements. These experiments with making reading tangible alongside trials of new teaching methods culminate in the development of a speculative programme of teaching.

The meta-methodological structure of the spinning process shapes my thinking throughout, emphasising attention and receptivity over creativity. I conclude that expanded reading, as

historically exemplified by the Tarot, offers valuable ways to trace and therefore examine itself.
Thus, it reveals the receptive capacity of art practice.

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PREFACE / GATHERING

‘And you want to call your mother and say mother I can never come home again because I
seem to have left an important part of my brain somewhere,
somewhere in a field in Hampshire. alright!’

Sorted for Es and Whizz by Pulp from their 1996 album *Different Class*.

For something to be gathered first it must somehow be scattered.

Eight of Rods



Figure 1



Figure 2 Eight of Rods from the Tarot de Marseille

What if English is not a language but the death of language?

What those of us who speak English explicitly call reading is the/one end of the yarn named reading. The word ‘read’ is old, older than the English language itself or the idea of mass Anglo-literacy or print. Once it meant the solving of riddles: to advise or to give counsel.¹

In modern English, the word divination, from the Latin *divinationem*, is used (often disparagingly) to speak of ways to find things out without knowing-in-order, or indeed of how to orientate toward mystery. In this way, ‘we’ of the anglosphere only inconsistently disambiguate between ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ reading. Regardless, in English, *via* German and Dutch, the word ‘read’ is still used expansively, to mean both. After all, as the idioms go, reading is how one finds what is hidden between the lines.

By foregrounding the divinatory sense of reading and addressing divinatory practices the idea of communication as a making of sense itself is troubled. As anthropologist Diana Espirito writes, defining divination for the Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology:

In this dynamism, one cannot wholly distinguish object from subject, matter from spirit.

Neither can the bodies and biographies of mediums be separated from the oracular act itself.²

¹ *Rede, n.*¹ *Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary.*

https://www.oed.com/dictionary/rede_n1 Accessed 6 May 2024.

² Diana Espirito. 2019. Divination. In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (eds) F. Stein, S. Lazar, M. Candea, H. Diemberger, J. Robbins, A. Sanchez & R. Stasch, p. 12. <http://doi.org/10.29164/19divination> Accessed 26 October 2023.

How much of what is commonly called literacy by educators is conditional on legitimacy? What then of illegitimate reading, dis-ordered reading, uncorrected reading? Where can it be found? Where have you seen it? Have you heard anything? Against what edges do remnants of this illegitimate reading gather on reality? Wool, in this context *is* context, that chaotic precondition of yarn or story.

I should tell you how I came (to be and to not be) (t)here: what I followed. The only discipline I ever knew was gathering and being gathered. I followed warmth and sparks and the sound of voices. I stayed up late. I gathered wool when I found it.

By coming here, I mean, going there. But I cannot go there now.

What I could carry, I brought with me (my cards in my bag, a silk, my notebook, pen roll, a ball of string, various rave toys). I will accept the need for an origin story when you accept that any story can be an origin story.³

I have gathered and been gathered. I have been gathering as I went: at firesides, under screens, in hired rooms, tents, in meanwhile spaces, outside pubs, on dance floors, engaging in what some call idle fancies, as if propelled like a top. I gathered wool with which to spin myself out of the *millefeuille*, from somewhere, somewhere in a field in Hampshire, alright?

In good faith I courted edges, keeping the lords and the trolls at arm's length. I needed to learn how to make something visible out of something invisible (reading). I needed the most

³ Lynn Sagan, 'On the Origin of Mitosing Cells'. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, vol. 14, no. 3, Mar. 1967, pp. 225-IN6. *ScienceDirect*, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-5193\(67\)90079-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-5193(67)90079-3). Accessed 26 October 2023.

economic means of production. I needed to learn how to spin, I needed a spindle. I gathered wool rather than cotton so I could tell from where it came. Wool is grey, tangled, full of shit, enduring, and can be produced without killing, through intergenerational and interspecies relation and care.

To solve riddles sometimes one must think with the world, mark one's way.⁴ The reading of artists is a multi-valent, polymorphous, expansive, and extensive thing, but it can also be incredible, vulnerable, dangerous, and harmful.

From a field in Hampshire, I followed a series of beacon fires to London, to art school, and later to Sheffield *via* the world, wool gathering as I went, from afterglow to afterglow, Jarvis Cocker's voice in my ears.⁵ The liner notes for *Different Class* prohibits reading the lyrics while listening to the music and this made it impossible not to do so. To begin with I had no idea what he was singing about, but I knew it would help me find my way. He had an aura or an accent, and something changed.

This time I came here (to art school at Sheffield Hallam) to offer an approach to the fact that not everything makes sense: a clew/clue.⁶ I want to find a way to show you, the reader how to use the approach. Under-realised artworks make the best rave toys/teaching objects and I have become adept at finding my way around. When I don't know what to do, I look for signs.⁷

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, 'Ariadne's Mystery'. *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 5, 1994, pp. 8–9.

⁵ Owen Hatherley, *Uncommon: An Essay on Pulp*, Winchester UK: Zero Books, 2011.

⁶ For a definition of 'clew' see: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clew>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

⁷ Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2000, p. 29.

There are many reasons why I had learnt so many things out of order. I have many different ways to explain it: telling people that I have never seen *Star Wars* worked for a long time, or that I had travelled a lot as a child, or that, or that, or that... When visibility is a condition of legibility, some things need masking.

It was true that I had not seen *Star Wars*, but recently I say instead (the one thing I used to be scared that people would think) that I grew up in a cult. It sounds dramatic but the reason I now feel comfortable telling people is that I worked out that it is only knowing this that makes me different from anyone else I know. My ex-partner, sent to boarding school at seven years old, and I like to joke that at least *my* cult let us sleep at home.

My approach: the irrational as a pseudo random seed, an approach to being taught. The approach is reading but the scene of reading is art school. I insist on this as a performance practice because it is live, and it loops durationally.

During the global coronavirus pandemic, beginning in 2019, the art school becomes co-located with, and occupies, my studio.⁸ My friend, a film conservator, and I, talking together on Zoom note that some days what's left of it feels like mostly Photoshop.

Every text written is already in collaboration with what is called artificial intelligence, that's what the alphabet is – a driver of automation. Surveillance, espionage, and sibyl-hood have always been forms of reading. Art is an uncountable domain of cunning and wile. You cannot get off the Internet.

⁸ 'GOD IS GERMS', Antonin Artaud quoted in David Rattray. David Rattray, *How I Became One of The Invisible*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2019, p. 301.

To write in the academic framework, I prefer to tell first, transcribing later, from memory, usually writing by hand. I had been asked to present to the seminar group on ‘insiders and outsiders and inter-disciplinarity’, for a research seminar in the Art and Design Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam convened by Becky Shaw. What follows is how I told them a story that was the beginning of the work that this study attempts.⁹

I had been trying to light a fire, for the gathering, so to speak. My peers were far away. I needed to gather wood and make friction to generate heat and light. I said I was trying to raise a vibe. I had been reading Hester Reeve’s *YMEDACA* the catalogue of her epic *gesamtkunstwerk* in which Plato’s academy is restaged in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park by local artisans and knowledge keepers. I had been reading Heidegger’s *The Origin of The Work of Art*.^{10,11} Needfire was lit at Beltane and in times of plague or misfortune, the fire in the hearth was extinguished and relit from scratch, without borrowing another flame.¹² I was thinking of a lecture by Sharon Kivland, her exegesis of Marx’s wood gatherers, in which the gathering of stories by the Grimms and their appropriation is linked to and contrasted against the gathering of wood by the poor: to gather, as in, to meet needs without theft or owning, an ‘illegitimate appropriation’.¹³

⁹ French activist pedagogue and thinker Fernand Deligny, discussed at length in the chapter on Carding, referred to his experimental schools for autistic young people as *tentatives* or attempts.

¹⁰ Hester Reeve, et al., editors. *Ymedaca: Hester Reeve*, West Bretton, UK: Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2015.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger. *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, Edited and translated by David Farrell Krell, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 139–213.

¹² James Fraser. *The Golden Bough*, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1993, p. 638.

¹³ Lecture: *Die Holzdiebe*, a text accompanying the eponymous exhibition at Zentrum für Kunst, Zitadelle, Spandau, 2018–19.

On Zoom, to my peers, I read Susannah Gent's text *Flat Earth* aloud.¹⁴ I showed my film, my three films that are one film, which I made when I was first taught by Becky Shaw in 2004 and which I didn't finish until two years after I completed my BA.¹⁵ On the third attempt I got the video running with sound through the platform.

I followed Becky to Sheffield from Camberwell in South London. It took thirteen years to get there, the path winds. I wanted her to see the films I started then, so she would know that I had finished them. I had not yet read about how fires were extinguished and relit by needfires at Beltane. Outside-the normative flow of time, the work is happening; it becomes visible when the conditions are right, the video had been online this whole time.

I read Susannah Gent's *Flat Earth* piece aloud again when the video ends, this time my voice breaks as I read about the picking up of Rizlas.

I couldn't press the record button, so I didn't. I only told what I can tell of the story, and of why I tell it. I chose one person to imagine myself speaking to, as I was taught, so that the context will not collapse.

I say then that I am trying to raise a vibe, like an MC. I say that I am thinking about illegitimacy, about the field against it, and its enclosure, literally where the gaps in the fence are. I am not from the city. I am thinking about barbed wire and how to remove what's snagged onto it. I am thinking about party knowledge and who clears the debris away afterwards.

¹⁴ The Roland Barthes Reading Group. *Roland Barthes's Party*, London, UK: MA BIBLIOTHÉQUE, 2020, p. 35.

¹⁵ Hestia Peppé *This Work is Home*, digital video triptych.

I told this story about seeing David Hoyle at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern in Battersea, discussing performance art in the academy with Gavin Butt and how charging for university education stops working class people from accessing their cultures of performance. There's a woman in the audience who asks a lot of questions, interrupts, explains too much, I feel uncomfortable, she is like me, talking too much, but David Hoyle is pure grace, he says to her, 'darling, you need your own show!'

There's so much I am not saying.

INTRODUCTION

‘As soon as a child has a consciousness, the child starts altering it. Who doesn’t remember that favourite in every nursery and kindergarten, the big noisy tin top with a crank you pushed all the way down, to set it spinning, and a brightly coloured spiral, red or yellow, say, painted round its outside? you watched that a few times, your head was spinning, you were stoned, so screwed up you might stagger, even fall, during the first few seconds after watching it. Lacking a top, you could become one yourself, alone or with help. Each child has at least one hour’s worth of background as a whirling dervish.’

David Rattray, *How I Became One of The Invisible*

Unspun fibre is held in place by a distaff.

Queen of Cups



Figure 3



Figure 4 Queen of Cups from the Tarot de Marseille

I found the spinning wheel in a roadside second-hand furniture shop by chance on my way back from a tutoring job in Streatham Common. An Ashford ‘traditional’ model from the late 1970s, it cost eighty pounds cash. I carried it home on the bus. At home, I researched the model online, purchased a repair kit, and proceeded to replace the brake and oil the joints. That was all it needed to get it working, though it took far longer to master the necessary movement practice to keep it working fluently enough to spin yarn even slightly fit to work with.

There can be no physical proof of a reading that occurred historically prior to writing. Instead, I look to an example of material culture which implies a similar form of attention and engagement, that is, spinning. I am interested in the relation between spinning and attention, and between this form of attention and the receptive practice called reading. Such a relation is, as I articulate it, not metaphorical so much as co-constituted. Spinning is the oldest and most basic textile technology known to humans or, indeed, to Neanderthals, and has been shown to have been practiced for up to fifty-two thousand years.

The cord fragment from Abri du Maras is the oldest direct evidence of fibre technology to date. Its production demonstrates a detailed ecological understanding of trees and how to transform them into entirely different functional substances. Fibre technology would have been an important part of everyday life and would have influenced seasonal scheduling and mobility. Furthermore, the production of cordage implies a cognitive understanding of numeracy and context sensitive operational memory. Given the ongoing revelations of Neanderthal art and technology, it is difficult to see how we can regard Neanderthals as anything other than the cognitive equals of modern humans.¹⁶

¹⁶ B. L. Hardy, et al. ‘Direct Evidence of Neanderthal Fibre Technology and Its Cognitive and Behavioral Implications’, *Scientific Reports*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1, Apr. 2020, p. 4889. www.nature.com, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-61839-w> Accessed 31 October 2023.

I am interested in spinning as the production of line in three dimensions and, as line, the spun in relation to the drawn, the written, and the read, technologies which may all be younger than spinning, although, in the case of reading, such precedence cannot be determined. Throughout the course of this thesis and in conducting my research, I use spinning as a meta-methodological model for the type of attention and relation to the material world necessitated by the desire to expand a conception of reading beyond lexicality.

In the Ph.D. studio at S1 in Sheffield's Park Hill, my fellow researcher Toni Buckby showed me how to spin by hand with a spindle. Spinning by spindle predates spinning on the wheel by tens of thousands of years. Being a little slower than working at the wheel, it helped me to learn the proper form for spinning at the wheel. After working with the hand spindle, I understood better how to twist and pull to draft the fibres as they turn, and to keep the twist from travelling back into the fibres not yet drafted, while maintaining tension. This emphasis on directionality, tension and twist as structurally integral to the production of line is essential to my articulation of how to make sense of reading without relying on the structure of written language to do so.

One of the earliest experiments in practice I conducted during the Ph.D. was the spinning of two large clews of yarn, one cream coloured, from unbleached wool from the Isle of Man, a gift from my mother, the other grey, from wool my sister bought for me. I span the white on the wheel, with difficulty and many breaks, at home in London, then later, the grey, on the hand spindle, carrying it with me and spinning during meetings where once I would have drawn or taken written notes. I kept these clews as research objects, winding and rewinding them to focus my mind when working on the Ph.D. Each one takes over an hour to wind back into its clew. This winding practice, an attentive, durational performance to self, predates the Ph.D. and provides it with its foundational concept. I developed the practice of clew-winding on

residency with performance artist Amanda Coogan in 2011, using pre-bought cotton string rather than yarn, for a piece I called *String Figure*.¹⁷

This spun element of the practice work, apart from a few images, is-physically elided from the final Ph.D. submission for the purposes of allowing digital access, but is retained in the conception, naming, and structure of each element submitted for examination in order to emphasise and illustrate the meta-methodological value of spinning as a model for my conception of expanded reading. The thesis is constructed meta-methodologically around these phases of the material process of spinning that name and inspire the chapters, from the gathering of wool to its twisting to form the yarn.¹⁸ The practice submission consists of the *Daughters of Necessity* texts and the *Clew* Video. The texts are structured by the idea of spinning in the ancient Greek myth of the Moirae: Atropos, Lachesis, and Klotho, the goddesses of spinning associated with the production of human fate as a line that they spun, measured, and cut. The title of the texts refers to their origins as the daughters of another Goddess, Ananke, or Necessity.¹⁹ The *Clew* video is named for an archaic word for a ball of yarn, from which we get the English word *clue*, and which is used in my research process to represent the recursive and fractal linearity of what is drawn, written, and read and in which form these verbs are rendered object. A clew of pastel-coloured chenille yarn reappears as a ‘rave toy’ in the ‘Reading with Objects’ workshop I conducted with Fine Art students at Sheffield Hallam, documented in the chapter on Drafting. By borrowing the structures of spinning and clew as a-models with which to describe ~~for~~ the usually intangible practice of reading, I ground ephemeral reading practice in the material realm, linking it to both gestural

¹⁷ The title *String Figure* is taken from the work of feminist theorist of science and technology Donna Haraway, as outlined in her essay *SF, Speculative Fabulation and String Figures =: SF, Spekulative Fabulation Und String-Figuren*. 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, Ostfildern, DE: Hatje Cantz, 2011.

¹⁸ Allen Fannin. *Handspinning: Art and Technique*, New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970.

¹⁹ MOIRAE (Moirai) - The Fates, Greek Goddesses of Fate & Destiny (Roman Parcae). <https://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Moirai.html#Encyclopedia>. Accessed 21 Aug. 2023.

relationships and practices *via* neurodivergent conceptions of stimming and to objects such as rave toys and performance props as well as the deck of Tarot cards.

Themes

Five thematic threads supply the yarn of my thesis, shown in the diagram below. They run through the thesis, present at every stage, plied together, constituting the substance I meta-methodologically manipulate. In the practice element this role shifts somewhat, and these themes become variously method, subject, context, problem, and object.

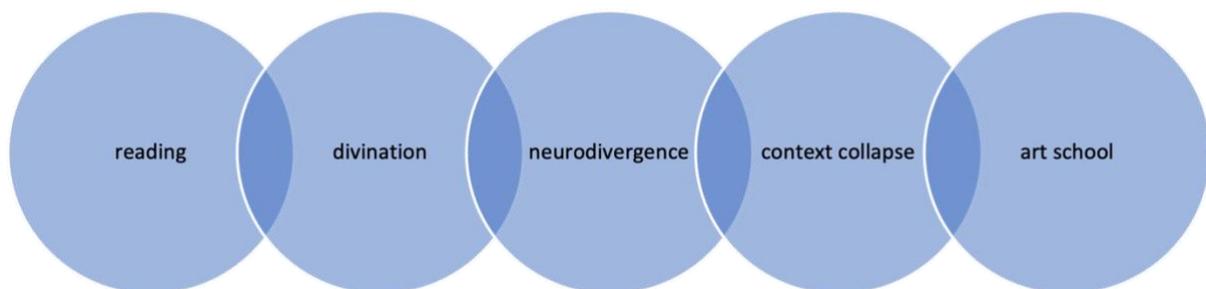


Figure 5: Diagram showing the relation between the themes of the thesis

I want to expand the idea of reading, particularly as it occurs at and for art school and by students and researchers of art. Throughout the thesis and the practice element, I address reading as a material, embodied multi-sensory and multimodal process, this process is co-constituted with the practice of spinning in which attention is made physical in the production of line. I use the term multimodal, as defined by semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van

Leeuwen to mean, ‘the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined’, to describe the range of modes such as writing, drawing, painting, image-making or performance, and their deployment, often in combination, in the context of art practice in contemporary arts education. I also use the idea of multimodality to think about the ways the idea of reading can be expanded to include receptivity and attention to multiple modes in relation to such mixed practices with spinning as a primary example of such practice.²⁰

With the exception of some particular cases (see the chapters on Drafting and Twisting where I discuss literacy in order to make links to existing scholarship) throughout the study, I refer to reading rather than literacy to make it clear I am not referring to writing, and to link my expanded reading to older senses of the word reading and thence to divination. In practice I make readings as both object and gesture and make reading itself tangible in the form of autoethnographic writing, drawing, and spinning, as I trace reading’s progress.

With divination understood as a form of reading, I explore the practice and tradition of the Tarot, and its potential use in art school. I consider Tarot exemplary of speculative modes of reading, beyond the alphabetic, and colloquial to the English-speaking world. I interrogate Tarot – both as object and as verb, its divinatory gestures and physical material forming an open system, rich with pedagogical potential and characterised by a well-developed ethical stance – to recommend Tarot as an object of research for arts pedagogy. It is my hope that by offering this positive reading of a historically stigmatised performance tradition, congenial

²⁰Gunther R. Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London, UK: Arnold; Hodder, 2001, p. 20.

space may be made in arts practice and pedagogy for other such ‘postsecular’ approaches.²¹ In the practice submission, as I draw, divine, and read from the Tarot: Tarot in turn becomes the means by which I interrogate my own work. Like the fidget spinner, the ‘toys’ or objects used to ‘regulate’ the attention of those who deviate from neurological norms through the practice of ‘stimming’ (explored in further detail in the chapter on Carding), to which I refer in the chapter on Drafting, the deck of cards both facilitates and necessitates forms of attention and relationships to intention which problematise and expand understanding beyond the usual categories and boundaries which have been used to describe reading as an embodied and material process.

Neurodivergence offers me a way to think about my own ‘enminded-embodimented-experience of neurodivergence and the ways neurodivergent rhetorics are informed by the material conditions we inhabit’, as crip scholar J. Logan Smilges puts it, beyond pathology.²² As an emerging understanding of how minds are embodied and bodies are enminded, the neurodiversity paradigm, as described by queer futurist and somatic psychologist Nick Walker, allows this study the space needed to spin and stim with others as well as thinking.²⁴ In the thesis I consider the challenges posed by the neurodiversity paradigm to the idea of reading as it is normatively understood in the present. In the practice submission my own struggles with academic reading and research are held gently in the space provided by the idea of neurodivergent ways of being as constellations of dispositions – from ADHD with its emotionally driven relation to attention, to dyspraxia with its glitches and discontinuity, to

²¹ Rosi Braidotti. ‘In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 6, Nov. 2008, pp. 1–24. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408095542>.

²² Kassiane Asasumasu, a multiply neurodivergent activist coined the terms neurodivergent and neurodivergence in the year 2000, see the footnote below on Nick Walker, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²³ Smilges, J. Logan. ‘Neuroqueer Literacies; or, Against Able-Reading’, *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2021, pp. 103–25.

²⁴ Nick Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*, La Vergne, TN: Autonomous Press, 2021.

autism with its inhabitation of sensory landscapes – and the affordance granted by the validation of self-diagnosis. Because of this space and affordance, I am able to think in terms not of what is wrong with me but rather where I stand in relation to learning and thus, to teaching.

I borrow the idea of context collapse from digital sociologies, repurposing it to repair the concept of empathy toward neurodivergent ends, by placing it in relation to expanded reading. I do this *via* the challenge to fallacies of autistic mindblindness posed by Damian Milton’s double empathy problem, which articulates an autistic experience of empathy.^{25,26} In the practice element in *Daughters of Necessity* I undertake various forms of performance to self and others, employing autoethnographic strategies to experiment with how context collapse manifests and can be repaired. In the *Clew* video I manipulate photographic images of handwritten notes beyond legibility using the mathematical and fractal logics of an image synth, Mirror Lab, demonstrating the power of linearity to offer ways out of loss of context.

The idea of art school or what remains of it is important for the thesis, providing a conceptual home for my vision of expanded reading. Working with expansive and expanding themes, I have need for a strongly bounded context tolerant of a multitude of modes, models, and sensory modalities. While art school as place, idea, and mode of study are investigated thoroughly in the thesis, the art school is also a subject for the *Daughters of Necessity* texts, where the often-fraught experience of art school emerges as an opportunity to confront it as reality.

Simon Baron-Cohen. *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*, MIT Press, 1997.
Damian E. M. Milton, ‘On the Ontological Status of Autism: The “Double Empathy Problem”’, *Disability & Society*, vol. 27, no. 6, Oct. 2012, pp. 883–7. *Taylor and Francis + NEJM*, doi:[10.1080/09687599.2012.710008](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008).

Thesis Chapters

Though the chapters are presented according to thematic and meta-methodological progression, according to the material aspects of spinning to which they correspond, each one is written as a stand-alone essay, so that – like the cards of the Tarot — they can, if the reader wishes, be read, and accessed in any order. While planning the thesis I pulled a Tarot card for each chapter, including this introduction, which then intuitively informed the process of writing, as in a Tarot reading. The card for each chapter is indicated at its beginning along with a ‘reading’ of the card in relation to spinning. Images for each of these cards are included, with an image from my experiments into the spinning process alongside their reading. The cards depicted are drawn from the Camoin-Jodorowsky *Tarot de Marseille* deck, which I discuss further in the chapter on Carding.²⁷

Gathering

I reflect on the process of coming to study, and on what is brought to the Ph.D. from elsewhere. I outline the need for an expanded understanding of reading that recognises divination as a precursor to literacy. I clear a space for working before the thesis and practice are fully differentiated. This space is a beginning.

Scouring

I contextualise the work of the Ph.D. in relation to art pedagogies, to the neurodiversity paradigm and the concept of neuroqueering as well as disability. The role of autoethnographic writing and rhetorics in relation to expanded reading in this context is demonstrated. I consider the emergence of avowedly neurodivergent and neuroqueer writing in the UK.

²⁷ Phillippe Camoin and Alejandro Jodorowsky *Tarot de Marseille*, Marseille, FR: Camoin, 2018.

Carding

I consider divination as a methodology, looking at Tarot in relation to autoethnographic writing and rhetorics, laying out its potential as a mode of expanded reading. I interrogate the role of chance and therefore context collapse in relation to divinatory reading, thinking about their already existing relation to art school contexts and what they make possible there. I recognise stimming as a form of neurodivergent reading.

Assembling

I situate the work of the Ph.D. structurally and conceptually in the British art school as a historic, social and cultural phenomenon, alongside my own experience of art school study. I look at what this historic and cultural specificity means for students and teachers, why they choose to study there, what remains of art school now, and what is at stake for those who venture to study in this milieu.

Tuning

I describe my methods in relation to the practice submission including my use of drawing, writing, and reading in making the *Daughters of Necessity* texts and the *Clew* video and the synaesthetic relation-between these three modes. I write about my use of mathematical and fractal transformations with an image synth, Mirror Lab, and the structure of my attention in relation to my ADHD diagnosis as experimental method.

Drafting

I write up my experience of running workshops on aspects of expanded reading with Fine Art students from Sheffield Hallam. I make observations about difficulties with reading, the ethics of expanded reading practice and the expansion of reading to include objects and gesture,

making links between the use of objects in performance and the idea of the fidget spinner. I outline a speculative programme of teaching for expanded reading at art school.

Twisting

I discuss what has changed and what has been found as a result of this study, considering what it means to expand reading and how reading can be made tangible as well as how these two dynamics of representation and expansion enable and facilitate one another. I return to a thematic analysis of my findings, considering how this study illuminates expanded reading as the receptive capacity of art practice. I position the practice of expanded reading as a pedagogical resource in the context of art school, considering its ethics as a challenge to prevailing ideas about the use of Artificial Intelligence, which I articulate as a form of automated reading.

Practice Submission

Daughters of Necessity

Daughters of Necessity is an autofictional autoethnographic record developed from the transcription of diaristic notes made during the first six months of Ph.D. study. Each page of notes or drawings made chronologically during that time is returned to in sequence and expanded upon three times; each time this is attributed to one of the *Moirae* in turn, *Klotho*, *Lachesis*, *Atropos*. This work of rewriting and *read-writing* was returned to at intervals throughout the Ph.D. and also contains reflections from across its timespan, though it remains primarily drawn from and spun with the observations made in those first six months of early wool-gathering. The *Daughters of Necessity* is both a record of reading and a reading of art school in itself. These texts make extensive use of the Tarot as a device, likened to a fidget

spinner, with which to interrupt and slow reading as stim in order to open up its relation to other practices such as spinning, drawing, writing and discussing, making reading tangible.

Clew

Clew is a twenty-minute video that spins together the visual artefacts produced by the Ph.D., a demonstration of reading as a visual art. Hundreds of notes and drawings made during the Ph.D. are taken up photographically and processed digitally in the Mirror Lab synth before being arranged chronologically in the form of a stop motion video. The relation between reading, drawing, and writing as linear practices is investigated by means of transformation in space kaleidoscopically and fractally, as well as in time by means of animation, a process itself linked to spinning in its early forms. The result is an experiment in abstraction, autoethnographic documentation and encryption that differs from the *Daughters of Necessity* piece in the specific methods and materials used but which is, like those texts, also to be understood as a reading in both senses, as noun and verb. If the viewer wishes to read the images in more detail the video can be paused at any time.

Note on Access

Throughout the thesis, where images are used, extensive image descriptions have been provided by means of alternative text for the benefit of readers who use automated screen reading technology. Other readers may also find these descriptions of interest.

SCOURING

‘Everything that is (looked at justly) is good. Is exciting. Is “terrible.” Life is terrible. Terribly beautiful, terribly cruel. Everything is marvellously terrible, to whoever looks at things as they are.’

Hélène Cixous, *The Last Painting*

The wool, once gathered, must be picked over, sorted, and washed in a process called scouring.

Seven of Swords



Figure 6



Figure 7 Seven of Swords from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

I describe and define neurodivergence in relation to art education. I lay out the context in which I position this definition with reference to existing literature. This literature includes academic work, as well as work in other domains such as experimental autoethnographic fiction and theory. I make links between the idea of neurodivergence and the art school as a context.

Neurodiversity and neurodivergence

The emerging neurodiversity paradigm acknowledges the need to recognise that not all minds process perception and do cognition in the same way.²⁸ Individuals who experience cognition and perception differently to socially and medically assumed norms commonly refer to themselves as neurodivergent, in order to self-describe this difference in disposition.²⁹ Recognising the significance of neurodivergence raises complex challenges to hegemonic thinking about skill, mastery, knowledge, and meaning itself, because doing so requires a fundamental re-thinking of positivist definitions of intelligence, skill, language, and learning that have been used to exclude, punish, and stigmatise neurodivergent understanding and experience. As this study shows, this recognition also raises questions about the emphasis in the arts on creativity.

Neurodivergent individuals may also be characterised variously as autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic, having ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, epilepsy, or some combination of these ways of being and/or other dispositions.³⁰ Neurodivergence, how it

²⁸The term neurodiversity emerged in 1996 from autistic self-advocacy communities online and off. See Martijn Dekker, 2023. <https://www.inlv.org/2023/06/29/neurodiversity.html> Accessed 26 October 2023.

³⁰ In search of a less stigmatising and indeed less boundedly categorical term with which to describe what are often medicalised as 'conditions' or essentialised as 'neurotypes', along with my supervisor Chris Bailey, I have settled upon the phrase 'ways of being' with which to discuss different commonly recognised forms of neurodivergence. This phrase is intuitively drawn from the work of Fernand Deligny who uses it throughout his

manifests and if its causes are developmental, genetic, the result of trauma or stigma, or all/any of these, is still more a matter of speculation than certainty in the highly contested field of relevant scientific, medical, and pedagogical literatures. Despite the significance of such literatures and their associated discourses on its development, this study takes the position that as a cultural idea, neurodivergence is broad and indeed flexible enough to encompass any and all possible causes of difference from perceived or assumed cognitive norms. Indeed, what I take as important is the experience of difference rather than its causal origin. Much of the literature has been developed ‘about us and without us’, describing only the observable characteristics of people with these ‘conditions’ rather than the experience of having them – I defer to self-advocated descriptions and characteristics, or studies in which these are acknowledged where possible.³¹

Reading at art school

Before considering the role of divination to expand reading in art school education, problems or stressors around reading at art school should be examined. This means considering reading and associated practices – creative and contextual – for students at art school from positions of neurodivergence and disability and the impact of taking these positions. I discuss the relationship between neurodivergence and disability in further detail in the sections below entitled *Art School Ableism* and *Neuroqueer in the UK*. I demonstrate the need to consider the value of approaches offered by the fields of rhetoric, autoethnographic fiction and autofiction when thinking about neurodiversity and disability in UK art schools. Rhetoric is understood as the art of persuasive or moving speech, and argument, autoethnographic fiction and autofiction

text *The Arachnean* in relation to the autistic children with whom he worked. Deligny’s work is discussed in detail in the chapter on Carding.

³¹James I. Charlton, *Nothing about Us without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

as types of fiction that enunciate the conditions and practices of their own making. There is little or nothing more rhetorical than the question of who gets to speak or write about themselves and why, apart from, perhaps, who gets to read about themselves and how have they been read.

Neurodivergence is often externally characterised and categorised by divergence from externally imposed norms, often those founded on literacy, defined by the ability to read and write conventionally well, but also by other norms of attention such as the ability to sit still while listening, or to make sustained eye contact when communicating with others. Difficulty with reading and writing may be described as dyslexia, while trouble with sitting still while doing so is associated with ADHD or autism depending on the form such failure to sit still takes. However, when neurodivergent or neuroqueer³² subjects do their own characterising and categorising, it is their very process of characterisation and categorisation that is found, by those invested in what it means to be normal, to be divergent or abnormal, resulting in for example, autistics being seen as lacking the agency and self-awareness to make life-changing decisions, or the process of self-diagnosis being seen as illegitimate. How a person tells noise from signal, or indeed from filter or mask, emerges as a crucial social and sensory difference. Autistic rhetorician M. Remi Yergeau defines the phenomenon of demi-rhetoricity to allow for how this differing relation to definition and its arguments is used against autistic and neuroqueer agency.

As a construct, demi-rhetoricity enables clinicians to claim the best of both worlds when they respond to autistic disclosures: (1) they can argue autistic people are not autistic

³² Ibid., Walker, p. 220.

enough to make claims about autism; and (2) they can likewise argue that autistic people are too autistic to make claims about autism.³³

What does this mean in the context of art school, or indeed in the context of contextual studies reading lists? What is meant when literacy and rhetoric are discussed in the context of art school? Though it is the disposition most often related to literacy and reading, looking at statistics for dyslexia alone, particularly in the context of art school, is insufficient. Other ways of being such as ADHD, autism, and dyspraxia also greatly affect the experience of reading and in doing so expand our understanding of what it means to read. The distinctiveness of the relationship between literacy and art should be understood in the very positioning of the subject discipline, where due to an emphasis on non-verbal and spatial phenomena, a standard definition of literacy or even lexicality is inadequate, and where dyslexia is often understood as an advantage to learning in a way that other forms of neurodivergence such as autism, dyspraxia, or ADHD are not.³⁴ Due to art school's focus on visual practice, spoken communication and essay writing are not the primary forms of assessment (assessment being itself a process of being read by others that this study takes as significant, see the chapter on Drafting), although as we shall see in the chapter on Assembling, both spoken communication and essay writing remain significant here. The distinct prioritising of the non-verbal required in an art school context demands that reading be considered in an expanded way, as should the rhetoric and rhetorical concerns around reading, which though often considered of secondary

M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 32.

³⁴ In their survey of thirteen dyslexic art students who were questioned regarding their decision to undertake study at art school, researchers Alison Bacon and Samantha Bennett cite rates of dyslexic art students being 'as high as 30% at one London art school'. Of the students the researchers questioned, five students are described as having 'perceived their academic options as otherwise limited'. The study goes on to make a strong case for a link between dyslexia as a way of being and at least a propensity toward, if not also an aptitude for visual thinking. Alison Bacon, and Samantha Bennett. 'Dyslexia in Higher Education: The Decision to Study Art'. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, vol. 28, Feb. 2013. *ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2012.742748>.

importance at art school are still widely used. These concerns include the way we talk about and critique reading and research, and how we represent them in logbooks or sketchbooks, ideas about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading, and the ways in which reading and research are taught at art school. Indeed, the need to look at how rhetorical phenomena such as argument and discussion work in art school in relation to neurodivergence emerges as just as, if not more important than simple literacy and academic conventions of ‘reading’. In this context, such phenomena might beneficially be considered part of reading in an expanded sense with reference to older meanings of read such as to give counsel or to make sense of (see the preface, on Gathering).

Art school ableism

In a study by Beth Pickard from the University of South Wales in 2020, the (self-acknowledged) neurotypical non-disabled researcher was surprised to find higher levels than expected of ‘medicalised gaze and internalised ableism’ in students enrolling on a ‘therapeutic arts’ undergraduate degree.^{35,36} Students were questioned before and after studying a twelve-week module on disability, inspired by calls from John Derby and Claire Penketh going back almost a decade, to consider disability in relation to arts education.³⁷ The researcher’s findings that the module was not only effective but according to students, transformative, were eclipsed

³⁵ Beth Pickard, ‘Undergraduate Creative Arts Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes toward Disability: Advancing a Critical Disability Studies Informed Curriculum’. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, vol. 20, no. 2, Oct. 2021, pp. 141–61. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1386/adch_00036_1.

³⁶ Though some people may, for their own reasons choose to describe either themselves or others as ‘neurotypical’ in opposition or contrast to neurodivergence, I do not do so in this study or in my practice. My reason for this is that I understand neurotypicality as a construction describing adherence to or investment in neurological and cognitive norms which harm all people and particularly prevent those who diverge from them more from thriving. To use it as a form of identification reifies these norms as the default, or worse optimum way of being, a positioning which I reject completely.

³⁷ John Derby, ‘Nothing about Us Without Us: Art Education’s Disservice to Disabled People’, *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 54, no. 4, July 2013, pp. 376–80. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2013.11518910>. Claire Penketh, *A Clumsy Encounter: Dyspraxia and Drawing*, Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-457-7>

by the revelation of how limited students' understanding of disability was at the outset of the course. Working on the basis that this study is likely representative of other art school contexts; this suggests that much more needs to be done to address the need for greater understanding of disability at art school. It also highlights how early in the process of adopting these ideas into art school pedagogy many courses are, if even specialist courses such as the one in question are coming up with such findings.

In their highly regarded 2018 survey of arts pedagogy in higher education Susan Orr and Alison Shreeve do not mention neurodivergence or disability of any kind, either in relation to access, inclusion and engagement, or in relation to curriculum or content, despite clearly aligning themselves in favour of the inclusion of minority groups (other than disabled or neurodivergent people).³⁸ Perhaps this elision of disability from such a high-profile survey work, otherwise diligent in considering how material conditions might affect student engagement, says more about the state of disability awareness in UK art schools than anything the authors might have included would have done. Given the scant nature of the contextual field, Lynda Fitzwater's paper from the same year seems particularly valuable, citing the 'emancipatory potential' of a neurodiversity framework in higher education in UK art and design, and drawing attention to the high proportion of art students who are neurodivergent.³⁹ Translator, editor, poet and artist Khairani Barokka draws attention to what she terms the violence done by 'racist, ableist arts education' in a keynote lecture on Zoom for the Centre For Feminist Research at Goldsmiths in 2020. In this lecture she makes connections between ableism, racism, and colonialism in terms of who gets to decide what a 'good strong smart body' is and how black, brown and crip

³⁸ Susan Orr, and Alison Shreeve. *Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum*, London: Routledge, 2019.

³⁹ Lynda Fitzwater, 'Theory and Practice in Art & Design Education and Dyslexia: The Emancipatory Potentials of a Neurodiversity Framework', *HUMANA.MENTE Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 11, no. 33, May 2018, pp. 121–43.

bodies have been and still are understood as the opposite of this in the context of arts education under white colonial rule and white supremacy in general.⁴⁰

Neuroqueer in the UK

To even use the terms neurodivergence or neuroqueer from my position as a researcher in a UK art school, an enormous amount of contextualisation has been required, from geographical position to differing research architecture in the arts from the social sciences. I began a long way from Yergeau's book *Authoring Autism* (2018), with an Oxford English Dictionary definition available for both neurodiversity and neurodivergence only since 2019.⁴¹ Yergeau and Walker's term 'neuroqueer', which I take as an important development, is still seen as a neologism.⁴² Yergeau writes of the way autism queers the neurological to the point of questioning the very nature of ideas such as agency and will, and the self-propulsion or direction – as they term it 'motioning'— of neuroqueer bodies:

We might for instance consider autism as a sort of neurologically queer motioning. To be autistic is to be neuroqueer and to be neuroqueer is to be idealising, desiring, sidling. But rather than story such motioning as parasitically unwilling, or as a grope toward mindblindness, I'd instead suggest that autism is a neurologically queer motioning that is asocially perverse, a lurching toward a future that imagines 'incommensurabilities of desires and identities and socialities', a ticcing toward rhetorical residues.⁴³

⁴⁰ *Against Racist Ableism in Arts Education Dr Khairani Barokka*. Directed by Centre for Feminist Research, Goldsmiths, 2021. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmHm5h84AKw>. Accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴¹ Jim Sinclair, 'Don't Mourn for Us', Autism Network International's newsletter, *Our Voice*, Volume 1, Number 3, 1993 https://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html Accessed 4 April 2023.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Walker, p. 220.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Yergeau p. 18.

Neurodivergence as a concept should not be seen to replace disability nor be conflated with it, though some forms of neurodivergence also constitute disability under the social model and the two terms can be considered complementary in both the neurodiversity paradigm and the social model of disability.⁴⁴ A 2020 Fractal ‘manifesto’ ‘Get the Frac In’ for *Peitho Journal*, to which Yergeau contributed, joins ideas of disability with trans and neuroqueer identities to call for radical solidarity and alliance, employing the idea of the fractal as a unifying figure for difference and self-similarity at every scale.⁴⁵ Such activism inflected scholarship continues the work of neuroqueering that began on blogs and forums online in the 1990s and at the turn of the 21st Century. American crip theorist Justine Egner, writing in 2018, links the emergence of neuroqueer theory and practices in the US to earlier conceptions of disidentification, articulated by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and the intersectional crip feminist scholarship of Alison Kafer and analyses active blogs by neuroqueer scholars such as Yergeau and Walker from which the term neuroqueer was established.^{46, 47}

In the UK the affordance to write about neurodivergence as opposed to autism or ADHD, for example, is helpful, particularly because the diagnoses of both autism and ADHD remain problematically defined (an example of demi-rhetorical logic) here. This is in relation to two terms: first, ‘learning difficulties’, an educational psychology term, often private school and/or insurance adjacent but also used in mainstream state education and healthcare; the second term is ‘intellectual or learning disability’, which in the UK can be legally delegitimising in relation

⁴⁴ The social model of disability is a phrase coined in 1983 by disabled UK sociologist Michael Oliver in recognition of work throughout the 1970s by activists such as the Union of The Physically Impaired Against Segregation to define disability as socially rather than individually or medically determined. Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 47, p.115.

⁴⁵ *GET THE FRAC IN! Or, The Fractal Many-Festo: A (Trans)(Crip)T1 – CFSHRC*. <https://cfshrc.org/article/get-the-frac-in-or-the-fractal-many-festo-a-transcript/>. Accessed 22 Sept. 2022.

⁴⁶ Justine E. Egner “‘The Disability Rights Community Was Never Mine’: Neuroqueer Disidentification’. *Gender & Society*, vol. 33, no. 1, Feb. 2019, pp. 123–47. SAGE Journals, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218803284>

⁴⁷ José Esteban Muñoz. ‘The white to be angry: Vaginal Crème Davis’s terrorist drag’, In *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. 1999, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

to personal agency and consent, and is an example of the failure to clearly differentiate between disability and impairment. Learning difficulties have not always been understood to constitute disability although intellectual and learning disabilities have. The concept of intellectual and/or learning disability as categories remain reliant on controversial IQ testing and the idea of intelligence to measure. Confusion over the meaning of these terms and their categorical application has far-reaching effects and consequences for inclusion and wellbeing across healthcare and educational contexts.⁴⁸ This means that at university and in work combinations of masking⁴⁹, partial non-disclosure, and self-diagnosis remain (albeit unofficial) messy norms for mostly practical purposes for which neurodivergence as an umbrella term is more appropriate and less stigmatising. A specifically American English language tradition of crip solidarity from outside the academy and mainstream medicine arrives in this work in the UK *via* the work of firmly social justice-oriented activist positioned voices of collectives such as collaborative performance art projects like the American Sins Invalid and more European focused Melt and the popularity on social media of such work's online dissemination.^{50,51} Colloquially, often *via* the internet and social media, this movement makes a huge contribution to the understanding of neurodivergence in the UK. It does however, require a certain amount of adjustment and translation to the UK context of free NHS services and subsidised medicine from American, Canadian, and European medical insurance contexts. While this leaves the case for self-diagnosis and partial non-disclosure at the discretion of the individual as necessary in the UK as elsewhere, the specific stakes, such as financial impact or risk to health, are here

⁴⁸ James Tapper, 'Fury at "Do Not Resuscitate" Notices given to Covid Patients with Learning Disabilities', *The Observer*, 13 Feb. 2021. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/13/new-do-not-resuscitate-orders-imposed-on-covid-19-patients-with-learning-difficulties>.

⁴⁹ Will Mandy, 'Social Camouflaging in Autism: Is It Time to Lose the Mask?' *Autism*, vol. 23, no. 8, Nov. 2019, pp. 1879–81. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319878559>.

⁵⁰ 'Sins Invalid'. *Sins Invalid*, <https://www.sinsinvalid.org>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2022.

⁵¹ Artists Ren Loren Britton and Iz Paehr collaborate as Melt to promote critical thinking and practice around queer resistance to anti-ableist technology with projects such as Meltionary which seeks to subvert mainstream practices of categorisation. <http://meltionary.com/about/>. Accessed 6 Aug. 2025.

distributed quite differently between the social, medical, and corporate fields, not to mention private and public space.

Neuroqueer lineages and alliances

The scholarly literature on neurodivergence published in English has been until recently mainly American (Yergeau's studies in neuroqueer rhetoricity) and Canadian (Erin Manning and Brian Massumi).⁵² This literature is written by individuals subject to DSM prescribing protocol, while influenced by translations from French language continental philosophical and psychoanalytic lineages of anti-psychiatry. The work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Fernand Deligny at the La Borde clinic and Deligny's later work with autistics at his *tentatives* network in the Cévennes is of particular importance – Deligny is discussed further in the chapter entitled Carding. I uphold this somewhat second-hand context of Anglophone anti-psychiatry while acknowledging key differences to and from the UK context. More recently in the UK the work of Damian Milton and Robert Chapman in critical autism studies has been instructive particularly with regard to their articulations of the double empathy problem and autism as a form of life respectively.^{53,54} Milton's articulation of the double empathy problem reframes the concept of empathy to include the autistic experience of empathy rather than denying its existence or relying on neurotypical observation of autistic behaviour. It makes clear that what has been described as mindblindness is in fact a two-way failure to communicate empathy rather than a lack of it. Chapman works through Wittgensteinian ideas to offer an understanding of autism as a way or 'form of life' rather than pathologising it as a disorder.⁵⁵

⁵² Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Milton.

⁵⁴ Robert Chapman, 'Autism as a Form of Life: Wittgenstein and the Psychological Coherence of Autism', *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2019, pp. 421–40. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12366>.

⁵⁵ In much of their recent work including the recent book *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism*, Robert Chapman has gone to considerable effort to distinguish their theorising of autism and neurodivergence from dominant English language anti-psychiatry narratives originating from the work of American theorist

Most recently, in the field of arts' education, the work of David Ben Shannon, influenced by Sara Truman's conception of research creation, has employed neuroqueer theory in relation to practice-based research in the context of music education for primary children, in which he demonstrates how the music/noise binary functions as a way of reinforcing neurotypical norms in dominant musical pedagogy.^{56, 57} In *Carding*, I suggest a repurposing of ideas from digital sociologies around context collapse in networks to further elaborate on Deligny's work on autistic and neurodivergent locating as reading, in relation to the double empathy problem, with reference to art school education and divination.

Yergeau's linking of the neuroqueer to new forms of rhetoricity and authorship allows me to claim the earlier ethnographic critical fictions of Chris Kraus, and her publishing work at American publishing house Semiotext(e)'s *Native Agents* imprint for a neuroqueer canon and as an important precedent to later publishing experiments in the UK. The work of Semiotext(e) plays a crucial part in my own contextualising of the work of the above theorists in English. *Native Agents*, made the link, important for my research, to art school in *Video Green* and implies or prefigures the idea of girl autistics in *Aliens and Anorexia* via autofiction.^{58, 59} This was before Simon Baron Cohen's gendered definition of autism, sometimes described as the

Thomas Szasz who famously suggested mental illness itself was a theoretical fallacy. While I support Chapman's recognition of the value of including the concept of illness, recovery and indeed medicine in the neurodiversity paradigm I remain indebted to the work of thinkers such as Felix Guattari, Fernand Deligny, and Ronald Laing who are often linked to Szasz under the banner of anti-psychiatry none of whom, however, denied the suffering experienced by mad or neurodivergent people. Robert Chapman, *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism*, London, UK: Pluto Press, 2023 p. 73.

⁵⁶ David Ben Shannon. 'Neuroqueer(ing) Noise: Beyond "Mere Inclusion" in a Neurodiverse Early Childhood Classroom'. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, vol. 9, no. 5, Dec. 2020, pp. 489–514. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i5.706>.

⁵⁷ Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman. 'On the Need for Methods Beyond Proceduralism: Speculative Middles, (In)Tensions, and Response-Ability in Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 3, Mar. 2018, pp. 203–14. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704464>.

⁵⁸ Chris Kraus, *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*, Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2004, p. 122.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, p. 34.

‘extreme male brain theory’ gained dominance in the UK in the early 2000s.⁶⁰ The popularity of this definition of autism as characterised by ‘systems’ thinking as opposed to empathising, and the linking of this characterisation to gender through hormones, has likely contributed substantially to a failure to recognise and support autistic women, trans and nonbinary people, and to the stigmatising misrepresentation of autistics as lacking in empathy. It also reinforces transphobic conceptions of gender as an essential binary. By contrast, the work of key thinkers of the neurodiversity paradigm is characterised by a commitment to expansive and liberatory conceptions of gender, embracing trans, and queer contributions to thinking about ways of being. I return to the question of autism and gender below in relation to the concept of neuroqueer.

The UK discourse around neurodiversity has more recently been profoundly developed in the work of numerous visual artists and writers. Performance artist Daniel Oliver and musician and performance artist Nwando Ebizie discuss their mutual neurodivergence in an interview published by the Live Art Development Agency as part of Daniel Oliver’s overtly dyspraxic text describing his performance practice, *Awkwoods*.⁶¹ In the interactive storytelling work of artist Uma Breakdown, room is made for neurodivergent dispositions and ways of being among the detritus of older terminologies drawn from the language of ‘mental and physical disabilities’ by centring the agency of the reading individual.⁶² Breakdown also illustrated and edited *Horse Bites Fence Zine* an Arts Council funded publication to which I was a contributor, where I discussed my thinking about ADHD and self-diagnosis with editor and researcher Rebecca

⁶⁰. Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain*, New York NY: Basic Books, 2003.

⁶¹ Daniel Oliver, *Awkwoods*. Live Art Development Agency, London, 2019, <https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/publishing/awkwoods-daniel-olivers-dyspraxic-adventures-in-participatory-performance/>. Accessed 10 March 2023

Uma Breakdown, *Alpha Nine Twenty* <https://umabreakdown.itch.io/alpha-alpha-nine-twenty> Accessed 2nd November 2023.

Bligh.⁶³ Artist and art school lecturer, Roy Claire Potter, who eloquently describes the impact of autism and other power dynamics on their interactions in art school in their text for Mostyn Gallery, *The Problem of Listening*, is described, along with Hamja Ahsan, by the *Dublin Gazette* as a ‘neurodivergent writer,’ in relation to their contribution to *Echo’s Bones: A Parallel Play*. The book documents and discusses the *Echo’s Bones* project in which autistic young people collaborate on a production of a play by William Beckett.^{64, 65, 66} In critical writing on the work of Jesse Darling, Kashif Sharma Patel claims that the artist’s work ‘elicits this subterranean, subaltern multitude of meaning in response — queer, neurodivergent, anticolonial, and so on.’⁶⁷ Small publishers of artists’ books have made some of the boldest contributions to a growing canon of neurodivergent writing in the UK. Artist Emma Bolland’s experimental writings on, from, and through psychosis in *Over in and Under* and *Instructions from Light* published by Dostoevsky Wannabe and JOAN are among the finest examples.^{68, 69} Book Works’ 2017 publication of Hamja Ahsan’s satirical *Shy Radicals* manifesto was notable in championing writing from an autistic perspective before the idea of neurodivergence became mainstream.^{70, 71} At the time of writing amendments to this thesis in 2025, autistic and

⁶³ Rebecca Bligh, Uma Breakdown and Rebecca Colman *Horse Bites Fence Zine* [https://archive.org/details/horsebites WEB/page/n31/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/horsebites_WEB/page/n31/mode/2up) Accessed 2 November 2023.

⁶⁴ Roy Claire Potter, *Sharing the Problem of Listening*, <https://mostyn.org/resource/sharing-the-problem-of-listening-by-roy-claire-potter/>. Accessed 10 March 2023.

⁶⁵ Rose Barrett <https://dublingazette.com/dublinlocalmatters/news/fingal-echosbones-55533/> Accessed 2 November 2023.

⁶⁶ Sarah Browne (ed.), *Echo’s Bones: A Parallel Play*, Fingal, Ireland: Fingal County Council, 2023.

⁶⁷ Kashif Sharma Patel, ‘A Correspondence on an Impossible Space with Jesse Darling’s “Unsovereign” Form of Social Thought in The Ballad of Saint Jerome’. *Atractivoquenobello*, 4 Feb. 2019, <https://www.aqnb.com/2019/02/04/a-correspondence-on-an-impossible-space-with-jesse-darlings-unsovereign-form-of-social-thought-in-the-ballad-of-saint-jerome/>. Accessed 10 March 2023.

⁶⁸ Emma Bolland, *Over In and Under*. Manchester, UK: Dostoyevsky Wannabe Experiments, an imprint of Dostoyevsky Wannabe, 2019.

⁶⁹ Emma Bolland, *Instructions from Light*, London, UK: JOAN, 2023.

⁷⁰ Hamja Ahsan. *Shy Radicals: The Antisystemic Politics of the Militant Introvert*. London, UK: Book Works, 2017.

⁷¹ For a demonstration of how widespread the adoption of the idea of neurodivergence has become, even since research on this study began in 2018, the renaming in 2024 of UK politician Matt Hancock’s *Dyslexia Screening and Teacher Training Bill* as the *Neurodivergent Conditions (Screening and Teacher Training) Bill* is instructive. The bill proposes all UK school children should be screened for all neurodivergent conditions by age six, with the only suggestion for how such provision would work being a mention of AI. See Hansard, Tuesday 23rd April 2024, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-04-23/debates/D9A8C26F-0A50-4F7A-B109-ACCAC6DD72B2/NeurodivergentConditions\(ScreeningAndTeacherTraining\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-04-23/debates/D9A8C26F-0A50-4F7A-B109-ACCAC6DD72B2/NeurodivergentConditions(ScreeningAndTeacherTraining)) Accessed June 1 2024.

selectively mute artist Nnena Kalu is shortlisted for the Turner Prize, celebrated as the first ‘learning disabled’ artist to hold that honour by journalist Eddy Frankel writing for the *Guardian*.⁷² The selection of her work by the prestigious prize draws attention, not only to her bright, abstract, largescale textile sculptures, but also, significantly to the processes of support and interpersonal collaboration, from both ActionSpace, the studio where Kalu and many other disabled artists work, and Arcadia Missa, the gallery representing her work, that make it’s making possible.

Though the selection of references above is not exhaustive, it is illustrative of the current convergence taking place in UK arts practice, activism and scholarship. The chapter on Drafting concludes with a speculative syllabus for the teaching of expanded reading, which includes much of the work cited above along with further relevant references that have been important to this study.

In the UK in relation to popular understanding, the idea of an autistic artist is still perhaps the least obvious neurodivergent position available and there are few out examples. As the work of destigmatising is done and neuroqueering is taken up, more and more examples appear. It is likely that a great many artists are in fact undiagnosed or ‘high masking’ autistic and neurodivergent more generally, just one example is artist Becky Beasley who describes the effect on her practice of a late diagnosis of autism as ‘possibly one of the strangest of happy endings – not exactly happy and certainly no end’, and ‘uncanny’, but also says that despite this that ‘post-diagnosis’ she was, ‘finally able to understand myself and my experience: despite

⁷² Eddy Frankel. ““Her Need to Make Is off the Scale”: Why Nnena Kalu’s Turner Prize Nomination Is a Watershed Moment for Art”. *The Guardian*, 19 May 2025. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/19/nnena-kalus-turner-prize-watershed-glasgow>.

my middle age'.⁷³ Historically there has been a significant amount of stigma around autism in creative circles in the UK, where autism, specifically of all neurodivergent ways of being, is often associated with inflexible and uncreative characteristics. This is likely a result of the lingering influence of the idea of mindblindness (1985, 1995) popularised by Baron Cohen, and which, like the extreme male brain theory, is associated with diagnoses of 'Asperger's'. In Baron Cohen's idea of mindblindness, autistics are conceived of as being unable to conceptualise a 'theory of mind' and so unable to model the feelings or experience of others.⁷⁴ The Autism Spectrum Quotient Questionnaire AQ, published by Baron Cohen's research centre in 2001 remains a commonly used clinical diagnostic tool, which marks respondents more likely to be autistic if they enjoy mathematics and less if they enjoy literature. Work such as Chapman's cited above, working from Milton's articulation of the double empathy problem as described above, go a long way toward proving concerns about mindblindness as irrelevant at best and actively harmful at worst. Milton's work theorises that when autistics communicate with each other there is no failure of empathy, suggesting that the problem described as 'mindblindness' is in fact a breakdown of social communication, as much to do with how non-autistics perceive autistics as the other way round, hence 'double empathy problem'.

With neuroqueer being a relatively new term in the UK, and one which remains somewhat – perhaps necessarily—unstable, there are two historical terms from its lineage whose confusing intersections Walker and Yergeau's neuroqueering helps to reconcile. These terms are autism and schizophrenia: that an artist might be schizophrenic is not an unusual an idea in UK terminology, though such an artist might well be stigmatised as 'outsider', but the fact that

⁷³ 'Disability in British Art Research Group: Becky Beasley', *Disability Arts Online*, <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/disability-in-british-art-research-group-becky-beasley/>. Accessed 11 May 2023.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*.

autism has been called childhood schizophrenia is less well remembered by many under the age of fifty.⁷⁵⁷⁶ The relation between the two conditions remains in question both medically and scientifically as well as socially. Anecdotally, at least in the English-speaking world, in the USA, where the DSM is more widely used, the history of specific diagnoses in social justice contexts is better preserved as part of activism and advocacy. It is the essentialist distinction between diagnoses such as autism and schizophrenia that neuroqueering resists and destabilises. By contrast, in countries such as the UK and New Zealand with relatively high levels of public health support, diagnostic categories seem to have been more often submerged in ideas such as mad pride and crip pride or disability, and indeed, in certain strands of anti-psychiatry. That is to say that where health insurance is not such a defining factor, and the DSM is not the primary reference, diagnosis itself is not always prioritised and treatment can occur on the basis of individual patient experience and clinical discretion via ICD⁷⁷ protocols. British psychiatrist Ronald Laing, sometimes associated with the anti-psychiatry movement, preferred to place emphasis on the experience of phenomena such as psychoses themselves, rather than diagnoses as identity markers, and the influence of his thinking and practice in relation to the

⁷⁵ For many reasons a great number of people who make art exist outside the milieus associated with institutional art education and professional practice and as such are denied recognition as artists. This is often because they are in some way minoritised, either through class, race, colonisation, incarceration or disability, because of an intersecting combination of these identities, or simply because they are children, often it is because they are mad. In English, artwork made by people considered outsider in this way has been widely referred to as 'outsider art' since 1972 when a critic called Roger Cardinal coined the term as the title of a book on the subject. Interest in artwork by outsiders began in Europe in the early twentieth century and has gone by many names including the 'primitivism' that famously inspired many artists of the modernist period, 'naïve' art and 'folk' art. Such interest has often been characterised by appropriation, exoticisation and pathologisation. I take the position that the terms art and artist are sufficient to describe people doing the work of art making regardless of their distance or divestment from centres of power in the art world as it is defined by insiders. Roger Cardinal. *Outsider Art*. London, UK: Studio Vista, 1972.

⁷⁶ Autism was called childhood schizophrenia in the DSM until 1980 Laura Pina-Camacho, et al. 'Autism Spectrum Disorder and Schizophrenia: Boundaries and Uncertainties', *BJPsych Advances*, vol. 22, no. 5, Sept. 2016, pp. 316–24. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.115.014720>.

⁷⁷ International Classification of Diseases, 11th revision <https://icd.who.int/en>, Accessed 10 March 2023.

politics of psychiatry is historically significant to the UK context.^{78,79} This leaves UK psychiatry, in some specific ways relating to diagnosis, still closer to Laing's methodology than the USA, albeit more likely because of neglectful austerity policies resulting in under diagnosis and over-prescribing of SSRIs rather than because of any deliberate methodologies of care. All this is to say that, as the idea of neuroqueer enters the UK context, it may yet provide a descriptor for a tendency to resist identification with formal medicalised diagnoses, even as awareness of and demand for neurodivergent diagnosis increases.

The divisions in understanding between diagnostic methodologies described above are like the distinctions between the social and medical models of disability, conflicts between the dominant models with which to think about mental health, disability or indeed any form of neurological difference. Walker's articulation of the neurodiversity paradigm rejects many of the distinctions outlined above, as part of what she describes as the 'pathology paradigm'. Following Walker, Chapman's 'neurodivergent marxism' offers much needed historical context for and analysis of the development of the idea of normal on which the pathology paradigm rests, as well as arguing profoundly in favour of keeping elements of both the social and medical models in play when conceptualising neurodivergence.⁸⁰ It is a notable feature of the emerging neurodiversity paradigm that ways are being found to resolve long-standing divisions in discourse such as those discussed above, with both neuroqueering and neurodivergent marxism being significant movements in this direction.

⁷⁸Peter Tyrer, 'A Comparison of DSM and ICD Classifications of Mental Disorder', *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, vol. 20, no. 4, July 2014, pp. 280–85. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.113.011296>.

⁷⁹ R. D Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, London, UK: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 88

⁸⁰ 'The Neurodiversity Paradigm in Psychiatry: Robert Chapman, PhD'. *Psychiatric Times*, 24 Sept. 2021, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/neurodiversity-paradigm-psychiatry>.

Even in the English language it is, perhaps fortunately, hard to pin down a neuroqueer position long enough to make it an identity, particularly –given Baron Cohen’s continuing influence – if one is a girl, a woman, nonbinary or femme, and particularly once one must also consider ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, Tourette’s, or any other collection of dispositions that form neurodivergent ways of being as they are currently described. Indeed, Walker, Yergeau and other coiners of the term neuroqueer considered the word a verb first, though it certainly is becoming an identity category as it is taken up more widely. Many high profile figures of every gender are openly autistic. The existence of Temple Grandin, Mel Baggs and Courtney Love, to name just a few shows that, particularly prior to Baron Cohen’s gender-dependent theories, and especially outside the UK, the diagnosis was not always gendered in the same way it has recently been here. Did all girl, women, and non-binary autistics just become non-autistic after Baron Cohen’s theories were established and does that mean they are all diagnosable as bipolar, borderline, schizophrenic, or ADHD now? Neuroqueering offers an alternative to seemingly endless logics of division and exclusion by external categorisation. Yergeau writes, of the silencing of autistic narration, searching not just for an ‘I’ but also an ‘us’:

if there is one takeaway from what I-here write it is this: what we do not know and what we often purposively ignore are autistic narrations of such rhetorical events, the interbodily potentials, desires, and moments that structure an autistic life, or any life. To whom do we listen? The autistic or the non-autistic? Can there ever really be an in between? What of my shit? What of my unhuggable body? What of me? What of autos, the self that so consumes the presumably autistic. Where the fuck are we?⁸¹

⁸¹Ibid., M. Remi Yergeau.

Kraus writes of her friend, artist Dan Asher in 2001, remembering 1978 and pre-figuring to some extent Milton's articulation of double empathy: 'It was only later that he defined his condition as "autistic", a condition he's since talked and written about incisively. I just accepted he was crazy, I was crazy too and so we got along'. Kraus's enthusiastic embrace of craziness here is a fine example of mad pride prefiguring neurodivergent and neuroqueer solidarity across gender.

In *Video Green* Kraus, writing in more detail about Asher's work, tells us his 'favourite definition of autism is *a heightened state of hyper-sanity*', which she mentions is 'often misperceived as schizophrenia or attention deficit disorder'.⁸² The differences between Yergeau's, Walker's and Kraus's positions are generational and geographical, but have more in common than not. As Yergeau says of the potential of neuroqueer strategies: 'What neuroqueer theory grants us is the capacity to behold rhetoric as a sometimes unattractive option—as that which disgusts or repels us, as a force from which we can abstain.'⁸³ Just because we want mad pride, neuroqueer, crazy, autistic, genius does not mean we should claim them all at once or need to in order to touch and find kin where we need them; however, the term neuroqueer allows a degree of non-disclosure along with pride where it is not clear how safe it is in which terms to speak or write.

Towards a neuroqueer art school

The 'diary writing girls' Kraus teaches at Cal Arts, as documented in *Video Green's* essays, seem to conform easily to the profile of the 'failing' student as laid out by Orr and Shreve in 2018:

⁸²Ibid., Kraus, *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*, p. 52.

⁸³ Ibid., Yergeau, p. 206.

Students who do not demonstrate the behaviours and attitudes expected by tutors are likely to be those who are failing or who hold strong convictions at odds with the prevailing cultural ethos of the course.⁸⁴

They also call to mind the neuroqueer early years music student whose contributions to David Ben Shannon's research creation he describes as being gate-kept by implicit assumptions about the noise/music normative binary. I read the connections here, from those missing in Orr and Shreeve's account, to those structurally excluded in Shannon's, alongside their address in the work of Kraus and Yergeau as suggestive of possible ways to rethink the potential of neuroqueer's contribution to arts education.

The 'diary writing girls' also seem in Kraus's implication to be neurodivergent fortune tellers who 'wondered why there were no senior female faculty at the school and why the Institution's only black employees were security guards and secretaries.'⁸⁵ These are questions that, along with looking for a discussion of disability, still need asking, and not only in California. After twenty years, if the paradigm of neurodiversity is finally being accepted, and if it is not to become a sticking plaster masking a lack of disability accommodations or racial justice, what is art school and those of us complicit in its architectures going to do about it? The examples of ethnographic and fictional authorship provided by both Kraus and Yergeau are helpful in thinking about ways to discuss and represent experiences of art school in critical ways.

Despite the potential of such an approach there are few examples of such representations of art school in fiction or otherwise with notable works by Daniel Clowes, Alasdair Gray, Pat Barker,

⁸⁴ Ibid., Orr and Shreeve, p. 72.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Kraus *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*, p. 122.

Katrina Palmer, and most recently Martine Syms, more pertinent because of their rarity.^{86, 87, 88, 89, 90} Kraus's *Video Green* and a single chapter by Sarah Thornton's *Seven Days in The Art World* are the even more rare portrayals in non-academic non-fiction writing. Orr and Shreeve's book of 2018 remains the main academic reference since Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger published *Art Students Observed* in 1973.^{91, 92} A small number of writings by artist educators and academics that consider the art school as a speculative proposition or in relation to wider cultural history are discussed further in the chapter on Assembling and Gavin Butt's recent contribution is discussed below. While I was completing work on this thesis in 2025, Gabrielle de le Puente and Zarinah Muhammed, UK art critics better known as The White Pube published a novel *Poor Artists*, developed auto-fictionally from ethnographic interviews with twenty anonymous artists, industry insiders, and educators as well as the authors' own experiencebibliog.⁹³ *Poor Artists'* contribution to the description of experiences of art's study is important, and the novel engages with the subject in more detail than any other recent contemporary analysis. Nevertheless, unlike the comparatively major trend for novels describing the American MFA in writing and its attendant scenes, art school and its representations remain a minor phenomenon, and indeed even the song *Common People* by Pulp can be considered a major study in the material conditions of art school by the standards of the field.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Daniel Clowes. *Art School Confidential: A Screenplay*, Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2006.

⁸⁷ Alasdair Gray. *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, Edinburgh, UK: Canongate Publications, 1981.

⁸⁸ Pat Barker. *Life Class*. London, UK, Penguin books, 2014.

⁸⁹ Katrina Palmer. *The Dark Object*, Book Works, London 2010.

⁹⁰ *The African Desperate*, directed by Martine Syms, Ways & Means, 2022.

⁹¹ Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, Granta, London, 2009.

⁹² Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, Faber and Faber, London, 1973.

⁹³ Gabrielle de la Puente, and Zarina Muhammad. *Poor Artists*. Particular Books, 2024.

⁹⁴ Pulp, *Common People*, Island Records 1995.

Much potential for critical thinking about the idea of art school, discussed further in the chapter on Assembling, is elided between the ideas that both students and teachers are lucky to attend or work there, and that art school is a place students go to study for the love of it and not for financial gain, despite much emphasis now on ‘employability’ as something art teachers are tasked with delivering for students. At the same time, art school or art courses at larger universities remain one of the few pathways to higher education where entry requirements are genuinely flexible due to their multimodal reliance on interview and portfolio for selection. For the moment, many students who would otherwise be unable to study at a higher level are still able to gain places at art school or on art courses although it remains to be seen what happens as many of these courses close. By emphasising institutions’ vulnerability, these art school dynamics simultaneously help to cloak its structures from critical representation and may make it easy to argue for art school’s defunding in relation to other subjects in increasingly marketised education discourses.⁹⁵ This phenomenon has been more clearly documented in relation to arts education prior to HE in the UK with regards art’s positioning in the National Curriculum and for funding for the arts in general but it affects art schools at the level of institutional funding greatly.⁹⁶ This underfunding is to some extent masked by the targeted marketing of UK arts courses internationally in order to attract higher international fee-paying students, but the effects are felt locally, as Jo Grady of University Colleges Union is quoted in the *Guardian*: ‘The universities most vulnerable are those with a higher number of less well-off students and it is unconscionable to deny them the chance to study subjects like art, drama, and music.’⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ryan Gerald Wilkinson, ‘Creative Arts Personal Pedagogy vs Marketised Higher Education: A Battle between Values’. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, vol. 39, no. 3, Aug. 2020, pp. 536–49. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12295>.

⁹⁶ Sally Weale, Education correspondent. ‘Funding Cuts to Go Ahead for University Arts Courses in England despite Opposition’, *The Guardian*, 20 July 2021. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/20/funding-cuts-to-go-ahead-for-university-arts-courses-in-england-despite-opposition>.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Weale, Sally.

Art schools in the UK sell the reified idea of arts education abroad to subsidise local students who cannot afford to study elsewhere.^{98,99} For some local neurodivergent students who may be returning to education or applying without traditional qualifications due to previous educational alienation, it is their only chance at higher education being foreclosed if courses are underfunded, places reduced and they become increasingly competitive to get into.^{100,101} Gavin Butt's recent book *No Machos or Pop Stars* (2022) discusses how in contrast, in previous decades, under free education policies in the UK, art school education transformed the Leeds music scene, giving birth to the class crossing genre of post-punk, showing the way access to the arts through free education generated cultural abundance beyond the studio or the diploma.¹⁰²

Butt cautions against romanticising art school in the light of this history, however, stating how critical his interview subjects were of their experiences there.¹⁰³ This highlights the need to represent art school experiences outside art school, to avoid cloaking and false mystique. Indeed, throughout the non-academic literature on art school this theme recurs, that art school should be documented and represented, as much for the need to criticise it as to praise it. It is

⁹⁸ Ibid., Weale, Sally.

⁹⁹ Anna Fazackerley, "'Treated like Cash Cows': International Students at Top London Universities Withhold £29,000 Fees', *The Guardian*, 13 Mar. 2021. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/13/treated-like-cash-cows-international-students-at-top-london-universities-withhold-29000-fees>.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Adams 'English Universities Over-Reliant on Overseas Students' Fees, Report Warns', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2022. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jun/15/english-universities-over-reliant-on-overseas-students-fees-report-warns>.

¹⁰¹ The Warwick Commission Report details the relation between low-income backgrounds and the likelihood of students going on to study art and design at school but data into this relation to such subjects at the higher level is not available. The report concludes more research is needed, The Warwick Commission Report, 2015, <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/>. Accessed 8 May 2024. p. 48.

¹⁰² Gavin Butt, *No Machos or Pop Stars: When the Leeds Art Experiment Went Punk*, Duke University Press, 2022.

¹⁰³ 'The Quietus | Features | Tome On The Range | Art Into Pop: Leeds Punk & Post-Punk, 1974–81', *The Quietus*, <https://thequietus.com/articles/32366-gavin-butt-interview-no-machos-or-pop-stars-leeds-post-punk-mekons-elta-5-scritti-politti-fad-gadget>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2022.

only in wholly academic writing about art school, such as that by Orr and Shreeve, that art school tends to be represented as something to be entirely praised. To some extent this may be explained by the simultaneous undervaluing and under-critical attitudes prevalent towards art school. Those representing it are often defensive and making a case for scarce funding, or indeed, engaged openly in marketing and marketisation, or otherwise, as described in Alasdair Gray's novel *Lanark*, they are in the act of escaping the worst effects of what art school lacks.

I conclude that the contextual literatures clearly indicate that understanding of the neurodiversity paradigm is urgently needed at art school as an under-recognised majority neurodivergent space. Understanding of neurodivergence and disability at art school may lead to better understanding of art school and the way the subject discipline of art and design has been positioned, leading to new ways to argue for better funding and support for art as study in academia and beyond. Issues of reading and rhetoric are key concepts for neuroqueering art school as an environment for learning and study. Ethnography and fiction are key methods by means of which space might be held for this neuroqueering to come about, in and from. From these elements new strategies for study and for reading itself emerge.

CARDING

‘The position of diviner may have fallen low in our day, but our craft must not. Reading Tarot still has to be practical and answer the cutting edge of need.’

Caitlin Matthews *The Untold Tarot*

Carding is a harsh process of alignment that renders fibre more ready for processing, a function of mechanical reproduction, named for the spiky plant head of the teasel, used for working fibre, which is *cardus* in the Latin. Its consonance with our name for pieces of stiff paper is a coincidence.

The Sun



Figure 8



Figure 9 The Sun from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

I propose a case for the use of divinatory strategies such as Tarot card reading in art school in response to problems of reading and context collapse that I identify. I lay out the context for neurodivergent divination and divination with Tarot cards with reference to work by Caitlin Matthews, Fernand Deligny, Remi Yergeau, danah boyd Chris Kraus, Martine Syms, and others.

Context Collapse

In 2009 sociologists danah boyd and Michael Wesch independently used the term ‘context collapse’ to discuss how on social media, multiple audiences were addressed in a single context. The failure of any single context to satisfy incompatible expectations, habits, and assumptions on the part of social media users and their potentially unlimited audiences tends to generate conflict and confusion in online social spaces. boyd and Wesch both draw on histories of interactionist sociological thinking about performance of the self, and later theories about the mediation of such performance.

The phenomenon of context collapse as identified by boyd is important for this study as it draws to attention the fallibility of the transmission of explicit meaning *via* the iterative and interacting inter-subjective processes of reading and writing as self-performance on social media. With Alice Marwick in 2009, boyd draws on Erving Goffman’s work on performance and authenticity to illuminate the way that audiences and performers are always, to a greater or lesser extent, fictional to each other.¹⁰⁴ As we cannot be sure exactly to whom we are speaking,

¹⁰⁴ boyd and Marwick look at Goffman’s dramaturgical models of the performance of self in the shifting socio-technological contexts of fields in which such performance increasingly occurs; literature, broadcast electronic media and contemporary developments in online social media, showing how multiple theorists have figured this as a process of making fiction.

in that we never know empirically what it is like to ‘be’ another person, communication is a matter of compression, translation, and speculation, a relation that must be tuned rather than quantified.¹⁰⁵ As the performance of self adapts to networked digital telepresence, and text-based communication takes the place of many experiences of proximity and physical presence, boyd and Marwick show how it is possible to trace the different ways in which users and their audiences fictionalise each other to deal with context collapse. While true of all social interactions, from the late 2000s onwards, social media, with its privileging of written and prerecorded communication, allowed the confusion of interaction to adhere in time, making the phenomenon of context collapse more tangible.¹⁰⁶ In these circumstances, context collapse may be understood as an extension or acceleration of the phenomenon that French theorist Roland Barthes famously described as the ‘death of the author’, when writing and performance become entangled with each other to the extent they have done on social media.¹⁰⁷ Strategies used to counteract this effect include anonymisation, self-censorship and the use of multiple accounts, avatars, or identities, varying according to the platform used and the degree of celebrity of the user.

I show that the uncertainty created by context collapse is not the failure of reading nor the failure of truth. Indeed, Barthes himself described the author’s death as the price paid for the birth of the reader. As has been recognised and acknowledged in speculative and divinatory practices of reading, and in art movements that work with chance and disorder such as Dada, surrealism, Fluxus and Oulipo, context collapse may be a generative engine of difference. Such

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the failure of communication as relational rather than originating from individual impairment see Milton’s work on double empathy and the ontology of autism.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that these same conditions of communication have simultaneously been extremely beneficial for neurodivergent and disabled people, opening up communications and sociality in unprecedented ways for those who find in-person interaction difficult. Such subjects have often been pioneers of many of the strategies mentioned to counteract problems with online visibility and context collapse.

¹⁰⁷ Roland Barthes, translated by Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text: Essays*. 13. London, UK: Fontana, 1977, p. 148.

ways of understanding collapsing contexts allow the conditions for the emergence of fictions as tactics through which reading subjects can reparatively re-orientate their relation to the shared spaces of thinking, understanding, and making in which they find themselves.

The work of French writer, film maker, pedagogue, and activist Fernand Deligny's work allows me the space and insight to think about the relation – through gesture rather than identity – between reading and context collapse. Writing in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* Leon Hilton describes Deligny's work:

Like a spider's web, a network is always in formation for Deligny, always in the midst of being built and maintained in compositional responsiveness to its environment. It is a precarious enterprise, in perpetual danger of either falling apart or, alternatively, rigidifying into an institution.¹⁰⁸

As I am not a French speaker, I read Deligny across this gap in linguistic context through bilingual scholars like Hilton and the translator of his writings, Drew Burke. Contexts must collapse eventually. Spiders, Deligny's chosen animal familiar, must know this. The management of the process of collapse, the spanning of the gaps created by it, the spinning of the web/network that orients the spider to space, I call reading. Deligny, accustomed to working with non-speaking autistics, and those who to various extents operate outside language, was an expert in spanning such gulfs in context. Through this sense of reading that occurs before verbal meaning, I address my need to analyse a situation without expectation or proof of a solution or direction, when there is breakdown of contextual knowledge – the situation which boyd and

¹⁰⁸ Leon Hilton, 'Mapping the Wander Lines: The Quiet Revelations of Fernand Deligny', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2 July 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/mapping-the-wander-lines-the-quiet-revelations-of-fernand-deligny/>. Accessed May 6 2024.

Marwick describe as context collapse.¹⁰⁹ I return to the work of Deligny later in this chapter to help me think further about how context collapse relates to neurodivergent and divinatory reading at art school.

Reading and context collapse

Jenny Davis and Nathan Jurgenson, discussing networked identity, extend boyd and Marwick's work to refer to two types of context collapse, 'collusion and collision', either deliberate or accidental.¹¹⁰ In any process of reading, in whatever mode (including listening), both forms of context collapse are liable to be in play at any time. It is the degree of control the reader has over context collapse, and so over what valence of collapse occurs, that varies. This is dependent on the degree of control available to the reader from their standpoint.

Context collapse does not only happen in terms of identity categories in a digital network; it is also taking place at the level of gesture and in the networked context where gesture is apprehended or given. In the context of an art school, staff read and interpret the work of students, while simultaneously being read by students, with assumptions, expectations, interpretation, and response shifting constantly on both sides. Hence, I have come to repurpose the term context collapse from digital networked sociologies where it was coined, for re-use in relation to art school and its pedagogical needs, including gesture. I am mindful in doing this that at all times Damian Milton's double empathy problem may also be in play.¹¹¹ Indeed, it

¹⁰⁹ danah boyd and Alice E. Marwick. 'I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience', *New Media & Society*, vol. 13, no. 1, Feb. 2011, pp. 114–33. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313>.

¹¹⁰ Jenny L Davis, and Nathan Jurgenson. 'Context Collapse: Theorizing Context Collusions and Collisions', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 4, Apr. 2014, pp. 476–85. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.888458>.

¹¹¹ Damian Milton, et al. 'The "Double Empathy Problem": Ten Years On', *Autism*, vol. 26, no. 8, Nov. 2022, pp. 1901–03. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221129123>.

seems evident that the phenomena of double empathy and context collapse, with their roots in interactionist thinking and performance are related through their relation to reading.

If reading is the process by which context collapse is approached, navigated, maintained, choreographed, and witnessed, it is also the interaction in which damage can be sustained as a result. If in reading, we deliberately put ourselves in the way of context collapse, we should teach this process responsibly and effectively in the most expanded and multimodal sense possible. Although reading may often be deliberate, all deliberate actions contain some degree of accident. The binary of deliberate and involuntary or accidental suggested by Davis and Jurgenson is troubled, for example, by the reading of neuroqueer subjects, whose different kinds of ticcing and stimming I understand as different kinds of reading, making possible orientation of the self in context, but which are also categorised (and so read by others) as involuntary. What then of context collusions and collisions? The binary itself is the collapsing context here. This is what Yergeau calls 'stimpoin't'.¹¹² What this means for our expanded sense of reading, for gesture, and for divination, is that this stimpoin't is the point at which divinatory reading is happening: an instance of being found and confounded all at once, a field of reading opening. The tolerance for this process or state in art school may be increased, developing a capacity for reading these confounding valences and finding stimpoin'ts between one context and another. A way to do this is through divinatory practices such as Tarot, in which surrendering to the shuffle, over which we do not exert control, can be a relief from decision making and an opportunity for insight where more conventional forms of understanding, including empathy, seem to have failed.

¹¹² Ibid., Yergeau, p. 206.

Reading art school

In an essay in *Video Green* Chris Kraus draws attention to the explosive response to art student Jennifer Schlosberg's 1998 writing project *78 Drawings of My Face* on a course at California Institute of the Arts. This project documented Schlosberg's efforts to describe interactions between herself and fellow students and staff, including tutor q (and famous performance artist) Chris Burden's response 'why do you make yourself so scary?'. In attending to Schlosberg's project Kraus shows how much difficulty can arise from the effort to document what happens at art school. The title of Schlosberg's work is not discussed by Kraus but is perhaps likely a reference to the seventy-eight cards of the Tarot. Schlosberg's work in Kraus's reading of it provides an excellent example of both a written work and an object as 'a reading' of a situation in which context is collapsing. Schlosberg's project reportedly (according to Kraus) comprises a written account of her time at Cal Arts, following her suggestion that she and other students and staff sit and draw each other. This suggestion was met with hostility for being too personal.¹¹³

In the opening sequence of Martine Syms's film *The African Desperate* (2022) the main character Palace Bryant clears her college studio in preparation for a *viva voce* on the last day of her MFA.¹¹⁴ Among the many items being cleared away are scattered Tarot cards. Like Jennifer Schlosberg, the character Palace Bryant, played by performance artist Diamond Stingily, is interrogated by a tutor about the presence of others in her work, a question Bryant, who is Black, openly calls out as racist. Syms makes it clear in this opening scene that the inclusion of the personal, and indeed persons, in art works is still a controversial site of scholastic conflict and alienation. Reference to Kraus's exegesis of Schlosberg's 1998 work may

¹¹³ Ibid., Kraus, *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*, p. 58.

¹¹⁴ *The African Desperate*. Directed by Martine Syms, Ways & Means, 2022.

be incidental but it resonates that in these two rare descriptions of Fine Art MFA experience two and a half decades apart, Tarot should also be referred to in the context of how best to document personal interactions. I was not able to access a copy of Schlosberg's original text, but Kraus describes it as:

425 single-spaced pages of what she called her "notes," recording in an alphabetised dossier, the history of her interactions with everyone at school. She compiled 78 folders on these colleagues who were friends, ex-friends, teachers, strangers, boyfriends. Rambling and infinitely digressive the text reads something like *Remembrance of Things Past* if Proust had spent his time at an American junior high school.

The seventy-eight cards of the Tarot deck function as a powerful template on which to structure a personalised database with which to study interactions and communication.

I read these references to Tarot by Syms and Kraus as cards in two adjacent Tarot spreads. What then is Tarot doing at art school? If, in 2022, Tarot is already in use in art practice, at art school, what is causing us to hide this method of reading, while we uphold and make show of conventional literacy, as Bryant must in her final exam? Throughout this exam Bryant holds and refers to a copy of *The Testament of The Dead Daughter* by Rene Colette Thomas with a homemade slipcover, and by the end of the film, as the character leaves on a train to Chicago, she is wearing a T-shirt with 'Dead Daughter' hand stencilled on the back. This slippage, from book to costume transforms the required 'book learning' of the academic context into a gestural

register of adornment where it can become legible in a new way, writing-as-reading-as-object, like the Tarot cards in Syms's opening sequence.¹¹⁵

Reading with Deligny

Deligny's work, as documented in his films and those made about him, also offer models for the (un)structuring of ways to read while acknowledging context collapse. Working with autistic collaborators, whose reading of the world is so expansive as to be read by most people as something other than reading, Deligny's films show how the slightest gesture (*le moindre geste*) can be a reading and can be read. Indeed, to sit watching his films *Le Moindre Geste* (1971), or *Ce Gamin Là* (1976), is to be taught a new way of reading *with* the people represented. In *Le Moindre Geste* a simple story expands to include gesture, phrase, line, and texture in both sound and visual movement as well as through phrase, repetition and fragment.¹¹⁶ The young boys' literal standing in a field, reading, in fact almost dowsing, with tics and stims, what Deligny termed *repérer* (locating), is in part the way the film is made, it is this locating that the camera follows.¹¹⁷ Sarah Moses, translator of Deligny's writing on film, writes of

¹¹⁵ Deligny writes of 'the adorned' to describe the slippage away from symbol into gesture in *The Arachnean*, 'And here we are, in close proximity to autistic children, first-hand witnesses to this inveterate inaptitude for restoring what we have ended up calling the adorned, that is, the detours traced in the real, traces of the human on the basis of which the locating would find itself in its own element.' Fernand Deligny, trans. by Burke, Drew, and Porter, Catherine *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2015. *L'arachnéen et autres textes* L'arachnéen, 2008, p222.

¹¹⁶ Jean Pierre Daniel Fernand Deligny and Josée Manenti, *Le Moindre Geste*. Societe pour les Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles, Les Cévanne, Gard, France, 1971.

¹¹⁷ Igor Krtolica, and Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc. 'The Children Estranged from Language: Fernand Deligny, in His Time, and against Lacan', *Psychoanalysis & History*, vol. 21, no. 2, Aug. 2019, pp. 211–27. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.3366/pah.2019.0296>.

the distinction Deligny makes between filming and camering. While he views the former as being driven by intentions and an end product, camering is non-subjective, endless, about the tool and the process; in short, not about making a film-object.¹¹⁸

In turn, as viewers we follow the boys *via* the movements of Josée Manenti's camera, *camering*, in what amounts to as much as a representation of an art school reading as *Video Green* or *The African Desperate*. Indeed, all three examples might be read as accounts of the 'end' of or escape from the art school.

In *The Arachnean*, Deligny's collected texts, Deligny writes, in response to his experiences with autistics: 'To put it another way; the aspect of wandering that is nonetheless essential – essential because what is at stake is the quest for chance – tumbles into the darkness of complete oblivion.'¹¹⁹ In *Le Moindre Geste* one of the boys the camera follows is shown entering a hole from which we do not see him return. Deligny and Josée Manenti, who shot the film follow the boy as he literally performs this 'tumbling into the darkness of complete oblivion' as the culmination of his wanderings.

Deligny's school, Cévennes, introduced in the film *Le Moindre Geste* as a place where the autistic 'students' make drawings of their 'teacher' Deligny, might, in my definition at its most expansive, be termed an art school, where reliance on the spoken or written is refused, where reading is expanded by necessity, where to wander and escape is the study. *Le Moindre Geste* visually cues us into this story with found artefact (a news item about an escaped bull –who, like the boy in the film described above, falls into a hole— forms an early intertitle) and

¹¹⁸ Marlon Miguel, and Elena Vogman, editors. *Camering: Fernand Deligny on Cinema and the Image*, Translated by Sarah Moses, Leiden NL: Leiden University Press, p. 12, 2022.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Deligny et al, *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, p.38.

fragments of art works (the aforementioned portraits of Deligny, drawn by the collaborating students, are shown) much as Syms does with reference to Tarot and other storied or read objects in her opening and closing scenes described above.¹²⁰ As an artist, these visual cues help me to read works such as Deligny's, across language and into gesture much as autistics and their collaborators in *Ce Gamin Là* read each other and their movements outside language. Indeed, even more so here than in *Le Moindre Geste* we see that this school, which Deligny termed a *tentative* or attempt, is also a place where the 'teachers', or as Deligny termed them 'close presences' make maps or *cartes* of the movements of the 'students' wanderings.¹²¹

Tarot and divinatory reading

I consider Tarot a particular example of divination, a case study of one among myriad theories of *anything*, a collectively authored assemblage of in-essential and illegitimate protocols.¹²² Rather than a cosmology, I understand Tarot as a template or form for generating a pseudo random output of images, as the subject of a spatialised pictorial meta-sequence or spread. The casting of cards into the spread, the hiding and turning of them in time renders the image as gestural. To read Tarot is to read in such a way that must constantly acknowledge context collapse.

Divination is the schematic means of finding things out without knowing how to start looking for something, without a framework, or where the context of what is sought is unfamiliar. For about six centuries one of the main ways this has been done, first in Europe, and later more

¹²⁰ Catherine Witt, 'The Space of Care: Fernand Deligny, Renaud Victor and the Making of *Ce Gamin, Là* (1975)', *French Screen Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 23–43. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26438941.2021.2003562>.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, Miguel and Vogman, p. 30.

¹²² Simon Wintle, 'Cartomancy and Divination Cards'. *The World of Playing Cards*, <https://www.wopc.co.uk/tarot/divination/>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2022.

widely, is the reading of Tarot.¹²³ The Tarot is an open practice of speculative multimodal reading of change(s) that has to be constantly iteratively re-made. It is the lot as deck: an index to anything that facilitates assignment, sorting, casting, sampling. With it, one sets the conditions for spinning, alignment, and arbitration. Drawing from the pack, the reader is drawing out and drawing on stochasticity, the constant potential for change.

Intuition, a word used often to refer to ways of knowing that are not formally objective, is defined by its lack of form and its negative relation to proof. It is difficult to speak about divination because as a way of doing things when other things fail, it is born from states considered negative: passive, vulnerable, uncountable, unclassifiable, unteachable. We confuse it *via* ‘superstition’ with instinct, the primitive, and naivete. Stigmatising of passivity in the anglosphere extends to using the characteristic as racialised and associating it with ‘the Orient’, its culture and peoples.¹²⁴

Talking about divination as a universal suggests the Tarot should be thought of as a cosmological map, a dogma, or a total book, a kind of scripture or theory of everything. Some Jungian interpretations of the Tarot such as that of Alejandro Jodorowsky, working with archetypes, ascribe essential universalised meanings to the cards, figuring them as symbols and diagrams yielding up these universal meanings once a code is cracked: divination as god trick.^{125, 126, 127} It is not solely Jung: most of the nineteenth and twentieth century’s occult

¹²³ Caitlin Matthews, in *The Untold Tarot*, connects divination to language, storytelling and gaming as cartomancy specifically rather than divination in the esoteric sense it has been associated with since the 18th century.

¹²⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, UK: Penguin, 2003, p. 108.

¹²⁵ Alejandro Jodorowsky and Marianne Costa, *The Way of Tarot: The Spiritual Teacher in the Cards*, Rochester, NY: Destiny Books, 2009.

¹²⁶ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, p. 575. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

¹²⁷ ‘that a single recognizable event, a single recognizable object, or a given rhetorical feature will have the same meaning no matter what discourse it is found in. This is the notion that impels the so well-intentioned cultural

movements, including those from which emerged the Rider Waite and Thoth illustrated decks, based their cosmologies on information about the ancient world gleaned entirely through orientalist discourse.¹²⁸ Material and practice-grounded Tarot scholarship such as that of Caitlin Matthews, which sees no opposition between Tarot as game and Tarot as cartomantic method, achieves a far less biased historiography of the cards by acknowledging their roots in gaming and playing cards, and from where the link can be made *via mamluk* cards, to the Andalus presence in Spain. Where I expand the definition of reading to include the way I read the gestures in the films above, it is Matthews's methodology of card-reading I employ that makes this possible.

History of speculative reading

These decks of cards, printed with variations on familiar figures and tableaux, each with its caption, emerged as playing cards in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Tarot was a game in courtly circles, an entertaining, procedural way of generating and telling stories in a group. This phenomenon was likely one of many lines of transmission from the long mimesis of the game of playing cards, from China and Japan, where systems of playing cards for gambling and games were probably developed from the use of lots in decision-making. These ludic protocols were transmitted slowly through trade and migrant groups and many different forms of colonialism until the Arabic presence in Spain, from where, *via* Italian courtly life, it cast mimetic spores into the culture of Europe, nurturing distinct forms and dynamics of its

imperialism of symbol explicators such as Jung or Joseph Campbell, who again and again seem to feel that when they find a dragon or a mandala in two widely separated cultures, somehow they have discovered the "same" or a "shared" symbol', Samuel R. Delany *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary*, Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1999, p. 31.

¹²⁸ Edward Said's *Orientalism* describes Friedrich Schlegel as one among many examples illustrative of such Orientalist discourse. 'Schlegel's lectures on language and on life, history, and literature are full of these discriminations, which he made without the slightest qualification. Hebrew, he said, was made for prophetic utterance and divination; the Muslims, however, espoused a "dead empty Theism, a merely negative Unitarian faith. "Much of the racism in Schlegel's strictures upon the Semites and other "low" Orientals was widely diffused in European culture.' *Ibid.*, Said pp. 98-99.

own. In Spain and the Arab world these playing cards were named *mamluk*, for the soldiers who played them.¹²⁹ Tarot has different numbers of cards to mamluk, and to conventional European playing card decks; the primary innovation of Tarot is the Major Arcana, a set of twenty-two *trump* cards in addition to the more familiar *court* cards displaying images of nobles, and the *pips* or numbered cards.¹³⁰ Though they vary somewhat across different times and places, the four suits in Tarot remain consistently translatable to both the format of mamluk cards and modern playing cards.

Tarot develops as a game similar to Consequences, and other games played by Dada, the Surrealists, Fluxus, Oulipo, and many children in the twentieth century, such as *Exquisite Corpse*, in which succeeding parts of a drawing or text are made by different players without looking at what comes before.¹³¹ In Italy Tarot may have been an appropriation of or response to existing carto-mantic speculative practices encountered by Italian nobles travelling among different cultures, transmitted with their own storytelling and gambling games. It likely also gained momentum from the impact of paper making and printing technology changing the relation of the individual to representation and reproduction by the early fifteenth century, moving away from the religious centres of power into the secular, even under conditions as

¹²⁹ 'The Trzes' Mamluk Deck by Ulrich Kaltenborn', *Esoteric and Divinatory Tarot*, 23 Mar. 2019, <https://tarotator.com/the-trzes-mamluk-deck-by-ulrich-kaltenborn/>.

¹³⁰ The word 'Trump' comes from *Triumph* after the unfolding sequences of pageantry tableaux well known in Roman cultural festivities.

¹³¹ Breton, Andre. *Breton Remembers*, Oct. 1948, This detail comes from the catalogue of an exhibition at La Dragonne, Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris, 7-30 October 1948, entitled "Le Cadavre Exquis: Son Exaltation", p.5-7, 9-11.1 archived online by the Wayback Machine here:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20080127195653/http://exquisitecorpse.com/definition/Bretons Remembranc es.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20080127195653/http://exquisitecorpse.com/definition/Bretons_Remembranc es.html). Accessed 16 May 2024.

Cadavre Exquis with Yves Tanguy, Joan Miro, Max Morise, Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitsky), *Nude*, 1926-7, New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art.

Exquisite Corpse with André Masson, Max Ernst and Max Morise, 1927, Chicago, IL: Art Institute Chicago.

oppressive as the Spanish Inquisition.^{132,133} Much of the evidence for the historic use of playing cards consists of public orders prohibiting them for their use in gambling. An article on the history of playing cards and the church nevertheless makes clear how intimately linked printmakers and painters of cards were with both religious imagery and more illicit material, and how the shift to playing cards may have come about as painters of cards and printmakers repurposed stock religious imagery from devotional images for pilgrims to playing cards for additional income.¹³⁴

Tarot has many similarities to a much older form of divination. The I Ching was first used in China and Japan and has been traced back to China's Zhou dynasty.¹³⁵ It is one of the earliest systems of computation. It offers a method for iteratively producing a random outcome, or what is more technically known in mathematical and computational terms as a pseudo-random outcome, that is to say it is not actually random, though whether anything is 'truly' random is a matter of ontological opinion. To describe something as 'pseudo-random' is to acknowledge an outcome of a process too complex for the querent, the person asking the question, to make sense of. It is a way of deliberately generating un-sense, combining the forms of the book and lot drawing, or what has been called cleromancy. The Tarot is a much later form of such a reproducible, paper-based generator of narrative spores. From the cards and lots a book is drawn that can be read in any order, and which, depending as it does on the situation from which the querent finds themselves reading, is never the same twice. Both the I Ching and the

¹³² During the Spanish inquisition when many texts were banned, secular storytelling must have continued within oral culture, the cards providing excuses, or prompts for narrative games without writing down more incriminating non-religious content.

¹³³ Simon Wintle, 'Early History of Playing Cards'. *The World of Playing Cards*, <https://www.wopc.co.uk/the-history-of-playing-cards/early-history-of-playing-cards>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2023.

¹³⁴ Simon Wintle, 'Playing Cards and Religion'. *The World of Playing Cards*, <https://www.wopc.co.uk/cards/religion>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2023.

¹³⁵ Martin Kern, 'Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han', *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: Volume 1: To 1375*, edited by Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 1–115. *Cambridge University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521855587.003>.

Tarot can also be understood as part of what is called bibliomancy or fortune telling with books. I tend to describe such forms of divination as speculative reading rather than ‘fortune telling’, as the latter is a form of address that has long been used to stigmatise and criminalise divinatory knowledge by emphasising its lack of rational basis. Though there is an undeniable case to be made for reclaiming such terms of derision, the link to speculative practice is important for me to emphasise for other reasons. The idea of speculation as a way of thinking where the outcome is not known, or where the outcome can be imagined, but not shown or proved through evidence, is also the type of thinking associated with some science fiction, as in many works such as *The Dispossessed*, *The Telling*, or *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin.¹³⁶ In these books Le Guin stretches the boundaries of what it is ‘possible’ to think, imagining the future as a way to do this expanding of the possible, and rendering these new possibilities tangible, representing them through storytelling. The speculative design of teams like Superflux and Dunne and Raby also works in this way.¹³⁷ Speculation in this sense is a way of approaching problem solving in the present by imagining a future context in which the seemingly unsolvable can be solved with a view to bringing this new context about in the now. This kind of speculation does not so much predict the future but finds new ways to describe and reflect on the present, and in so doing, to alter it.

In contrast to divination or even the study of fine art, speculative design processes are taken seriously in research contexts. When scientists develop new technologies, and technologies to

¹³⁶Ursula K. Le Guin repeatedly refused the role of future prediction for her speculative writing which she always emphasised as fiction, indeed in the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* she playfully and provocatively goes so far as to refer to such fiction simply as ‘lying’. Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1992. Ursula K. Le Guin *The Dispossessed*. London, UK: Gollancz, 2002. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Telling*. New York, NY: Harcourt, 2000. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. London, UK: Orbit, 2010.

¹³⁷ Dunne, Anthony, and Fiona Raby. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.

develop new technologies, speculative designers can be paid well to consider how those technologies might be applied.¹³⁸

Tarot for artists

Reading, specifically the often-ambivalent literacy of artists' reading as discussed in the chapter on Scouring, is already a speculative process in that reading itself presents a problem to be solved. The art historian Adrian Rifkin¹³⁹ describes reading with art students at the University of Leeds in terms that make this abundantly clear:

Now I'd never been a very good explainer of texts, so the technique of reading in these courses was for the students to read at least a paragraph of *The Third Critique, Aesthetic of the Sublime*; at least a paragraph of Gayatri Spivak; at least a paragraph of Derrida, and to work on that paragraph until we realised how little we understood, any of us.

So often these fine art students would generate performance games to express how they themselves had read these difficult texts, and if you like Kant then became something whose own troubles in getting from A to B, in getting up to the sublime and down again, became a part of our way of working.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Abbey Bamford, 'Designing the Future: How Superflux Is Demystifying Speculative Design', *Design Week*, 4 Jan. 2023, <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/3-6-january-2023/experiential-futures-superflux-speculative-design/>.

¹³⁹ Adrian Rifkin, also discussed in the chapter on Drafting, is a British artist and scholar whose 'abiding interest in indeterminacy and improvisation' (as described by Michael Swiboda in the introduction to his interview with Rifkin linked below), particularly in relation to Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, and emphasis on the relation between art and radical pedagogy, make his work an important reference for this study. His practice of improvisatory 'enunciation' offers one model for what expanded reading as a practice might constitute: 'Interview with Adrian Rifkin', *Liminalities*, <http://liminalities.net/14-1/rifkin.html>. Accessed 16 May 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Adrian Rifkin, <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/media/file/events/bat-2021-04-21-bat-adrian-rifkin-transcript.pdf> Accessed 10 November 2023

Many (although far from all) artists have an antipathetic relation to the written word and are far happier reading images and symbolism such as that found in the Tarot than they are a written text. Therefore, by engaging multimodally with artists' reading, as a way of analysing the context and the lived experience in which the artist querent finds themselves, it becomes possible to develop a methodology of speculative reading that does not assume prior knowledge or treat reading as an automatic, passive process of spectatorship. This kind of engagement addresses this landscape of reading among what remains of the art school and its needs as described in the chapters entitled Scouring and Assembling as not only productive but reproductive. However, reading in the art school remains somewhat difficult to discuss due in part to stressors from the demands of academic reading on a neurodivergent student population. Although often comparatively little reading is explicitly required at art school, as art students are asked to write relatively few academic essays and dissertations are often optional or being phased out entirely, contextual research in the form of critical reading of and about other artists' practices remains pedagogically beneficial and is an often-implicit requirement in the development of students' practices.¹⁴¹ For models of speculative multimodal reading designed to be suitable for expanded self-teaching and learning from practice I look to the community of Tarot readers for guidance.

¹⁴¹ Artist educators Joseph Noonan-Ganley and Roy Claire Potter have both written eloquently about the case for abolishing academic writing as a requirement at art school; in so doing they both provide vivid accounts of such requirements as they currently stand. While both are at least nominally concerned more with requirements to write rather than to read Noonan Ganley concludes his essay by explicitly making the demand to 'allow the idiosyncratic reading that is already being done to be identified, supported and taught with the same spirit of self-directed learning that is crucial in contemporary art pedagogy' and Potter draws direct attention to neurodivergence at art school, 'more consideration of how neurodiversity factors into arts education ought to come in at the level of curriculum design'. I agree with both writers that abolishing the requirement to write on art courses would open the relation of art study to the more expansive conceptions of not only writing but also reading and study itself for which art students undoubtedly have immense capacity. Joseph Noonan-Ganley 'Abolish the art writing strand in art departments', *Commissioned Critique*, 03 <https://www.comcrit.cc/03-joseph-noonan-ganley/>. Accessed 17 May 2024, Roy Claire Potter, 'Art Student Essays: CRAP!', *Corridor8's Substack*, <https://corridor8.substack.com/p/art-student-essays-crap>. 23 Apr. 2024.

The Tarot de Marseille was a popular deck in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I work with a reproduction of this deck, developed by Jodorowsky in collaboration with Camoin, one of the last Tarot card printers in France, retrofitting old woodcuts and archived test sheets of Tarot cards to get back to the oldest version of the Marseille deck that they could find. Though I love working with the resulting deck, I prefer Matthews's rationale for this to Jodorowsky's. Matthews's insistence on the power of older Tarot deck's use of court and pip cards rather than the fully illustrated decks of the twentieth century is instructive and salutary. She suggests that the 'secrets' of Tarot emerge in the reading rather than from the cards themselves, linking the reading of them to a practice of performance, gesture, and language rather than emphasising hidden or encrypted signs, and universal symbol and image.

Protocols such as Matthews's for reading could be integrated into what might be considered an expanded conception of reading for art school that is truly multimodal and embracing of both divinatory histories and neuroqueer futures, encompassing ways of reading that recognise the value of context collapse as generative. Reading in this way has little to do with being able to read a theoretical essay, or even with the decoding of symbols, and yet much to do with thinking about practice in the arts. It might be a kind of reading and indeed even constitute a system of documentation for reading helpful to neurodiverse studios. If so, in order to make it so, some forms of stigma should be addressed so that those who find Tarot and its outputs 'scary' do not alienate or ostracise those who may find them helpful. With such forms of stigma addressed, Tarot and other forms of divination could take their place in arts pedagogy. This understanding of Tarot and reading expands the idea of reading itself to divinatorially meet the neuroqueer need for multimodal anti-positivist crip literacies that embrace the generative and speculative space at the heart of context collapse.

Deligny writes, of cards, in the Arachnean:

The word *carte* (card) works well, coming from the word *charta* ‘paper’. It can either be a ‘small rectangular piece of cardboard with one side bearing a figure’ (playing card), ‘a reduced scale representation of the total or partial surface of the terrestrial globe’ (map), or ‘a paper establishing certain rights for the person bearing it’ (identity card, membership card, etc).

As we can see the word is quite vast, and while it has been many years since I had my (Party) card our customary practice consists in tracing *cartes* (maps) where the wander lines of the autistic children who live here appear; we venture to do this to make something other than a sign. One sees that each living area covers a truly minuscule parcel of the surface of the globe.

In fact what we are looking for is what there may be in *common* between these children and ourselves.¹⁴²

I am struck by this vision of the card as one of many pieces of surface supporting an appearance in space, denoting a portion of that which is shared in common, a location or *locating* that expands beyond the mere reading of signs, and yet which may nonetheless, in some way, be read.

¹⁴² Ibid., Deligny, Drew and Porter, p. 149.

ASSEMBLING

‘Dave is dismantling his chicken coop. He said the chickens didn’t like the artificial environment of the college, so he has taken them to his digs.’

Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*

The conditions for spinning are also the conditions for dowsing. The spindle is the earliest reproductive machine.

Ace of Cups



Figure 10



Figure 11 The Ace of Cups from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

I outline a history and definition of art school in the UK. I lay out the background and context for thinking about the conditions under which art students and staff currently study and work with reference to existing literature and by discussing my own experiences.

A range of art schools

I have been officially enrolled as an art student in four university accredited art schools, Winchester School of Art (The University of Southampton), Camberwell College of Arts (The Institute of the Arts, which became University of The Arts London while I was studying), Goldsmiths College (University of London), and Sheffield Hallam University in the Department of Art and Design, each programme having a unique route and history into absorption to university level accreditation. My course at Goldsmiths was a Masters of Fine Arts set up within the computing department by textile academic Janis Jefferies as an alternative to the MFA run by the Fine Art department. The University of the Arts London is an amalgamation of five independent art schools which instead of seeking outside accreditation succeeded in becoming their own university. The art school now referred to as the Department of Art and Design is the oldest part of Sheffield Hallam University and was historically an original Government School of Design. Winchester School of Art, where I did my Foundation degree is a local art school accredited by its larger university neighbour, the University of Southampton. In addition to these institutions, I have also worked with a variety of artist-led groups, peer study groups, and informal schools, most recently The Carousel Institute of Arts in Derbyshire. The Carousel Institute of Arts functions more like a residency programme than a traditional art school, but it is a school in the sense that it has strong ties to place, in its case a livery-stables, fibre farm, and riding school, and to a group of people who periodically return to The Carousel, a piece of land connected to the livery stable, to make work together. More

recently they are also trialling artists' residencies alongside sheep farming in Wales. I argue that alternative art schools such as The Other MA, The Carousel Institute of Arts, Conditions Studio Programme, Open School East, and School of The Damned form part of the scene of art schools in the UK. Artists in the UK are likely to be involved with both mainstream art schools and their alternatives at different times in their careers.

A short history of art school in the UK

How then should art school be defined? What art school could be, should be, has been, and is are of course not identical or even consistent. In Britain in the 1830s and 40s the government was persuaded of the need for schools of art and design, not only in London but in all the centres of manufacturing power in the country as part of a programme of civic cultural improvements in the wake of the industrial revolution.¹⁴³ The result was the Government Schools of Design, first in London, in what would become the V&A museum and other parts of South Kensington such as The Royal College of Art, and later in Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, and other cities such as Sheffield. In these schools, students attended part-time classes in drawing, painting, and sculpture, from life and examples by artists, often paid for by employers as part of apprenticeships, along with access to a library of reference materials for pattern and composition.

For the next hundred years such art schools proliferated across the UK, particularly in the post war period of the 1940s and 50s, which saw numbers of art students rise from 6000 in 1938 to

¹⁴³ Ranald Lawrence, 'The Evolution of the Victorian Art School', *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 19, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp. 81–107. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2014.884842>.

a post war peak of 15000 in 1950, falling to 11000 by 1955.^{144, 145} Numbers of art teachers remained high well into the 1950s despite student numbers reducing. This excess of educational provision prompted the government reforms regarding the required teaching of art history through complementary studies, and decentralised examinations, of the Coldstream era from the late 1950s to 1970.¹⁴⁶ The Coldstream era refers to the period of government inquiry and reform overseen by NACAE, The National Advisory Council on Art Education, and NCDAD, the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design councils, also known as Coldstream and Summerson after their chairmen. The main changes at this time were an end to centralised examination and the introduction, following the Coldstream report, of the Diploma in Art and Design for the comparatively few Higher Education courses in art and design at colleges found to be suitably able to provide a complementary studies programme.¹⁴⁷ The remaining colleges not deemed suitable to award the new diploma had to offer less prestigious vocational and training courses, causing widespread dissatisfaction and some protests. During the period of 1962 to 1984 art students on any course, Diploma awarding or otherwise, like those studying medicine or science, were paid direct maintenance grants and housing expenses while pursuing their course of study.¹⁴⁸ During the 1970s many art colleges were incorporated as part of the new ‘polytechnic’ institutions. In 1992 on becoming universities polytechnics were given the right to award their own degrees in art and design for the first time.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Houghton, ‘A 60-Year Dysfunctional Relationship: How and Why Curriculum and Assessment in Fine Art in England Have Always Been Problematic and Still Are’, *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, vol. 18, no. 2, Oct. 2019, pp. 171–85. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1386/adch.00005.1>.

¹⁴⁵ Marie McLoughlin, “‘The Textile Student Needs Little Giotto, (or a Little Will Go a Long Way)’ (Pevsner. Nov 1968), The 1970 Coldstream Report in Response to the Art School Unrest of 1968’. *Journal of Design History*, vol. 32, no. 2, May 2019, pp. 170–87. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epy049>.

¹⁴⁶ Julia Lockheart, ‘The Importance of Writing as a Material Practice for Art and Design Students: A Contemporary Rereading of the Coldstream Reports’, *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, vol. 17, no. 2, Oct. 2018, pp. 151–75. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1386/adch.17.2.151.1>.

¹⁴⁷ Lisa Tickner *Hornsey 1968 The Art School Revolution*, London, UK: Frances Lincoln, 2008, p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Butt, pp. xi.

Following the Browne Report of 2012, the Conservative UK government brought about reforms that saw universities, including art schools, raise tuition fees (first introduced by the Labour party in 1998) for undergraduate study from £3000 to £9000 per year.^{149,150} This effectively ended the era of direct government funding for art schools, which for the first time became almost entirely reliant on student fees, and in 2016 the last maintenance grants paid directly to students were abolished.¹⁵¹ Despite the cost of an arts education by 2015 the number of students studying art and design remained high. The Warwick Commission Report describes the situation as an ‘over-supply of graduates seeking employment in cultural and creative occupations’.¹⁵² It seems that regardless of cost, incursion of debt, and precarious future employability, students are willing to undertake study at art school in great numbers, which the current government is happy to continue to take advantage of without paying for.¹⁵³ This is regardless of widening inequality across the arts and cultural sectors, attributed to the unchecked practices of underpayment and unpaid opportunities that are commonplace after graduation and beyond.^{154,155}

¹⁴⁹ ‘The Browne Report: Higher Education Funding and Student Finance’, *GOV.UK*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-browne-report-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

¹⁵⁰ Louise Bunce, et al. ‘The Student-as-Consumer Approach in Higher Education and Its Effects on Academic Performance’, *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 42, no. 11, Nov. 2017, pp. 1958–78. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1127908>.nm

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Butt, p xi.

¹⁵² The Warwick Commission Report, <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/>. Accessed 8 May 2024.

¹⁵³ According to government statistics 190,180 students enrolled to study ‘Design, Creative and Performing Arts’ in the UK in 2020/2021 academic year. It is interesting that the government chooses to include performing arts in this statistic when most discussions of art school in the UK separate performing arts from art and design. This figure does not include those attending ‘alternative programmes of art study’.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, The Warwick Commission Report.

¹⁵⁵ ‘“Structurally F–Cked”: A Report into Artists’ Pay and Conditions’. *A-n The Artists Information Company*, <https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/structurally-f-cked-a-report-into-artists-pay-and-conditions/>. Accessed 13 Mar. 2023.

Defining art school by state funding

In their survey of the sector in 2018, higher education researchers Susan Orr and Alison Shreeve define art school 'as a term that embraces art and design faculty in the university as well as independent Art Schools'.¹⁵⁶ By 'independent Art Schools' is meant institutions such as Glasgow School of Art, which currently award their own degrees rather than being accredited by a university. Nicholas Houghton's definition, that 'Art school' is used as a term to refer to all those sites or departments within post-secondary art institutions where art is taught',¹⁵⁷ comes closer to covering everything, including art foundation courses, which are funded as part of further education not higher, and alternative institutions that do not receive government funding, neither of which are discussed by Orr and Shreeve, who focus on undergraduate teaching.

Historically, in the UK at least, art school has been defined by the state funding and accreditation structures assumed above, in relation since 1960, to the Coldstream reforms. The history of funding and governance of art schools particular to the UK is certainly not irrelevant to a definition of art school; relying on this specific history for the purposes of such makes it possible to compare art schools in the UK with their international counterparts, and indeed to experiment with alternative systems. While the existing literature on art school is, as discussed in the chapter on Scouring, not extensive, what there is makes clear the structures of funding and accreditation and how they have changed. In recent years the most significant change has undoubtedly been the switch, since 2012, to being funded predominantly by student fees rather than government funding.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Orr and Alison Shreeve. pp. 11.

¹⁵⁷Nicholas Houghton, 'Six into One: The Contradictory Art School Curriculum and How It Came About', *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2016, pp. 107–20. Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12039>.

Looking for another definition

When thinking about art school from the point of view of the assembly of those who wish to study art, rather than how such study is funded, the existence of alternative art schools, and indeed historic moments such as the occupations of Hornsey, Guildford, and Brighton in 1968 are thrown into relief. When this emphasis is chosen, if not to privilege the art student as consumer or customer but rather, to ask on whom the labour of making this studying possible falls, one must question the division between staff and student entirely, as all alternative art school projects have needed to do. It is notable that students at Hornsey, funded to attend the student occupation even by the government that they were resisting, had as financial circumstances far more in common with lecturers and other staff than students on the picket lines of the strikes do today. Still, students support their staff under the slogan ‘your working conditions are our learning conditions’. The assembly of those who wish to study art is not separable from those who can teach and nor is it reducible to a consumerist model.

For much of the twentieth century ‘the art school’ was a local phenomenon, a place nearby in any medium sized town. Artists Matthew Cornford and John Beck document the disappearance of these local institutions in an essay from 2012 and an accompanying long term photography project, following the privatisation of British university degrees by the Conservative government.¹⁵⁸ ‘The Art School in Ruins’ considers what can be learnt from the physical ruins of UK art schools themselves, in contrast to theorising about what curricular changes took place in them. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, during which art school teaching attempted to

¹⁵⁸ John Beck, and Matthew Cornford. ‘The Art School in Ruins’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1, Apr. 2012, pp. 58–83. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412911430467>.

move online with varying degrees of success, their project finds a new resonance in 2023 with an exhibition at New Art Gallery Walsall.¹⁵⁹

Recent changes

As students and teachers return to studios left empty during the pandemic, I am interested in the tension between the multivalent sites of art school, from ruined Victorian buildings converted to new purposes that Beck and Cornford track down to current studios, and from hard to locate third party data centres to the bedrooms in shared houses and halls of residence where art students live and work. Where is the art school in fact located, and for whom is it possible to be there?

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on face-to-face meeting and fieldwork, the relation-of this study to the art school as a place was drastically altered. Even after restrictions were lifted the new ubiquity of remote meeting technology means that at least some of these changes to what it means to assemble in the pursuit of art study are permanent. Not all these changes are a loss, with the possibility of remote working for many teachers and students being a welcome new form of access to art school implying an expanded sense of presence. For my research, however, the curtailment of in-person fieldwork was a serious setback, reliant practically and conceptually on orientation to place and the liminal spaces of teaching and study. It became difficult to tell when one was at art school or not as home working space and art school became overlaid; Zoom meetings took over as the main interface for interaction with others.

¹⁵⁹ John Beck and Matthew Cornford, *The Art Schools of the West Midlands: The New Art Gallery Walsall*, February 2023.

The idea of art school

It is, as Beck and Cornford point out, often the idea of the art school in abstract that emerges as the strongest signal, an idea which defines a lifestyle or a set of practices: referring to Frith and Horne's book *Art Into Pop*, they suggest:

The most productive aspect of the local art school for Frith and Horne is not really educational at all but is instead environmental and affective. The persistence of the allure and mystique of 'art school' as a set of vaguely defined and under-scrutinized concepts, possibilities and practices is really what they value, a bundle of notions circulating in the ether, contained within the rooms and corridors of a designated site and spilling out into the streets, pubs, cafés, shops and bedsits of the surrounding environment.¹⁶⁰

In the chapter entitled Scouring, I discuss the ethnographic literature on art school. There is an additional body of art school literature that is more concerned (as Beck and Cornford characterise Frith and Horne's work *Art Into Pop*) with the idea of art school, sometimes taking it as a utopian proposition. Anthologies such as Ruskin School of Art's *A Curriculum for Artists* (2004), *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (2007), and *Visual arts at IUAV, Venezia: 2001–2011* (2011), associated with what has become known as 'the educational turn' in art, collect texts that take art school as a starting point for propositions, speculation and provocation, such as Liam Gillick's collaboration with students at Columbia's graduate studio art programme *Nobody Asked You To Do Nothing A Potential School*.^{161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166} Rather

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Beck and Cornford, *The Art School in Ruins*.

¹⁶¹ Paul Bonaventura et al. *A Curriculum For Artists*, The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford 2004.

¹⁶² Steven Henry Madoff, editor. *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2009.

¹⁶³ Chiara Vecchiarelli, editor. *Visual arts at IUAV, Venezia: 2001 – 2011*, Mousse Publishing, Venice 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Janna Graham, et al. 'The Educational Turn in Art', *Performance Research*, vol. 21, no. 6, Nov. 2016, pp. 29–35. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2016.1239912>.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Bonaventura et al. *A Curriculum For Artists*, The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford 2004,

¹⁶⁶ Steven Henry Madoff, editor. *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2009.

than describing art school as it is experienced such projects seek to describe art school as it could be or as it is wished for, even sometimes going so far as to posit art school or art education as a form of art in itself.

Art school is certainly an idea that holds space for institutional ambivalence, and in particular an ambivalence to written language. This ambivalence is notable in the tension of the position of most art schools in relation to universities and academic language. This is noted by Orr and Shreeve, Houghton, and Julia Lockheart as a legacy of the Coldstream era reforms' insistence on art school independence in setting complementary curricular in relation to art history in the UK to maintain equivalence with more traditionally academic forms of study. Houghton calls it contradictory, while Orr and Shreeve refer to the art school curriculum as 'ambiguous' and 'sticky'. Lockheart notes that this tension has ramifications for dyslexic students and others with different learning needs, with art school as the only part of the academic institution where the study of history is possible without a requirement to prove this exclusively in writing. Repeatedly the art school rises as a place where one might imagine neurodivergent students and staff are more likely to find the means to thrive academically. In part this is due to the emphasis on means of communication and study not excluding of language but inclusive of what is beyond it. This idea of art school is not without its troubling aspects, however: as I outline in the chapter on Scouring. Art school is often singled out as 'special' in much the same way neurodivergent students and staff are in other parts of the university.

I argue that in 2023 despite its *ambivalence* and *contradiction* the idea of art school is neither 'ambiguous', nor 'vaguely defined' but a rather complex and unusually taciturn myth, well understood by many, actively spoken or written by few, yet still eloquent, when necessary,

particularly when challenged. Much has changed since 1987 as Kate Oakley and Mark Banks imply with their response to Frith and Horne's confident assertion of:

the recurring importance of art schools simply as a *scene*, a place where young people, whether students there or not, can hang out and learn/fantasize what it means to be an artist, a bohemian, a star – this is the art school dance that goes on forever.¹⁶⁷

The experience of art school now

Nearly forty years later the *scene* remains, and the *dance* continues, but the price of entry has risen enormously, and everyone is tired. As Banks and Oakley put it:

The kind of informal, situated and practice-focussed arts education outlined in *Art into Pop* has been superseded by requirements for HE institutions to demonstrate appropriately standardised and regulated programmes that point to specific learning and employment outcomes.¹⁶⁸

It is not through ambiguity or vagueness that the difficult demands of this 'art school dance' and the necessary myth of the art scene are maintained, along with the requirements of privatised HE in the UK, but through the increasingly stringent disciplining of students and teachers working in the ever-shrinking space between contradictory demands. The dance, in the scene set between these contradictory demands, becomes ever more rarefied and requiring of control, in some cases, perhaps mine included, debilitatingly so.¹⁶⁹ In the production of Orr

¹⁶⁷ Simon Frith and Howard Horne. *Art into Pop*, London, UK: Methuen, 1987, p. 22.

¹⁶⁸ Mark Banks, and Kate Oakley. 'The Dance Goes on Forever? Art Schools, Class and UK Higher Education', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 41–57. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1101082>.

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of debility as a 'triangulation' of the disability/capacity binary or as an 'expected impairment' see Puar, Jasbir K. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, p. xvi.

and Shreeve's sticky curriculum precariously employed current staff and students at art school have common cause with the child silk workers in the Manchester silk industry, evoked by Banks and Oakley, and whose plight was described by Karl Marx in *Capital*, as well as with those workers who, at that time, attended the first art schools in order to increase their employability.^{170, 171} As is also true for the silkworms themselves, sacrificed for their silk, the effort and or indeed bodily cost required of both staff and students in today's Higher Education in the arts, can be unsustainable.

What then is missing in this conventional account of art school and its origins? Where are the reasons for joining in this exhausting dance, what possesses us to put on these red shoes? The *scene* is still persuasive and appealing enough to a great many of us, tired though we may be. Even the alternative art schools such as Open School East, The Other MA, or Conditions Studio Programme, run along the familiar structures of mainstream art schools, with crits, studios, lectures, and reading groups, the main difference is direct and transparent funding.¹⁷² As Emma Edmondson from Southend-on-Sea's The Other MA (TOMA) told me, it is the lack of financial transparency and accountability that comes with proximity and entanglement to the university that TOMA was set up to avoid, and it is clear TOMA consider themselves the real art school. Indeed, in Essex, TOMA are the only Masters level programme in Art and Design available,

¹⁷⁰ 'Indeed, since their inception, art schools have always walked an uneven path between utility and ornament; between the purely pragmatic necessities of serving industry and the desire of teachers and students to move beyond such 'narrow' instrumental concerns. To give a random, but somewhat typical example, the foundation of the Macclesfield School of Art and Science in 1877 was marked by much civic fanfare emphasising the harmony that might ensue as the two cultures met in service of the local silk industry. The *Macclesfield Courier and Herald* reported the town's Mayor, Alderman Birchenough, as enthusiastically welcoming an institution that held the high aim 'to cultivate a taste for the beautiful and at the same time to raise the staple manufacture of the town', the reporter going on to praise the new college for its focus on affairs 'thoroughly practical in nature' while aiming to nobly instil in its populations 'sweetness and light' and a 'love of the beautiful' (*Macclesfield Courier and Herald*). Ibid., Banks and Oakley.

¹⁷¹ Karl Marx. *Capital*, London, UK: Penguin Classics 1990.

¹⁷² Since the introduction of £9000 tuition fees in 2012 many alternatives to art school have been developed by artists themselves to offer programmes of teaching and study. These are usually at postgraduate level, without awards, in varying self-organised studio and funding set ups.

even without accreditation by a major academic institution. At TOMA the organisation responds directly to the needs and wishes of the artists (the word *students* is not used, nor is *school*, TOMA is always referred to as a programme) in terms of teaching and lecture provision. Lecturers, visiting artists, and Edmondson as course coordinator are paid the same flat rate.¹⁷³ Though the programme is currently without a permanent base, meetings are still regular and in person, the set-up is about as close to the mid-twentieth century structure of a local art school as it currently gets.

Art school's neurodivergent potential

With alternative art schools such as TOMA offering equivalents to master's study, the road forks at postgraduate study level or training for academia. With the possibility of employment as artists and in the arts increasingly precarious, the art school as a space of study rather than training is important to emphasise. Like students studying history or English literature, artist Ph.D.s. need not necessarily dream of becoming practitioners of fine art in the purest sense but consider themselves to have proven capacity for reflection, problem solving, research, and so on during a period of sustained study. Crucially, on practice-based art Ph.D.s this remains a possibility, albeit a difficult one, for neurodivergent students who may struggle with writing or other aspects of conventional academic skills. For all the talk of the idea of art school and art in academia, of interest to me is its reality as a potential (if to some extent at risk *and* risky) haven for multimodal and multi-sensory neurodivergent study in the academy. I am interested in how neurodivergent students find their way to and at art school and what can be done to facilitate this process more reliably and compassionately. As a neurodivergent art student, I am keenly aware that there is much to be done towards this project and that the art school

¹⁷³ Citing an informal conversation with Emma Edmondson in January 2023.

environment as it currently exists is far from the utopian neurodivergent space we might imagine, as I have described above.

My experience as neurodivergent, including my formal adult diagnosis with ADHD and self-diagnosis with autism while pursuing this Ph.D. in art and design, speaks to the potential for art school as a neurodivergent space as well as to the obstacles it poses. That my struggles with academic performance could have been identified earlier is almost certainly the case, however, it may be that this did not happen because the art school context already accommodated me more than other academic contexts. It was certainly true that art school always felt more like the ‘right’ place for me than mainstream academia. This was because, rather than finding the work easier at art school than I would have done elsewhere (sometimes quite the opposite), I found the environment itself more engaging and challenging than the other worlds to which I had access. I returned for graduate and postgraduate study for precisely this reason. Outside art school I struggled to find a foothold in the art world itself and indeed in any professional capacity other than as a private tutor, where my rapport with neurodivergent children stood out and would eventually help me to self-diagnose as neurodivergent. I maintain it was my previous experience at art school that helped me to develop an intuitive understanding of neurodivergence as relates to study, which made it possible for me to do this work with young people. My eventual decision to take up postgraduate study was motivated by a wish to follow these experiences with research that did them justice.

Conclusion

Art school is not a utopian space, but it is one that is much needed and wanted by those who choose to study and teach there. Testament to this is the great personal financial cost incurred by students in attending it. As I have shown, art school is better characterised as defined by its

multimodal forms of study rather than by the production of subjects as artists or even by the teaching of art. Defining it so honours the contributions of both teachers and students and allows the emphasis to fall on what happens when art is understood as a way of learning.

TUNING

In the practice of automatism, the artist attempts to deliberately erase conscious intent from the mind in order to free the mind to obey interior impulses.

Susan Hiller *The Provisional Texture of Reality*

Spinning is a collective activity.

King of Coins



Figure 12



Figure 13 The King of Coins from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

I describe the practice elements of my research with regard to method and sketch the autoethnographic, autofictional and visual basis of my methodology in terms of writing, reading, image, gesture and narrative. Describing method in this way makes it possible to link the thesis to my practice and to think through the connections made. This chapter deliberately works in the present tense to facilitate this process of description, leading to the articulation of ADHD as methodology. I outline my method in relation the practical research outputs of this study: the animated visual collage, *Clew* and the extended autofictional text, *Daughters of Necessity*. Further discussion of method in relation to neuroqueer pedagogies in the context of workshops with art students forms the basis of the chapter on Drafting.

The visual

Computers can generate fractals, images into which one can zoom as far as the pixel resolution allows. My drawings also use a fractal logic, which does not zoom so well but which is used to organise forms on the picture plane according to the rules of self-similarity, recursion, and division. This logic is common in many indigenous pattern disciplines, textile histories and architectures, and visualisations of neurodivergent and psychedelic phenomena produced by artists such as Paul Klee, Unica Zürn, Adolf Wölfli, and Yayoi Kusama.¹⁷⁴ Benoit Mandelbrot was the first to model some instances of fractals mathematically.¹⁷⁵

The app Mirror Lab, developed by Ilixa Software, allows me to perform transformations (mathematical transformations of the array of pixels) on digital photographs.¹⁷⁶ I take photos

¹⁷⁴ Ron Eglash, *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman, 1982.

¹⁷⁶ François Morvillier and Alain Pitiot, *Mirror Lab*, Ilixa Software <http://ilixa.com/index.php>. Accessed 1 June 2024.

of my drawings or notes I have written and submit them to layers of these transformations to create new images, as if with a kaleidoscope *via* digital collage.¹⁷⁷ The app can also compute the transformation of images by fractal mathematics, producing outcomes I can zoom in on, crop, and scale, then mirror, repeat, translate, or distort. The effects combine origami with tessellation or tile work, as in Murano glass and many more traditional physical techniques. Beyond the gimmickry of special effects, I am interested in the dissociation afforded by a mathematical relation to a messy, intimate image from my everyday life, my handwriting, and my thoughts as written longhand.

Like the artist Hayao Yamaneko, whose video synthesiser work is portrayed in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*, credited in the film for special effects, I trace the edges of the moments in transformation where conventional legibility breaks down into pattern recognition and sensing, and where visual logics lose integrity to become blur and noise¹⁷⁸. Yamaneko is presented to the viewer as the 'pal' of the one who is writing letters to Marker's narrator. Of the one who writes, the narrator says, 'he wrote me', of Yamaneko, the one who writes says, 'he showed me'. It is unclear from the point of view of the one who watches whether all three are real people or, instead, fictional avatars invented by Marker, but regardless, someone made the video images that dance on the screen. Of these synthesised images Yamaneko reportedly says they are 'less deceptive' than 'those you see on television. At least they proclaim themselves

¹⁷⁷ The kaleidoscope is a form of optical instrument invented and patented between 1814 and 1816 by Scottish scientist and inventor David Brewster. Kaleidoscopes use repeated reflections between two or more mirrored surfaces to produce pleasing and surprising colourful symmetrical patterns. Though Kaleidoscopes became popular as a toy or novelty the invention is relevant to the development of optics as a scientific discipline, particularly later work on prisms and the dispersal of light into its visible rainbow spectrum. David Brewster. *The Kaleidoscope: Its History, Theory, and Construction with its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts* (2 ed.). London J. Murray.

¹⁷⁸ Extracts of *Sans Soleil* containing Hayao Yamaneko's videos can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JamGQOhCe_k and here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt9-XliLfNw> Accessed 16 November 2023.

The text read by Marker's narrator as the voiceover of the film is available here: https://www.markertext.com/sans_soleil.htm Accessed 16 November 2023. Hayao Yamaneko. Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*, Argos Films 1983.

to be what they are: images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality'. I ask myself if, what is here implied as the alternative to the image, 'the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality', might be a good description of 'words', of what is 'read' in its most conventional sense, when text is not being understood itself as a type of image, when letters and words are not being understood as marks in a wider visual system?

Yamaneko's work in *Sans Soleil* is reminiscent of that of renowned Korean Fluxus artist Nam June Paik's famous video work with engineer John Godfrey, *Global Groove* from 1973, partly produced on the Paik Abe synthesiser that Paik developed in collaboration with Japanese TV engineer Shuya Abe in 1969.¹⁷⁹ Paik was famous for troubling the very idea of how what is seen 'on television' comes to be. These early forays into image synthesis are important ancestors to my work here, with Paik also explicitly making the link between card reading, divination, chance and communication technology in later works such as *I Ching 36* from 1991.¹⁸⁰ In this work a robot-like figure with a stomach suggestive of a roulette wheel appears to dance on limbs made from connected televisions showing kaleidoscopic forms, marked with Korean characters, adorned with a hat made of playing cards. Paik's work is alive with the potential that occurs when signs and processes interact in the production of consciousness and surprise and suggests an animated, expanding form of reading that is productive of both creative agency and reflective submission to what cannot be predicted, acknowledging the *I Ching* as the technological ancestor of both playing cards and digital life. I am interested in spaces, processes and gestures, which allow access to this liveness in relation to the visual,

¹⁷⁹ *Global Groove* Nam June Paik and John Godfrey, US 1973, NTSC video, 29 min. Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York. <https://www.eai.org/titles/3287> Accessed 15 January 2024.

¹⁸⁰ *I Ching 36* is a mixed media installation loosely taking the form of a humanoid robot constructed from wood, felt, acrylic, playing cards, dice, aluminium framework and nine Sony monitors. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/contemporary-art-day-auction-4/i-ching-36> Accessed 15 January 2024.

semiotic world, which generate the most reflective, expansive and generative readings and understanding of reading itself as possible.

The images I produce in Mirror Lab both document and encrypt the visual elements of my practice, serving to illuminate the written element, providing colour, texture, and pattern, resulting in movement, repetition and therefore expansion from conventionally understood legibility, to its availability for reading in its expanded potential. The outcome itself, as a visual object, is drawn, autoethnographically, as a visual reading, from the research process using photo montage.

The written and the read

The written element of my practice is also drawn autoethnographically from my daily notes expanding the texts as I transcribe by hand. For each page of notes, I generate three fragments of fictionalised text to include further memories and associations recalled on rereading the note. Each fragment is designated Lachesis, Klotho, or Atropos for one of the Moirae or fate-spinners from the ancient Greek, the daughters of the goddess Necessity. This process is autofictional as well as autoethnographic, productive of new insight. I discuss the rationale for using such a process in Scouring. The outcome is a writing that is explicitly also a reading of what took place at art school. In the section entitled Carding I discuss other examples of reading in this sense, where an understanding coalesces into the formation of a new creative or rather speculative output. The texts and images, often themselves images of texts, that my work generates complement each other in their multimodal handling of the source material. I choose to understand what is written as an output of prior reading, generating ‘a reading’ in its object sense, simultaneously making available an offering to future reading and readers to come. This

choice is made in political opposition to convention, which understand's reading as the passive consequence of writing's action.

Working with the app I am conscious of the work as a collaboration with unseen, unnamed developers. Sometimes the app's controls change with an update, or I find one I do not like; there are functions I do not use at all until I find myself pushing a process in a new direction and trying something I thought I had figured out, but which works differently for a particular new way of taking a photo initially or cropping it. I think most people use this app's engine to produce patterns and textures from scratch, or to synthesise something that looks totally 'new'. One might approach it with a design plan and outcome already in mind, but I don't. For me this is a process of improvisation. I am interested in retaining the texture from my broken camera lens in the noise across my notes but also how this and the layers of transformations can function as encryption. To what extent my own response to my own manipulations is predictable, I am not sure, nor to what extent it might register for the viewer as more than random. These are always important questions when working with abstraction, the tuning of stochasticity is the main method. Where is choice involved and what value does it play? I am conscious of choosing to use the app against its own grain in this way and take pleasure in that messiness, steering myself where possible away from getting stuck in workflow ruts where all my images end up looking the same; once smoothed out, there is no way to regain the textures of the photograph. I end up with flurries of images that flow together with visual logic that shows their proximity to each other in my process and time. Like a journal, they are best viewed in chronological order although the images themselves kaleidoscopically alter the chronological time implied in conventional lexical reading and defy the normative linear directionality of texts' visual logics.

A kaleidoscope's interior surfaces reflect so as to cut, spin and multiply the visual in a simple form of machinic automation that disrupts control and intention in the optical relation. While I am working at these kaleidoscopes I am always reading the contents of the original photo and am forced to do so in odd ways: I turn my head at angles to tell whether some note has retained its meaning or if a line from a drawing has gained new resonance in its new position; I choose which areas of line to move away from because they create a jarring visual artefact near the edge of a cut. As I encrypt in layers from the original photographic documentation of my handwriting, I become more familiar with both what I show and what I choose to obscure or occlude. The kaleidoscopes are in this way like a reverse Rorschach, where, in the act of making them, I take sense away from writing and image according to intuitive interactions. This making is still reading. This is reading as a process of abstraction or dissociation rather than interpretation. Still, new sense continues to emerge deep into the layers when I want to preserve something, even when pushed to the edge of noise or over the line into it. Reading demonstrates itself continuously according to its oldest sense, the understanding, or solving of riddles, the reflection inspired by confusion and its resultant metacognitive clarity.

The temporal

My practice also involves the making of study objects, like lo-fi apps, kin to kaleidoscopes, that can be held in the hand and used to do making thinking reading, like a fidget spinner for art school-ing, I think of them as spinners, like spindles, like a rock with a hole in and a stick for making yarn, like a ball of wool to wind and unwind, like a stack of cards to shuffle and contemplate. More is written on the use of card decks in the section entitled Carding and on fidget spinners as art objects in Drafting. Like irregular pieces of MDF cut on a laser cutter out of the negative spaces of one of my drawings – I use simple tool structures for reading and making objects from these readings that become aids for thinking in themselves. I photograph

their temporary outcomes rendering them into the digital where this process of abstraction and contemplation can continue, often in Mirror Lab, as described above.

This practice generates hundreds of images. I scroll through them on my computer in sequence and in this temporal context, they have their own clear logic. Disseminating them to others proves frustratingly difficult due to file size and the clunkiness and incompatibility of free content management systems. To recreate the experience of scrolling through the images on my own computer online will take hours of tedious work and much server space, storage in Dropbox renders them all out of the sequence of their structuring chronology and surrounds them with ugly and distracting Graphical User Interface. Eventually I work out a hack, recording my screen while I scroll through on my home computer creates a primitive stop motion animation video which I can share with others. Each image is loaded by hand-clicking through, so the intervals are slightly irregular, based on my own intermittent rhythm of reading and responding. I am reminded in doing so of working the pedal of the spinning wheel to keep the spindle turning. The video is ten minutes long and still runs uncomfortably fast for some eyes. I halve the speed and double the length to give the viewer the chance to read.

Transcription

From my notes I write up and I write out, 'I' tell 'you' about what happens at art school as if I am reading from Tarot cards, generating fiction in the process from what's left of my memories and what I don't mind leaving in. As described in Carding I lean into the context collapse between where I am now and where I was then, describing what's left as if I'm my own biographer, left with scraps and inconsequential, minor details. I allow myself to break the rules, make more gaps, spin more into them, as if I am a character in my own novel now, truth left behind, I swim in fiction. Someone, never quite me, is at some art school, never quite mine,

doing something, never quite right. That's at least true to how it was and is for me. Something that almost happened is almost represented, and for the reader that's close enough, an approximation to convey something needed, a scent of an idea. Will I describe the pandemic when it happens? Will I describe my nervous breakdown, all that I lost in the process? Will I blame art school? Mercifully I'm not sure I'll get that far through the text generated by the notebooks; not sure you need to hear it. One lesson I've learned is not to go on too long.

Describing my drawings is easier than writing up memories from notes. Does it matter that it is 'easier'? I think it means something that it provides a respite, the way drawing does itself, reading the drawings is a peaceful experience, perhaps it's the abstraction. I think in doing this I am borrowing methodologically from artist and writer, Renee Gladman, though it's basically *ekphrasis*, it's the description of what's in my notebook *and the experience of reading from it* at once, that is a method. In Gladman's work the distinctions between drawing, writing, and reading come undone and rewire themselves in synaesthetic architectures where calligraphic drawing uses the asemic structures of handwriting and writing borrows the purpose and intentions of drawing. Notably, all of Gladman's work, whether drawn or written seems to invite reading on the part of the viewer.¹⁸¹ It's not that this is what Gladman does so much as that it's what seeing and reading Gladman's writing and art works and their relation to each other, enables me to do, and that is a methodology. That it's easier for me to write about my drawings than other kinds of writing, well, then one is in the free world of description, away from the 'truth' of what happened or why I didn't document this compared to that. That is, what I am writing, is fiction, becomes fictionalised. In describing my drawing, I escape from correction because by the time I'm doing what I know is something no one else would bother to go into, there's a forensic level to my own interest which blows up the inconsequential detail

¹⁸¹ Renee Gladman, *Calamities*, Seattle, WA: Wave Books, 2016.

of some line into a landscape or an architecture which I can hope a reader may enjoy for its own sake.

If writing about the drawings is respite and making the drawings is also then what is the writing, in a study that hopes to emphasise reading? I am queasy often with what I am putting into words, and it's true that I became very sick. Why is it so much easier to write about neurodivergent jouissance than its disabling illness? Perhaps that's obvious. Perhaps others find the writing the easy part, the jouissant part? For me it's the reading, the attending, the being present to(o). I can't stim to writing so easily. Is it a dyspraxia thing? Even longhand, though then it's easier. Perhaps it's because I'm thinking of the reading that hasn't taken place yet, the future readers of what I write, the unspooling, of what I'm putting 'in' now. Perhaps it's the need to make sense for someone else. So how am I doing it? What method is employed to do it if not reading, what comes on the heels of reading when it's writing? That's why I call the writing I do for practice, this stream of consciousness, a reading when it's done. It's more like a transcription than a composition, that's for sure, a decanting of thought straight through the arm. Gladman writes of reading:

And I had found in reading a way to draw lines from the earth and make an outline around my sitting at this table or walking the streets of any place, any large or small city, any countryside, any emptied forgotten place, any place transitioning, taking on multiple identities, blaring them at once, and this was all architecture, all the reading I had done.¹⁸²

I would like it if the writing could also be its own kind of drawing, like Gladman's lines, building an image in the mind or perhaps the ear of the one reading. Increasingly I feel

¹⁸² Renee Gladman, 'Untitled (Environments) - Journal #92', *E Flux Journal*, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/203283/untitled-environments/>. Accessed 28 Mar. 2023.

synaesthetic about these distinctions. In reading is it our ears that are activated or our mind's eye or is it that we hope to activate both for the reader? It's not only senses that get mixed up, but pronouns too, after all, my writing is another's reading and that is the inherent synaesthesia in the written relation. Writing about this mix up is understandably fraught with confusion and I am trying to be gentle with myself. In so doing, I hope I am also being gentle with my future reader. It's important that this self-gentleness is a part of the methodology of this study, in fact the need for this is one of the strongest constraints I have had to employ. What's heart-breaking then is how much has been left out as a result of the insistence on only doing what I can and not dwelling too hard in regret for what I could not. I have to admit what it costs me every time I say no. it's as though I began at the wrong volume, so loud, and it was years of work just to adjust to the correct scale of gentleness. Learning what to leave out: filtration of signal from noise is key to any kind of reading. I am indebted to the careful construction around these matters in Heike Geissler's novel *Seasonal Associate*, where the use of the second person allows the writer to focus directly and only on the relation to the reader in order to preserve her family and co-workers' privacy, the author explaining this process while employing it.

You're alone in the apartment now. To begin with, I pretended you had my boyfriend and my children, but that's not how it is. I'm not going to share them. I can't do that.

You're me, but you don't have my entire life. So in principle you're alone in the apartment, but I'm there too.¹⁸³

Reading this work early in the research process helped me understand how to employ auto-ethnographic methods selectively alongside those of autofiction to protect both research

¹⁸³ Heike Geissler, translated and edited by Katy Derbyshire. *Seasonal Associate*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018.

subjects and those who wish not to be included, as well as the writer and implicitly the future reader of the text. Autofiction has often been criticised for the way it can incorporate the personal narratives of people close to the writer/protagonist without respect for their privacy, but Geissler expertly shows how it can also have the potential to encrypt and protect it. Like *Mirror Lab*, or a kaleidoscope, autofiction can be used to multiply, reflect and transform reality.

Notation

From where do these notes and drawings come? I keep a notebook with me as I go about the place. The place is art school, or along the way to it. At home, reflecting on what happened when I was at the school, I make further notes. The notebook is also a sketchbook and in it I draw. I show up for seminars and other collective events, in person when I can, on Zoom otherwise. When other people are present, I talk with them, drink tea, and we hang out. If there is a formal discussion, I make notes or draw, depending on the content and register of what is under discussion and how I feel, especially when I need to sit and listen without interrupting others. My drawings are not figurative, they are closer to some kind of radiesthesia or automatism, almost asemic writing. If what is being discussed is new to me, I am more likely to make notes than to draw, but if the topic of conversation is not directly relevant to my research I will draw and pay attention more to the meta-methodological structure of what is being said. By listening to what is being said I free up my hand from the burden of voluntariness.

I do things this way until I get sick. I have kept books like this for almost twenty years consecutively but when I get sick, for the first time I stop. This is partly because I stop going to the art school and partly because what I am writing starts to scare me. When, after a year and a half, I start work on the Ph.D. again, I don't start a new notebook. This is because I am working on writing up the thesis and there are more notebooks full of my data from this going

about of it than I will ever need to write up. In my practice I am now writing out, or transcribing from these notebooks, and I don't want to spend time on making new notes and drawings. Because in writing out from these notes everything expands by a factor of three pages, I don't get past the first notebook. I am four years behind myself now, when I initially began the writing out from the notebooks, I was two years behind. Then I got sick and had to stop. I continue with making writing and the kaleidoscopes from earlier notebooks.

ADHD

I don't know why in order to write about practice I need to write in this present tense, but I keep doing it. It's something to do with the way the Ph.D. slips tenses, I think, a way of accessing stimspace through writing. Perhaps I need to choose any other tense and transpose it all into that once I have it written. Or perhaps the present tense is the most appropriate tense in which to write the ADHD friendly Ph.D. I lose track of what to do about paragraphs. Is there space here to talk about what ADHD as method(ology) would look like? Is this where the spinning comes in? Questions like this sometimes feel like putting one's hand into a wheel as it turns. This is the mechanics of a stream of consciousness, the 'commotion' of it all. I want to talk more about Gladman's spinning¹⁸⁴. I must acknowledge that as a coincidence. To begin with I am thinking about continuous centripetal centrifugal processes and their relation to line, and I guess she is too. In the assessment for ADHD, they ask if you ever feel as if driven as if by a top! What is coincidence in ADHD methodology? That feeling when someone else just gets it but especially at the same time. If ADHD is characterised (by me) as fear of time it also makes instances of synchronicity like this even more precious, makes tensility, as in the tensile relation of time to telling, the key factor in the tuning of reading and writing, the constant

¹⁸⁴ I discuss Renee Gladman's description of herself as 'spinning' at Gestures conference in Manchester in 2019 in my practice submission *Daughters of Necessity IV*.

interplay of stretch and pressure on the moment in question, moments wound up around each other. When I get diagnosed with ADHD my writing sample is pathologised for its stream of consciousness qualities. The chapter on Drafting was originally supposed to be about line, this one is supposed to be about resonance and finding it in the apparatus, but they are not unrelated. I'll have to unpick them from each other later, more ADHD as praxis. In addressing it I recognise a particular relationship to autoethnographic recording, as defined above, by time and the interdependence of the relation to a, studio-based communality. There is an emphasis on keeping track of, or transcribing flow without causing disruption or offence but also an awareness of the constant possibility of doing so that recurs throughout the *Daughters of Necessity* texts, the tension between the need to keep track and the wish to obscure what happened. The present tense reaches for the just past of working memory before it is lost – rather than making plans one attempts to create a narrative from what happened. How did I go about things? As if I have, which I do, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the least rehabilitated learning disability there is, the one where if you can't persuade someone to treat you like a genius you might well end up in jail. Is this too personal yet? Too hyperbolic? If so, then it's coming close to an honest methodology. It turns out a practice-based Ph.D. in the arts might be a lot more accessible to someone of a more autistic disposition than for an ADHD one after all. Whenever I get to this point of thinking about method, methodology, and practice I want to quit, and I think that's telling. The yarn overwinds and breaks, the spindle falls on the floor, the apparatus is out of tune again. The apparatus is me.

Let's have a new paragraph. On a good day when I imagine ADHD as methodology it's like, to do with being very contentedly integrated in that commotion Gladman talks about,¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Renee Gladman spoke about 'commotion' at Gestures conference in Manchester in 2019, see the practice submission *Daughters of Necessity V*.

humming along in hyperfocus with a sense of being both needed and cared for. ADHD as methodology involves other people being around or within reach I think, it's very communal, like a good day in the studio when people are talking over each other, and nobody minds. There is the affect of being happy to be in commotion, that's key. But there are a lot of days that aren't good, that's why they call it a disorder, and so it becomes one. Communal spaces are rarely built to withstand commotion now, let alone encourage them. But where I get utopian about it is in the humility that comes from all those bad days. To have ADHD and live with it well is to deeply understand contrition, regret, failure, consequence, apology. It is to know to the point of art what it means to make amends with time and its wounds, it is to learn from the punishing present tense what it means to travel backwards and forwards in time as one can in drawing, to revisit mistake and error, to face up to the future when things so rarely go as planned. It is ultimately a methodology of salvage and repair. It's why I think if what I spun was good enough to darn with, then that's something, even if it doesn't look like art to anyone else. If I imagine the future reader of this writing in service of an expanded reading, it is someone else, who, struggling with the demands of a goal driven, creativity-privileging neoliberal art education needs a reminder of the gentleness required to retune their research apparatus.

DRAFTING

I had to keep verifying: ‘the person in the world’ was a student in my class of eleven girls and was one of the silent ones, which was all of them? Why hadn’t she made herself known or at least distinguished herself? How did one draw out the person who is the most perplexed of all persons? You couldn’t be direct.

Renee Gladman *Calamities*

In drafting, fibre is drawn into linear tension prior to spinning.

Page of Swords



Figure 14



Figure 15 The Page of Swords from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

At art school the work of reading for research in context or complementary studies is often seen as a problem. Avoided as difficult, boring, or a distraction from the ‘real’ practice of making, it goes relatively undiscussed, unexamined as a practice itself and is usually left as implicit in rare discussions of writing at art school such as those by Julia Lockheart discussed in the chapter on Assembling.¹⁸⁶ I present, describe, and analyse the outcomes of three workshops I conducted with Fine Art students. These were designed to allow me to examine the possibility of expanding the idea of reading, in order to include the diversity of associated, often invisible practices of active sensing undertaken in the study of fine art. I consider the ways in which expanding the idea of reading accommodates art school practices and might also inform and illuminate neurodivergent practices of reading, allowing the full extent of artistic and neurodivergent scholarship to be acknowledged, encouraged, and embraced. I offer a speculative programme of teaching, based on the outcomes of the workshops, which shows how my research might inform teaching in an art school context.

Introduction

I conducted three, ninety-minute workshops at Sheffield Hallam with undergraduate Fine Art students. These workshops were not compulsory to attend, and work undertaken in them was not graded. Students attended on a voluntary sign-up basis according to their own wishes and all who participated gave written consent for their contributions to be recorded according to the university ethics requirements.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Lockheart.

Each workshop addressed, either overtly or indirectly, an aspect of expanded reading, relevant to art school.¹⁸⁷ I assert that reading at art school is, with notable exceptions from the art writing community as found in the pedagogical work of practitioners such as Adrian Rifkin and Sharon Kivland, both under-theorised and under-discussed.¹⁸⁸ This may be because commonly used, narrow conventions of literacy and reading are less suitable for practice-based multimodal study. It also suggests that much about reading is simply taken for granted, perhaps because those who develop courses of study in Higher Education assume students know how to read well before arriving at art school. The intention for these workshops was to test, in three different ways, to what extent and how, multimodally expanding the idea of reading is helpful in generating discussion and thinking about reading at art school.

The workshops were designed so that students could choose to attend all three or only one or two. The first concerned reading ‘out of context’ and was titled *Do you read me?* The second concerned reading with Tarot and other divinatory card systems and was titled *Reading and telling with Tarot*. The third concerned the reading of objects and was entitled *Rave toys and fidget spinners*. Each workshop was advertised to students by posters posted up near the front door to the main studio space (see images below). Posters were illustrated using screenshots from a Roblox environment created as part of my visual research development for the Ph.D.

¹⁸⁷ The idea of ‘expanded reading’, central to this research project, and building on the ideas laid out in the chapters on Gathering, Scouring and Carding, is my own construction, which proposes an expanded definition of reading to allow under-recognised reading forms such as divination, which are older than the advent of mass literacy to be addressed.

¹⁸⁸ Sharon Kivland and Adrian Rifkin are both discussed elsewhere in this thesis, in Gathering and Carding respectively. Both practitioners work explicitly with reading in their educational careers; Adrian Rifkin did so notably in his work on Goldsmiths’ MFA in Art Writing, and Sharon Kivland in her convening of research events around reading as a contemporary art at UCL’s Senate house, as well as forming the Roland Barthes Reading Group at Sheffield Hallam University in 2017. Her work as founder and editor of publishing house MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE foregrounds and celebrates the work of reading and readers. For documentation of the event at Senate house see Sharon Kivland <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/7562/> Accessed 10 November 2023. Further information on MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE is available here: <https://mabibliotheque.cargo.site/> Accessed 16 May 2024.

The workshops took place in early January, a quiet time in the studios with many students away on outside placements or other assignments.

Workshop	Title
Workshop 1	<i>Do you read me?</i>
Workshop 2	<i>Reading and telling with Tarot</i>
Workshop 3	<i>Rave toys and fidget spinners</i>

Audio from the second parts of the first two workshops, comprising question and answer sessions were recorded, and there is a complete audio recording of the third workshop. I had intended to make a complete video recording of all the workshops but in the first workshop the chosen equipment failed, and I had to switch to the back up: an audio recording. After this I decided to work with audio only in the following workshops for the sake of consistency. In the second workshop, due to nerves, I forgot to turn on the recording until the second half of the workshop. What is captured is the conversational part of the first two workshops, during which most participation occurs. Missing are the set up and exposition by me of the purpose of the workshop, and in the case of the first workshop, the carrying out of the reading activity.

It is not the first time that, engaged in the flow of teaching, I have forgotten to press the record button at the beginning of the session; indeed, I refer to this happening during another presentation in the preface of this thesis, the chapter on Gathering. During lockdown, when teaching a workshop on performance over Zoom, there were several times when at the last minute I deliberately omitted making the recording to allow students maximum freedom and safety to experiment. Whether deliberate or not, the omission of recording emerges repeatedly in my teaching and indeed my performance practice to the extent that I have begun to identify

it as a tactic, one which links the preservation of the live event through memory with both the perceived attention ‘deficit’ of an ADHD disposition and the affinity with storytelling with which it is often associated. The fact that not everything is recorded emphasises the significance and irreplaceability of the individual experience and their account of it in describing neurodivergent and neuroqueer life. It also evidences the atypical relation to the body, control, intentionality and deliberacy characteristic of ADHD as disposition, the tendency to forget when in a state of performance or hyperfocus, and the need to revise strategies as a result. The tactic of combining recordings and more autoethnographic methods with my personal and auto-fictionalised account here is in keeping with the methodological structure of this research study and the primary purpose of the recording was more to aid memory for myself in writing up the experience of the workshops than it was intended as research creation itself.

Of the recordings made, all have been transcribed and the names of participants removed. The recordings made during these workshops constitute conversations structured on three different possible models of expanded reading. As such they reflect on attitudes to and experiences of expanded reading in the context of an art school. On reflection I think the advantage of recording sound only was that the participants and I were less self-conscious and more able to be comfortably present for each other without being filmed. It certainly allowed me to be present for facilitation more completely. Additionally, reliance on the retaining of spoken information was consistent with art school rhetorical processes of responding to practical work through discursive speech as a connecting practice linking diverse forms of making, acting, and doing, though it was unfortunate to lose the opportunity to record participants gestures in a more multimodal way. In future iterations of workshops with more helpers and participants it would be of interest to pursue the use of a camera in workshops in relation to expanded

reading, perhaps inspired by Deligny's ideas about *camering*, but in this case it was beyond the scope of the research.¹⁸⁹

The 'crit-space' of the fine art department studios is a section at one end of the long studio space, partitioned off at half the height of the ceiling by plasterboard. This space was furnished by several very large video screens, many yellow plastic chairs, and a large table as well as various plinths and other such studio clutter. On one wall, opposite the plasterboard partition and video screens, a large, fitted whiteboard was mounted, between these, more screens, high up windows, and opposite this, wall-to-ceiling windows facing a walled courtyard outside. There was one door, providing access to the corridor and stairwell, and students and staff not attending the workshop had to walk through the space to access the MA workshop upstairs or the toilets through this. Ambient noise levels were high and the conversations of students in the studio across the partition were audible at times as were the sounds of building works from elsewhere in the building. During the workshops we sat around the table on the yellow chairs.

Though in many ways this environment was far from ideal for the recording of conversations around reading or for comfortably accommodating a workshop hoping to make space for those with neurodivergent ways of being it was highly characteristic of the art school's studio environment, and therefore quite an appropriate demonstration of the environmental limitations of the spaces students and staff find themselves working with. This is illustrative of the way in which art school, though in many ways the logical choice for those seeking the multi-sensory classroom, is far from ideal for those for whom the sensory world can present cognitive and physical challenges. This is despite the considerable extra cost to art and design courses in providing studio accommodation for students rather than more conventional classroom spaces,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Miguel, and Vogman, p. 73.

in which the behaviour expected of students is far more normative and restricted. As imperfect as it is, studio space at art school allows relatively free movement, expression, and modes of working as long as ambient noise, and the varying movements and behaviour of other students can be tolerated. Outlining an art project she undertook with fellow art school lecturers Jerome Harrington and James Corazzo to explore and communicate experiences of art and design studio spaces *Studio Inside, Studio Outside*, Becky Shaw describes the studio thus:

Art and design educational studio spaces have a ‘vernacular’ – the way they look, sound and are used not only encompasses the current educational needs of the student, but is fused together with expectations and visions of what professional life in that discipline might look like. The studio houses the day-to-day activities that make up learning in individual disciplines, and is a powerful part of student identity and a sense of belonging – ‘disciplining’.¹⁹⁰

A choice of space in which to conduct my workshops was not available, and alternatives would have been limited to teaching rooms in other university buildings, outside of ‘the art school’ as a physical space. With this in mind and in the spirit of Ignacio Farías and Alex Wilkie’s description of the studio as ‘a space of material intimacy’, despite the studios’ considerable access issues for neurodivergent needs, in order to stay faithful to the art school context I decided to conduct all three of the workshops in the crit space as given.¹⁹¹

Why expand the idea of reading?

The idea of reading or conventional literacy has been defined in relation to a narrow neurotypical norm that excludes many complex relations with the sensed world. This definition

¹⁹⁰ Becky Shaw on *Studio inside, Studio Outside* with James Corazzo and Jerome Harrington, 2017. <https://beckyshaw.net/Studio-Inside-Studio-Outside> Accessed May 6 2024.

¹⁹¹ Ignacio Farías and Alex Wilkie, editors. *Studio Studies: Operations, Topologies and Displacements*, London, UK: Routledge, 2018, p. 11.

denies the experiences of neurodivergent people, many of whom seek to study at art school in the hope of accessing forms of study more accommodating to their experience of meaning making.¹⁹² It also forecloses the receptive potential of reading for artists when reading is simplistically cast as a passive process of consumption in contrast with the active agency of making.

Chris Bailey offers the idea of neurodivergent literacies, informed by the ‘ruling passions’ of New Literacy Studies to outline the way neurodivergent people relate, often multimodally, to reading in the pursuit of what have been termed their ‘special interests’.¹⁹³ I maintain that addressing the often perceived problem of reading at art school through a neurodivergent and multimodal lens such as this allows the possibility of opening up frustrated potential and reducing epistemic stress and harm in relation to study. To do this, the idea of reading must be expanded to include other less acknowledged aspects of creative receptivity such as rhetoric, story, and gesture, as forms of response to the meaningful, sensed world that may not necessarily be written or spoken. This is also something discussed by Monica C. Kleekamp in relation to neuroqueering education.¹⁹⁴ As disability studies scholar J. Logan Smilges puts it: ‘To acknowledge a neurodivergent meaning-making practice as literacy would be to threaten the definition of disability itself, thereby throwing into crisis the system of dominant neurotypicality that upholds white heteronormativity.’¹⁹⁵ I discuss this further in *Carding, Scouring and Twisting* chapters.

¹⁹² Ibid., Bacon and Bennett.

¹⁹³ Chris Bailey. “‘Neurodivergent Literacies’: Exploring Autistic Adults’ “Ruling Passions” and Embracing Neurodiversity through Classroom Literacies’, *Literacy, Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12320>. Accessed 18 Apr. 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Monica C. Kleekamp “No! Turn the Pages!” Repositioning Neuroqueer Literacies ‘, *Journal of Literacy Research*, 52:2, 2020, pp. 113-135.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., Smilges.

To think about how to expand the idea of reading I chose to explore ideas around or adjacent to reading at art school with art students in workshop scenarios. The themes for the workshops were chosen based on previous teaching experience from which this enquiry was developed and my Ph.D. research. I chose three areas of focus for the workshops: proposing to investigate 1.) reading as ‘out of context’, ‘random’ (or ‘unintended’) encounter, characterised by surprise, difficulty and confusion, 2.) Tarot reading in the context of art study, structure, ethics and emphasising questions over answers 3.) encounters with ‘random’ objects as characterised by surprise, difficulty and confusion. Each workshop theme approaches reading or relations in which reading may take place, in a different way, without explicitly presenting the activity as ‘about’ reading (although the first workshop explicitly refers to reading, it’s emphasis was on the relationship of reading to randomness) so as to create spaces in which it becomes possible to see how reading practices in an art school context might find ways to expand and develop. All the workshops sought to situate, in different ways, the performance of reading, to both self and others as both norm or deviation from what is expected or required in the art school context. In all cases the affective, gestural and embodied experience of reading and discussion of that was prioritised.

Workshop 1: Do you read me?



The workshop is part of Hestia's PhD art research that offers new understandings of reading in the art school.

In the workshop you will be given more information and asked for your consent to be included in the research. You can still participate in the workshop if you don't want to be included in the research.

DO YOU READ ME?

A workshop for BAs who want support to think through the role of reading and text in their creative practice. All types of readers are welcome, slow, fast, reluctant or enthusiastic!

Reading as chance encounter.
Repairing relationships with the written world.

With artist and Ph.D. researcher,
Hestia Peppé

2-3:30 Wednesday 11th January
meeting in the crit space

Please email
hestia.peppe@gmail.com to attend
any L6s interested in assisting,
please mention this in your email.

Figure 16 Poster for the workshop *Do you read me?*

Of the three workshops, the one in which problems with reading were most directly discussed was the first workshop, for reading out of context, called *Do you read me?* In this workshop the practice of reading out of context, at random or in response to prompting by others was introduced as a way to approach reading 'as a gift' and as something to be enjoyed for its own

sake rather than as a means to an end. This is in contrast to the idea of reading in context for contextual or complementary studies, trying to find texts that make sense of or in relation to one's practice as required in the study of art and design in Higher Education since the reforms associated with the Coldstream reports, for more on which, see the chapter on Assembling.

I and the four participants, three level 6 students, a lecturer, and recent Ph.D. student explored reading aloud and reading texts multiple times over as strategies to allow access to reading as encounter, regardless of understanding, and to reading as a practice of listening prior to making sense. First, we used texts chosen and brought in by me, then texts chosen by the students were added if they wished. The texts brought in by me, chosen by participants at random from a selection were:

Chemical from *Surge* by Jay Bernard¹⁹⁶

An extract from *Chroma: A Book of Colour* by Derek Jarman¹⁹⁷

An extract from *Sub Rosa: The Book of Metaphysics* by Frankie Lisette¹⁹⁸

Homebody from *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* by Eileen Myles¹⁹⁹

Story from *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* by Eileen Myles

The strategies used were introduced to bypass a sense of shame or lack of achievement around reading and self-judgement about 'doing it right'. Reading exercises involved going round the circle of four participants and myself, reading the short texts aloud to the group multiple times

¹⁹⁶ Jay Bernard. *Surge*, London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Derek Jarman. *Chroma: A Book of Colour*, London, UK: Vintage, 1995.

¹⁹⁸ Francesca Lisette. *Sub Rosa: The Book of Metaphysics*, Norwich, UK: Boiler House Press, 2018.

¹⁹⁹ Eileen Myles. *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014*, Dublin, Ireland: Tuskar Rock press, 2016.

over. Texts were sourced by myself from my own books before to the workshop, mostly chosen for brevity and my own enjoyment of them. I wanted them to feel like gifts. A second time around, texts chosen by the participants were added if they wished, and also read multiple times over. Two of the participants brought texts to read aloud (references to which were not recorded), one from a critical essay, another from a book of photographic illustrations of the planets, both of which were texts the students were working with in contextualising their studio practice. Participants read somewhat nervously but increased in confidence with repetition, listening politely and attentively as others read. I was nervous about how the texts I had chosen would come across, and then surprised and moved by the bravery and generosity of the participants in approaching the unknown texts and the willingness of some to contribute texts of their own choosing. The conversation following this group reading, which was recorded, did not require the participants to make sense of or critique the texts read, but focussed on the experience of reading, what it felt like, and comparing this with the way participants habitually ask themselves to read and experience reading.

Participants generally expressed a high level of discomfort with their usual experience of reading and therefore an initial reluctance to thinking about it. Comments such as ‘I don’t even know sometimes I start reading and I just get frustrated because it takes me a long time and I feel like I can’t remember any of it.’ and ‘Well, I think I’ll just have a quick look at this then I think well it’s not going in anyway I’ll just stop.’ were characteristic of the participants response to prompts to reflect on their usual experience of reading. Reflections on the workshop were more positive about the strategies offered, participants particularly welcoming the idea of thinking about reading as related to listening, and eventually embracing the opportunity to talk about reading as an experience in itself. As one participant commented:

‘ I haven’t had to read out loud to a group since school so it kind of transported me back there all of a sudden um and I think it can be, it was nice, the first read was more sort of anxiety inducing because there’s you know every word is a surprise and you don’t know what it’s going to be but I think it was helpful as a sort of orientation cos that first reading you don’t really take much in you’re just trying to figure out what it is you’re reading like you said so the second one kinda helps to like let it flow a bit more I think. I felt a bit more confident reading it the second time.’

Overall, it seemed this workshop went well, with some very interesting discussion of reading occurring and the ‘gifts’ of the chosen texts and strategy of reading out of context being well-received. Apart from the disruption to my plans regarding recording due to the video equipment failing and having to switch to audio only, I was generally happy with the proceedings though as always after facilitating a workshop somewhat tired and anxious as to how well I had succeeded in holding space for the participants. Listening to the recording before the next workshop was very helpful in thinking about how better to do this next time. I think therefore, for each workshop following this my confidence increased incrementally.

Workshop 2: Reading and telling with Tarot

READING AND TELLING WITH TAROT

A workshop for BAs who want to work with Tarot and other cards their creative practice.

Diagramming, shuffling, sorting, casting. Working with the Tarot system: cards, chance, and story as one to one performance. Reading as performance to self.

With artist and Ph.D. researcher,
Hestia Peppé
2-3.30 Thursday 12th January
meeting in the crit space

to attend please email:
hestia.peppe@gmail.com
Any L6s interested in assisting,
please mention this in your email.

The workshop is part of Hestia's PhD art research that offers new understandings of reading in the art school.

In the workshop you will be given more information and asked for your consent to be included in the research. You can still participate in the workshop if you don't want to be included in the research.



Figure 17 Poster for the workshop Reading and telling with Tarot

Eleven students from a range of levels from 4-6 attended the second workshop, of which, only two had attended the previous workshop.²⁰⁰ We sat, somewhat crowded around the table on the yellow chairs in the crit space. I began with a more formal introduction to how the Tarot deck works as a system of symbols and images, its historical origins in the deck of playing cards, and how to go about reading the cards as well as some examples and links to other Tarot practitioners. I used the whiteboard as an aid to map out the Tarot card system and to write notes of practitioners' names for the students to take note of. I handed around cards from several decks I had brought so that the students could see some examples of the different decks and then I demonstrated some worked examples of card readings using my own cards, spread out on a silk scarf on the table in front of us, describing my thought process while reading the cards in order to explain how each card is interpreted in the context of the Tarot spread and the question asked. As discussed above, I did not make a record of the readings from the workshop. However the image below shows the spread of cards I drew for the chapters of this thesis, with a diagram marking the relevance of the positions illustrates for the reader the way cards in a Tarot reading might be organised in space. Tarot readers use a combination of approaches to spreading the cards, either using pre-planned formations for common questions and queries or improvising spreads tailored to support specific situations and problems. Spreads allow cards to interact with each other in terms of visual syntax, proximity and association, although it is not uncommon for cards to also be read individually or in sequence.

²⁰⁰ In the UK in Higher Education levels 4-6 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework correspond to the three years of an undergraduate degree, level 7 to a postgraduate degree and level 8 to Ph.D. There are other qualifications which are also available as equivalents at these levels .



Figure 18

Throughout the second half of the workshop, I took questions from the participants..

By comparison to the previous workshop, in the discussion following the introduction to Tarot in the *Reading and telling with Tarot*, participants seemed immediately comfortable with the idea of reading with Tarot, with questions focussing more on the specifics of how and why Tarot works and issues of best or safe practice. In this workshop it seemed participants assumed that there was a technical and practical framework that could be learned systematically that would enable reading and felt more confident to approach it as such and empowered to ask questions themselves. This was in marked contrast to the *Do you read me?* workshop in which participants waited to be prompted or questioned before reflecting. It is possible this difference was related to the size of the workshop groups, the novelty of the Tarot or a tendency among

art students towards interest in the occult. However, importantly, it also seems likely that reluctance to discuss problems with reading is due to assumptions that reading is something everyone should already know how to do, whereas Tarot reading is not seen as an essential skill and therefore not knowing how to do it has no shame attached to it, removing barriers to participation formed by fear of the stigma of poor literacy. This, combined with Tarot's appeal as both novel and mysterious, suggests that it might be possible to address issues around conventional literacy *via* delivering teaching Tarot reading in the future if the approaches of the two workshops were combined. It seems that by giving people an opportunity to learn a new type of reading, especially a highly visual and spatialised one such as Tarot the idea of reading itself can open up in a positive and accessible way. Though there is not enough data to be sure of this from these workshops their outcomes are indicative of many fruitful ways future redesign of the study could yield powerful results in relation to this application of Tarot reading.

The discussion following the Tarot workshop raised questions among the participants pertaining to the association of Tarot with magic and other occult or spiritual practices such as astrology. Specifically, I was asked whether people of different star signs were likely to be better at reading the Tarot, whether the cards needed 'cleansing' to keep them safe, and perhaps most importantly how the Tarot cards worked. Care was needed in responding to these questions neither to alienate students with strongly held beliefs nor to exert undue influence or make claims for Tarot reading that could not be supported. This care rightly elevates questions of ethics in relation to the practice of Tarot but likewise, in the context of this inquiry, also does so in relation to literacy and expanded practices of reading. In teaching practices of sensing and response, what are our responsibilities? It seemed important to emphasise where agency falls in the reading process, not in some unseen power but in the construction by the reader of questions and reading spaces. As one participant put it: 'You're the force, not the deck.'

Identifying where and how agency is engaged in reading of all kinds seems an important aspect of what expanded reading practices might enable for students, perhaps helping foster resilience and critical engagement in increasingly persuasive and influence-driven media economies and ecologies.

Participants responded positively to the idea that Tarot might be helpful for managing workflow and navigating blocks in the creative process and to its potential for framing research questions and developing receptivity and intuition. The idea that there was relief in knowing when to stop making decisions and start asking questions was much affirmed. If this was linked to the idea of reading in general in the context of a wider programme on expanded reading much could be developed in terms of thinking about the less visible and tangible aspects of the research process, and in making these aspects accessible to students.

Workshop 3: Rave toys and fidget spinners



SPINNERS, RAVE TOYS, PERFORMANCE WITH SMALL PROPS

A workshop for BAs who think with handheld objects in their creative practice. From texture and stim to gesture and character via Brecht, ASMR, repetition and duration.

Please bring your favourite spinners, rave toys, plushies and other small props. Sharing objects is not required, treasures will be respected but objects do not need to be precious.

With artist and Ph.D. researcher, Hestia Peppé
2 – 3:30 Wednesday 18th January

meeting in the crit space
Please email hestia.peppe@gmail.com to attend.
Any L6s interested in assisting please mention this in your email.

The workshop is part of Hestia's PhD art research that offers new understandings of reading in the art school.

In the workshop you will be given more information and asked for your consent to be included in the research. You can still participate in the workshop if you don't want to be included in the research.

Figure 19 Poster for the workshop Rave toys and fidget spinners

This workshop was attended by only two participants, both from level 6 and both of which had attended the two previous workshops. In this workshop the practice of 'thinking with objects' was introduced as a way of responding to given objects, taken out of context in much the same way that texts in the *Do you read me?* workshop were given and taken out of their usual context.

Objects were supplied, mainly small plastic toys or tools that could be held in the hand and easily carried, each was chosen for its sensory interest, like the rave toys and fidget spinners of the title. Objects included a light-up moon with two different coloured light settings, a glass prism, a ball of multi coloured chenille yarn, an orange contact juggling ball, and a small pair of magnetic frogs. Each toy suggests or invites characteristic gestures and ways of moving that the students were asked to consider. I think of such objects as small, mass produced, anonymous art works and favour the designation 'rave toys' for them as a nudge toward the sensory joy adults can take in the context of the rave, and a corrective to the more infantilising idea of the fidget spinner. For example, a prism is a small, seemingly simple object that, as a tool, historically and still, allows humans to alter our entire relation to the visible world and representation, making the full dispersed spectrum of colour visible to us, highlighting the fact that each person's embodied cognitive and sensual relation to the world can be shaped and altered based on our interaction with objects. 'Rave toy' is an idea which exists, mainly as a search term for the purposes of purchasing them online, outside the narrow conceptualisation of neurodivergence as 'special needs' but which means essentially the same thing as a fidget spinner, a sensory toy that brings delight and comfort, helps concentration and provides enough interest to maintain its engagement over time while other things are going on. Rave toys also act as a locus for social interaction, attracting other people with their bright lights, colours or sounds, advertising an opportunity to gesture and stim together, much as stim toys such as fidget spinners would if the stigma surrounding them was removed. The association with the rave also hints at and links to more illicit ideas of risky neurological behaviour and the seeking out of altered states, a testing of the edges of neurological experience that occurs in rave culture, perhaps the only other arena in which deliberate experimentation with affective and sensory experience is commonly acknowledged, outside of childhood and the arts. As media theorist and geographer Arun Saldanha writes about rave culture in Anjuna, Goa:

Nonetheless, the causes of intoxication don't lie solely in the molecules. Different bodies react differently to the same molecules in different places. There are other forces at work apart from the neurochemical. A materialist psychopharmacology should be committed to explaining drug effects as determined through embodied interaction.²⁰¹

This is to say that interactions between bodies of all kinds can be neuroaffective even without a chemical interaction, a theoretical point of overlap between rave culture, or what Saldanha terms 'psychedelics', art and design, and the neurodiversity paradigm. Indeed, Nick Walker includes psychedelic experimentation with drugs in her definition of acquired neurodiverse conditions, but I prefer Saldanha's more expansive definition of psychedelics here for the purposes of art school, where drug experimentation is not appropriate.²⁰² Thinking about the encounter, via attention, between body and object as reading also links to histories of scholarship in philosophy of mind on the of extended mind hypothesis, first proposed by Andy Clark and Dave Chalmers in 1998 and taken up more recently with regard to the relation between spider and web, by Hilton Japyassu and Kevin Laland, a study with powerful resonance to Deligny's much earlier evocation of spiders, as discussed in the chapter on Carding.^{203, 204, 205}

Participants were encouraged to bring an object of their own: one brought a stone wrapped in paper and the other a tin full of glass marbles in a plastic net. Each participant was given one

²⁰¹ Arun Saldanha *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and The Viscosity of Race*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 58.

²⁰² Ibid., Walker, p. 27.

²⁰³ Andy Clark, David Chalmers, The Extended Mind, *Analysis*, Volume 58, Issue 1, January 1998, Pages 7–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/58.1.7>

²⁰⁴ Hilton F Japyassú, and Kevin N Laland. "Extended spider cognition." *Animal cognition* vol. 20,3 (2017): 375-395. doi:10.1007/s10071-017-1069-7

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Deligny et al, *The Arachnean and Other Texts*

object at random from the selection and, after spending about five to ten minutes working with the object, was asked to respond to the object, using either words or gestures. Though the phrase ‘reading objects’ was not directly used, the process they were asked to undertake could be described as reading in the expanded sense with which I am working with it elsewhere. I chose not to introduce this concept so as not to prejudice the participants’ response to the task and although this workshop followed on chronologically from the two previous workshops prior which discussed reading, neither of these workshops extended the concept to directly reading objects directly.

As only two participants attended this workshop each participant had time to work with several of the objects provided, inspiring a wide-ranging conversation on the nature of critical and affective response to objects in general, object agency, gesture, artificial intelligence, touch, texture, and the idea of *Vanitas* or *memento mori*, particularly in relation to the durational longevity of objects manufactured from plastic. This conversation is indicative of the ways and directions in which it might be possible to expand the idea and practice of reading to include multi-sensory and multimodal responses to artefacts other than written texts. Touch and gesture emerge as particularly important modes of relating which could be seen as tangible outcomes of the reading process. Much of the dynamics of this conversation and how it related to the objects in question might be relevant also when thinking about the dynamics at play in art school critiques of art works, to how storying and thinking out loud with and in response to objects as a kind of reading is a core art school practice and could be considered part of reading in an expanded way.

In addition to the conversation, both participants attempted responses in gesture to some of the objects, one choosing a ‘ritualistic’ interpretation of all the ways the chosen object could be

held and the other attempting to ‘follow’ the chosen object by moving their body in the same way the object moved. When considered as examples of ways of reading, these encounters with objects demonstrate very clearly the role of performance, both to self and others in the reading relationship.²⁰⁶ If one imagines the encounter between spinner and drop spindle as an example of such a relation, one can readily understand the importance of spinning by hand as model, metaphor and exemplar in this study, with the addition of yarn as attention itself, making it possible to articulate spinning as both reading as material outcome (yarn) and reading as process (spinning).

Although only two participants attended this workshop, it is notable that both these participants also attended both the other workshops. These two participants’ positive response to the workshops overall also suggests in future that participants would benefit from the workshops being presented as a series on reading, designed to be attended as a whole, multi-day course. In the speculative programme presented below, I outline the form such a course might take.

Conclusion

The workshops provided excellent opportunities to trial student responses to being asked to think about and engage with expanded practices of reading. It was deeply gratifying to see the tools of my personal practice in the hands of others and to discuss working with them in a group context for the first time. The process of sharing these tools and seeing the way others approached them and reacted to their experiences with them illuminated much for me about the outputs of my research. It seemed particularly significant how the shift in emphasis from creative production to receptive experience was met, in the case of many participants, with a

²⁰⁶ As performance, either to self or others, reading is also a process of becoming fictional to both one and other, as discussed in more detail in the chapter on Carding in relation to the work of danah boyd and Alice Marwick with regard to context collapse.

palpable sense of relief. The idea that those of us engaged with creative work need to allow space and time for addressing how we sense and receive signals from the world in different ways emerged as being of deep importance. Overall, the outcomes of the workshops suggest the benefit of addressing the potential of expanded reading with students in the art school environment and indicate various ways in which going about this in future could be more productive of insight.

My thinking about the problems with the existing focus on a conventional literacy model at art school were both confirmed and expanded, in particular, by the difficulty students had in discussing reading explicitly in the *Do You Read Me* workshop. I felt that more time was needed to develop the trust in a group to begin to overcome this difficulty, as well as less direct approaches such as those in the workshops that followed this one. The popularity of the Tarot workshop is notable, suggesting a good way to get students to engage with expanded ideas of reading at art school is to offer a positive framework with which to do so rather than directly attempting to address problems with conventionally understood literacy. In addition, questions of the ethics of care required when undertaking receptive practice were raised, and well addressed by dwelling on the occult historic specificity of Tarot lineages and how to navigate thinking about them ethically. It is important for any serious programme of study concerned with divinatory strategies gleaned from Tarot, such as those presented in the reading out of context and reading objects workshops, to consider Tarot as a whole, rather than simply borrowing from it piecemeal in terms of technique. By placing Tarot practice in context as a historical and material phenomena students will be able to benefit more fully from its rich legacy and its tradition of ethics. In the *Rave Toys and Fidget Spinners* workshop the relations between gesture, object and discursive practices at art school were teased out in the context of

receptive, rather than creative practice, hinting at ways reading could expand to include embodied interactions.

It seems clear that in order to most coherently show the benefits of expanding the idea of reading practice and best disseminate this to students, that the three workshops should be combined into a progressive programme of study in future. The speculative programme outlined below develops the form such a course might be expected to take if budget and other constraints were no object.

The speculative programme is written with reference to existing materials from courses of study in the arts at two different Higher Education institutions.^{207, 208, 209} Working to develop a speculative programme of study for expanded reading, perhaps inevitably, raises important questions about the role of reading in both the specific context of communicating a curriculum to students, who must read the learning objectives, assessment guidelines and other course materials, and in assessing student work, when the staff delivering the course must read students' work. While I have tried here to address the first point by including multimodal sources such as video in the recommended texts and the second point by allowing multimodal submissions for assessed work, I think it is important to recognise that without further trials in practice, this speculative programme is still reliant on quite a restrictive model of reading to

²⁰⁷ University of the Arts London *Assessment Criteria* <https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/stories/new-assessment-criteria3> Accessed 4 May 2024.

²⁰⁸ Bridget Winwood and Chris Glover *Guide Number One: How to Write Learning Outcomes* Sheffield Hallam University, 2008 <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/teaching/files/2016/09/How-to-write-learning-outcomes-Guide-1.pdf> Accessed 4 May 2024.

²⁰⁹ Helen Kay, a revision of *Guide Number 2: How to write assessment criteria* 2008 produced by Bridget Winwood and Chris Glover in 2008 which was based on the original version by Rosie Bingham Learning and Teaching Institute, Sheffield Hallam University, 2005. <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/cfp/files/2018/10/Writing-Assessment-Criteria-Performance-Indicators-Handbook.pdf> Accessed 4 May 2024.

communicate itself. This must be understood as a limit of the current study but one which could be profoundly explored in further in collaboration with students and possibly other educators.

The question of studio space and its suitability for hosting neurodivergent and neuroqueer reading practices as raised early in this chapter remains an open one. As with the speculative programme's reliance on verbal literacy described above the use of space for such a programme assumes the limits of any given institution and indeed this study. However, it is hoped that in collaboration with students and staff much could be done in terms of experimenting with ways to construct and hold improved instances of spaces for neurodivergent and neuroqueer reading in the art school. In setting up such instances I would recommend spaces are chosen to prioritise lack of through traffic and privacy for participants, low ambient noise and plentiful table space.

Speculative Programme for Teaching Expanded Reading

Divination at Art School

Speculative Programme of Teaching for Levels 4/5/6

Keywords:

reading, neurodivergence, neuroqueer, disability, context collapse, divination, Tarot, randomness, speculation, stochasticity, chance, cards

Learning Objectives:

By successfully engaging with this course the learner will become able to:

- Engage practically and theoretically with expanded reading, understood as the receptive capacity of art.
- Recognise how neurodivergence and expanded reading can inform and support one another.
- Identify where and how agency is engaged in reading.
- Formulate and develop a personal relationship to the ethics of expanded reading.
- Apply the principles of divination with Tarot and strategies taken from divinatory methods to expand and represent the experience of reading.
- Examine and appraise how reading has been expanded and represented by peers and artist practitioners.

Assessment Criteria

Learners' work will be judged on:

- The clarity of their description and articulation of expanded reading.
- How effectively they can demonstrate understanding of the relationship between neurodivergence and expanded reading.
- Their ability to identify and trace agency in relation to reading.
- The fluency with which they formulate and develop a personal relationship to the ethics of expanded reading.
- How successfully they apply divinatory principles and methods to expand and represent reading.
- The extent to which they can examine and appraise how reading has been expanded and represented by peers and artist practitioners.

Assessment Methods

Formative:

- Exit notes/drawings/collages/memes/voice notes from students on each session.
- Think, pair, share responses in any media.
- Group crits on visual/ multimedia work in progress.

Summative:

- Expanded reading case study: Individual presentations to group of own visual/ multimedia work in response to the ideas encountered on the course.
- Logbook: visually documenting research and development of expanded reading case study (can be either physical or digital media)

Lesson Breakdown

Eight three-hour long sessions, each including a forty-minute lecture or demonstration with discussion on the following themes. Each session will also include presentations from students and peer critique.

Neurodivergence

In this session we will address the significance of neurodiversity to questions of reading and receptivity in art.

Do You Read Me

This session will introduce the concept of reading out of context and think about how randomness can help to foster intuitive practice.

Expanded reading and the receptive capacity of art.

In this session we will discuss the role of reading in relation to art and how one might transform the other.

Rave Toys and Fidget Spinners

In this session we will think about the ways we might read objects, how this relates to gesture and body, and what it means for reading to be multimodal.

Divinatory principles to expand and represent reading.

In this session we will look at what the ancient idea of divination can offer us as artists attempting to represent and render reading as tangible.

Reading and Telling with Tarot

In this session we will work with the divinatory system known as the Tarot as an example of a system for expanded reading, its history and how it can be incorporated into art practice.

Reading and agency

In this session we will question some of the ideas about the risks, dangers and problems that have, for better or worse, been historically associated with reading and its relation to power.

The ethics of expanded reading

In this final session we will confront issues of responsibility and the need for ethics in expanded reading as a practice of encounter and engagement.

Artists, readers, and writers:

During the course, students are expected to research the work of other artists and practitioners. This research is a work of reading, and it is therefore hoped it will be multimodally expansive, including images, videos, and art works as well as writing and spoken word. The following is a list of practitioners who in some way engage with ideas of reading, divination, neurodivergence or study in their work, many of whom will be referred to throughout the course. Students are also welcome to read the work of practitioners not on this list.

It is recommended that students choose at least two practitioners to read each week as this will enrich contributions to class discussions and enhance theoretical understanding as well as independent work. Reading should be well documented in whatever expanded form is desired in student's logbooks.

Kathy Acker, Hamja Ahsan, Mel Baggs, Chris Bailey, Khairani Barokka, Emma Bolland, danah boyd, Uma Breakdown, Gavin Butt, Italo Calvino, Robert J Chapman, Jesse Darling, Samuel Delany, Fernand Deligny, Constance De Jong, Jessica Dore, Nwando Ebizie, Heike Geissler, Renee Gladman, Johanna Hedva, Evan Ifekoya, Alison Kafer, Nnena Kalu, Bhanu

Kapil, Sharon Kivland, Chris Kraus, Ursula Le Guin, Huw Lemmey, Audre Lorde, Kellyann Maddox, Christopher Marmolejo, Caitlin Matthews, Damian Milton, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, Daniel Oliver, Katrina Palmer, Nam June Paik, Allison Parrish, Everest Pipkin, Roy Claire Potter, Jasbir K. Puar, Nisha Ramayya, Ariana Reines, Adrian Rifkin, Arun Saldanha, Rosalie Schweiker, Erica Scourti, Louisa Martin Shaeri, Becky Shaw, Martine Syms, Nick Walker, Hayao Yamaneko, M. Remi Yergeau.

Recommended Texts:

Ariana Reines on reading to translate.

https://canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/preliminary_materials_for_a_theory_of_the_young_girl

Renee Gladman on drawing and reading.

<https://www.reneegladman.com/a-story-of-drawing>

Nick Walker's definitions of neuroqueer and neurodiversity

<https://neuroqueer.com/neuroqueer-an-introduction/>

<https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>

GET THE FRAC IN! Or, The Fractal Many-festo: A (Trans)(Crip)t

<https://cfshrc.org/article/get-the-frac-in-or-the-fractal-many-festo-a-transcript/>

Roy Claire Potter *Sharing the Problem of Listening*

<https://mostyn.org/resource/sharing-the-problem-of-listening-by-roy-claire-potter/>

Everest Pipkin *On Lacework: Watching an entire Machine-Learning Dataset*

https://unthinking.photography/projects/lacework/index_2.html

Recommended Videos:

Mel Baggs *In My Language*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>

Khairani Barokka *Against Racist Ableist Arts Education*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmHm5h84AKw>

Jesse Darling *Site Visit – A Road Trip Movie*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWAdWljI9uU>

Chris Marker Extract from *Sans Soleil*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JamGQOhCe_k

Nam June Paik *Global Groove*

<https://vimeo.com/558372601>

Adrian Rifkin, 'Interview with Adrian Rifkin by Michael Swiboda'. *Liminalities*

<http://liminalities.net/14-1/rifkin.html>.

Martine Syms *The African Desperate* Trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVSXgmZQezY>

TWISTING

being again

spinning, turning, returning

rotational being.

Louisa Martin *Lossy Ecology*

The movement of fibre around a still point holds the threads of the yarn together.

Death



Figure 20



Figure 21 Death from the Tarot de Marseille

Abstract

In this chapter I discuss what has been found and what has changed as a result of the research. Primary to these findings is the principle that, to expand reading, ways to visualise it or make it tangible are needed. Once represented, reading can be understood in new ways. Ways of making it tangible include drawing, photography, and digital collage, discussing reading, transcribing reading, and writing or making autoethnographic accounts of reading. This representation, of necessity, enlarges and expands the concept of reading by including its tangible outputs and opening to a more sensitive relation to context. Divination in the form of Tarot combines all these elements and dynamics.

Discussion

Models of reading:

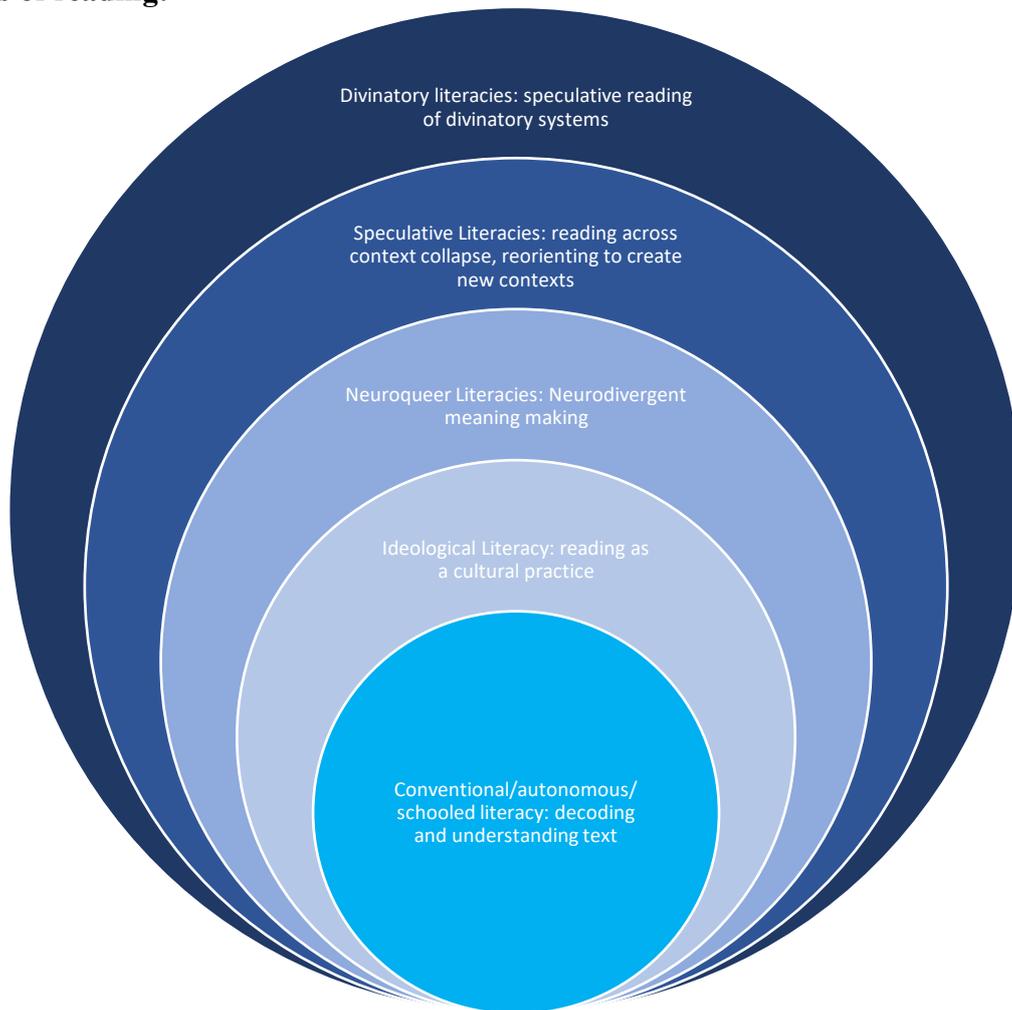


Figure 22: Hierarchical model of expanded reading by types of literacy.

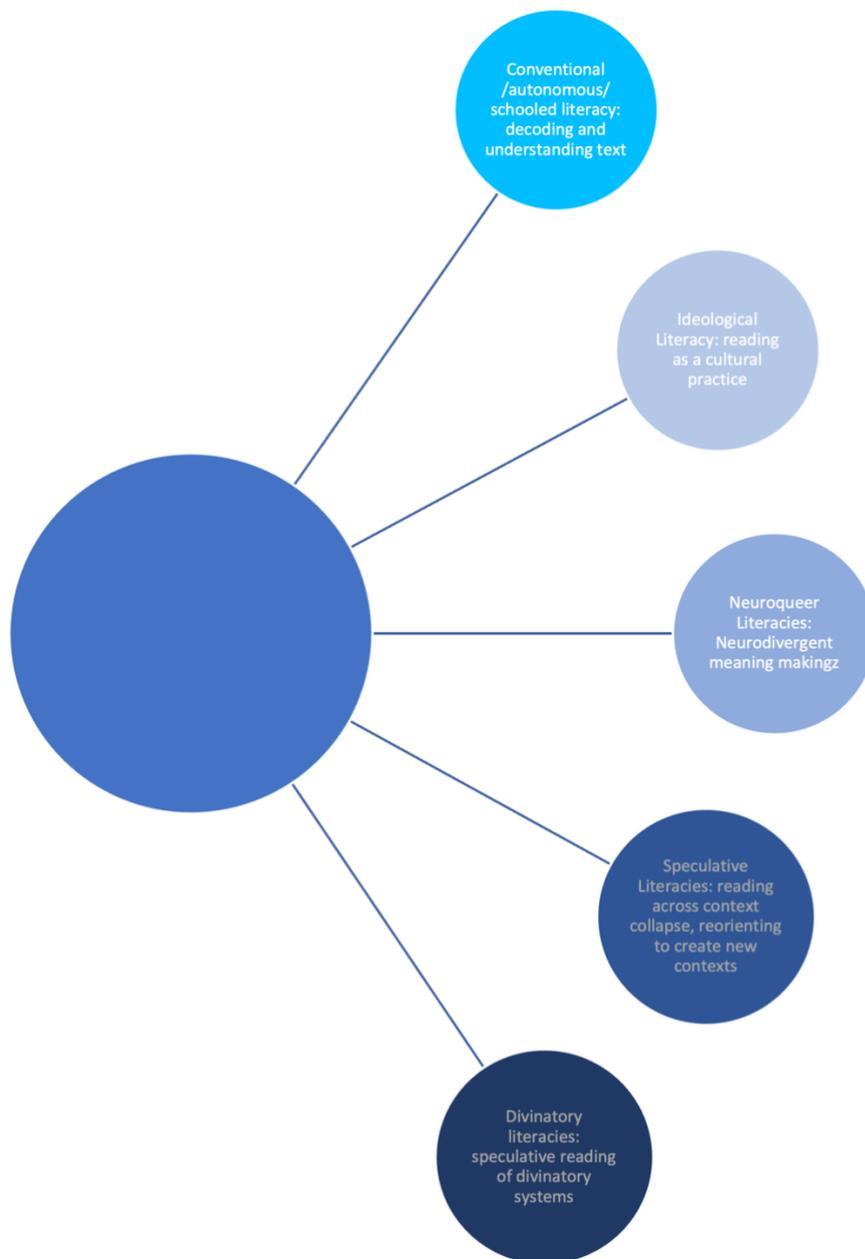


Figure 23: Additive model of expanded reading by types of literacy.

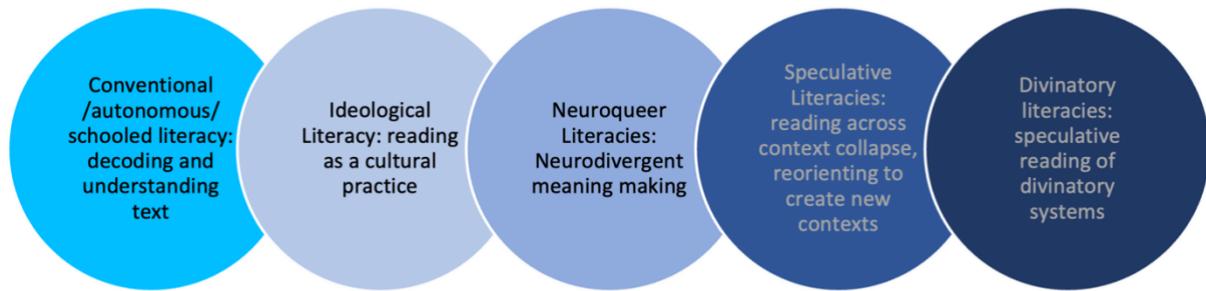


Figure 24: Types of literacy and their interdependence.

These diagrams show different ways to model the expansion of the idea of reading across the varying definitions encountered in this study, which aims to include as many forms of reading as possible. In each diagram reading is broken down into five ‘types’ of literacy to show their relation to each other. I use the idea of literacies here to break down the concept of expanded reading into elements in order to show how the concept of expanded reading I am developing relates to existing scholarship around literacies as forms of reading. Although I use the term ‘neuroqueer literacies’ here, in constructing this model I am indebted to the work of Chris Bailey for building on the work of Brian Street in *New Literacy Studies* and developing the concept of neurodivergent literacies. I discuss neurodivergent literacies further in the *Drafting*

chapter and the rationale behind using the term neuroqueer in the Scouring chapter.^{210,211} My use of ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ literacies draws from the work of Street.

Mapping the forms of reading this study discusses in visual relation to each other raises the problem of ‘expansion’ as a potentially hierarchical concept, each type of literacy being surpassed by more and better, more expansive models as expansion is enacted. I propose rather that this expansion is-additive and generous, and that each type of literacy adds to the expanded definition of reading as it is included, as illustrated by the second diagram. This diagram can be understood as analogous to a cross section of multi-ply thread in which smaller fibres are twisted into one larger, stronger cord. The relation between the types of literacy is illustrated in the third diagram, here the types of literacy overlap in a linear progression from one to another, enabling the expansion of reading overall. This movement follows the spiral progression from one thread to another laterally around the twisted centre of the cord. The twist disrupts the possibility of hierarchy, emphasising instead, the interdependence of fibres in a spun line.

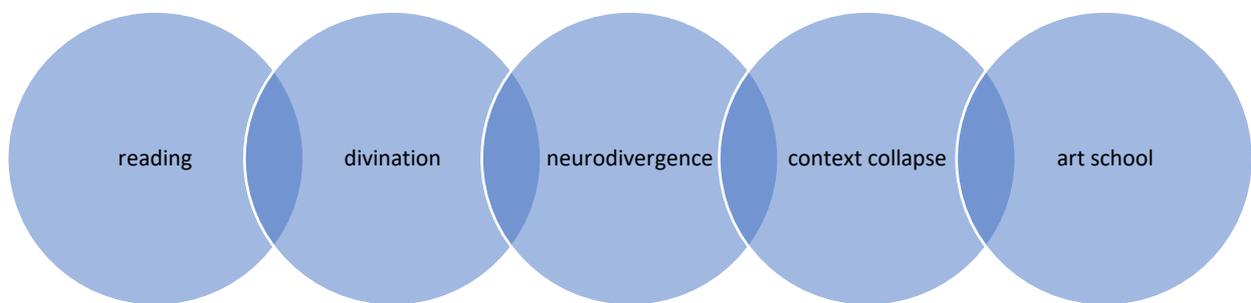
While literacy is often conceived as a primarily visual phenomena in contrast with, for example, listening, at every level of this study showed reading to be both a multi-sensory and multimodal practice. It is multi-sensory in that information drawn from all senses may be read or evoked internally from what is read in performance to self, and multimodal in that all kinds of expressive modes such as writing, drawing, and speaking can trace and extend reading into the tangible sphere. Despite this multimodality of reading, conventionally, reading remains understood as invisible and intangible. Thus, the expansion of reading this study enacts is not

²¹⁰ Ibid., Bailey.

²¹¹ Brian Street. (2003) ‘What’s “new” in new literacy studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice’, *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5.2, pp. 77–91.

simply an acknowledgment of reading's multi-sensory multimodality but is a drawing out of the idea of reading to include its tangible outputs, acknowledging and tracing reading as a process that is both affective and effective, indeed also as both affect and effect. In this sense reading emerges as no less than the receptive capacity of art itself.

Themes:



Findings

In the following section I explore ideas emerging from the practice in relation to the themes established earlier in the thesis, in the chapters on Scouring, Carding and Assembling, and as referenced in the diagrams above, and in the introduction. The practical elements of this study are discussed in detail in the chapters on Tuning and Drafting.

Reading

Understanding divinatory reading as, historically, a precursor to conventional literacy, helps to think about reading as a somatic and affective experience as opposed to a frictionless transfer of information. Before mass literacy in English, to *rede* meant to make sense of or to riddle out

meaning from the confusion of all possibly relevant information, the noisy whirl of the world ordering itself in the mind and senses through the attention.²¹² Divination would have been the main form of systematisation this reading took, and indeed, in English in its early forms, the decoding we now think of as conventional literacy was a technology practiced exclusively by those formally deemed to be in contact with the divine, priests and other intercessors. In the workshop on *Reading and Telling with Tarot* we discussed in detail the complex relation between reading the cards and many peoples' experiences of belief in spirits, saints, gods, ancestors, and other intangible powers, the ethics of engaging with such a process, and how this requires us to think about the ethics of reading itself and how to engage in it. Tarot as practiced today is notable as a form of reading that, due to its divinatory function, is usually practiced according to an explicitly defined ethical stance.²¹³ This is in part due to the need to counter widespread stigma associating Tarot reading and 'fortune-telling' or divination in general in general with scams and manipulation, but far more importantly can be understood as a sincere and structural recognition of the vulnerability inherent in the reading relation. In this study, my thinking on the ethics of reading as a practice of embodied neuroqueer encounter has been shaped by my own encounters with the autofiction of Chris Kraus, Martine Syms and Heike Geissler, the films and texts of Fernand Deligny, the neuroqueer rhetoric of Remi M. Yergeau, the digital sociology of boyd and Marwick, the drawing/writing of Renee Gladman and the artistic practices of the many other artists referenced. For better or worse, these encounters were what shaped my particular understanding of the reading relation. Such a basis in deep relation and multimodality of neuroqueer reading, can only be resolved by modelling

²¹² David Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1997, p. 97.

²¹³ Most practicing Tarot readers who charge for their services have written terms and conditions that lay out their legal position with regard to ethics in practice in which, as well as positioning themselves as providing services ultimately for 'entertainment purposes only' usually go into detail about how the transaction will take place, what to expect etc. *Kelly-Ann Maddox*. <https://www.kelly-annmaddox.com/policies-ethics>. offers an extensive and thoughtful example. Accessed 3 Aug. 2023.

through gesture, embodiment and performance, acknowledging and nurturing the need for sensitive, neuroqueer and crip attuned approaches to encounter – to whatever extent it is mediated – between bodyminds, and encounter’s inherent proximity to context collapse.

It does not go without saying that, in order to meet the ethical demands raised by practicing embodied neuroqueer reading in the context of art school as a pedagogical tool, that such approaches must also be both anti-colonial and anti-racist. It is in encounters where power is unequal that the dangers and vulnerabilities of reading are most keenly felt and where the stakes are highest for those already at significant disadvantage in contexts such as higher education as a recent Ph.D. by Kat J. M. Stevens makes clear.²¹⁴ Though the formal literature as pertains to race and colonialism directly relating to neuroqueer reading at art school or indeed to Tarot is scant, I have been informed since early in this research by Erin Manning’s responses to the provocation by Fred Moten ‘that all black life is neurodiverse life’, referenced in both *The Minor Gesture* and *For A Pragmatics of the Useless*, in which Manning interprets this statement by Moten as, ‘asking how the fugitivity of value composes with the being of relation while underscoring the complicity between executive function and whiteness in neurotypicality’s adhesion to an unchecked narrative of superior functioning.’^{215, 216} Following Moten and Manning, I am orientated to understand neurotypicality as, in many ways, functioning as an expansion of existing scholarship on Whiteness.²¹⁷ I am also mindful of the cautionary

²¹⁴ Kat Stephens. *The Gendered, Racialized, & Dis/Abled Experiences of Neurodivergent Black Women Graduate Students Across Higher Education*. University of Massachusetts Amherst. DOI.org (Datacite), <https://doi.org/10.7275/30783865>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2025.

²¹⁵ Ibid., Manning, p10.

²¹⁶ Erin Manning. *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, Duke University Press, 2020. p4

²¹⁷The scholarly work of both Sarah Ahmed, and Arun Saladnha (cited in the chapter on Drafting) on Whiteness, and what it does is relevant, both because the racialisation of individuals has an enormous effect on who can benefit from identification with ideas and categories such as queer, neurodivergent or disabled and, following Chapman, because neurotypicality itself has been historically co-constituted in relation to racialisation. Ahmed, Sara. ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’. *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 2, Aug. 2007, pp. 149–68. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>. Ibid., Saldanha, Ibid., Chapman 2023.

relevance and challenge to both neuroqueer and crip theories of Jasbir K. Puar's ongoing work on the construction of both homonationalism and debility as ideological tools employed by racist colonial states in the violent and systemic disciplining of Palestinian and other Orientalised peoples.^{218,219} In thinking about the specific ethics of expanding and expanded reading as they relate to existing practices and pedagogies in art and its teaching, I am indebted to translator, poet and performer Khairani Barokka for her account of colonial art teaching in Indonesia, and to Tarot reader Christopher Marmolejo's recent exegesis of decolonial Tarot practice and symbolism, *Red Tarot*.^{220,221}

Reading in the sense that this study hopes to ethically engage with it, in its expanded sense, is itself also an expansive process, one of opening to what is outside or other to ourselves and thus it demands to be thought about in terms akin to hospitality, a practice of letting things in rather than one of taking things away or extracting them from somewhere else. Reading is therefore also a practice that carries an inherent risk. Largely this risk, that one opens oneself up to harm, or influence from bad intention, cannot be completely offset without severely limiting the potential benefits reading enables for both reader and read. Thus, reading is also inherently a practice of courage and generosity albeit one which must also employ criticality, judgement, and considered limitations where needed. It is perhaps these expansive and receptive qualities of reading that have led to the practice of reading, particularly of fiction, being historically associated with feminine coded vulnerability and pathologies such as mania, hysteria, and neurasthenia and, in general, perceived inability to distinguish imagination from reality. Variations on concerns about this, both serious and satirical, are found throughout the

²¹⁸ Jasbir K. Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131fg5>.

²¹⁹ Jasbir K. Puar. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Duke University Press, 2017

²²⁰ Ibid., Barokka

²²¹ Christopher Marmolejo. *Red Tarot: A Decolonial Guide to Divinatory Literacy*. 1st ed, North Atlantic Books, 2024.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the writings of Molière, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Sylvain Marechal, and novelists such as Jane Austen and Gustave Flaubert, to name a few. In Rousseau's *Émile*, a treatise on the ideal education, written in 1762, he describes women who read thus:

When women are what they ought to be, they will keep to what they can understand, and their judgment will be right; but since they have set themselves up as judges of literature, since they have begun to criticise books and to make them with might and main, they are altogether astray.²²²

Through the lens of neurodivergence, these negative, gendered connotations given to reading resonate with understanding of how divergent relations to cognitive experience have been stigmatised as madness and deficit. The possibility that such associations were encouraged to preserve reading and its power for a mostly white male elite also seems important. Thinking about divination as an expanded form of reading highlights how non-alphabetic reading such as that enacted by practitioners of Tarot has been both stigmatised and criminalised as fortune telling and chicanery where it is practiced by minority groups such as members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities and all those with no fixed address, while simultaneously being preserved as occult knowledge among members of the upper classes, as practiced by groups such as the Golden Dawn.²²³

²²² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* (1762), translated by Barbara Foxley, London, UK: Dent, 1986.

²²³ In England and Wales, the government's Vagrancy Act 1824 states that 'every person pretending or professing to tell fortunes, or using any subtle craft, means, or device, by palmistry or otherwise, to deceive and impose on any of his Majesty's subjects' should be "deemed rogues and vagabonds". <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/5/83/section/4> Accessed 4 May 2024.

Divination

Divinatory strategies can provide ways to visualise, write about, and discuss what reading makes happen, expanding the idea of reading to include modalities such as drawing, rhetoric and fiction. I explore this in the *Daughters of Necessity* texts, in which divination by Tarot is used as a means of drawing out layers of thinking about how the notes on art school were read and about how it felt to read them. Tarot cards were drawn in relation to the notes, both at the time of writing and the time of reading or are read into the drawings made alongside the notes at the time, and then written about in the transcription of the notes. This diss/associative triangulation allows space in the writing process for thinking about the intermediary processes involved with reading as they take place. In the images that make up the *Clew* video these intermediary processes are visualised. The video demonstrates for a viewer the relation between drawing and writing as triangulated by further forms of reading, such as the use of digital sensing in the form of photography, and the processing of the resultant images through both the Mirror Lab app and iMovie. The video draws out reading in multiple ways, including the possible ways in which a viewer may occupy themselves in attending to it, by attempting to read the word forms shown in the conventional way and being confounded, or by taking in fragments of meaning while attending to the visual patterns and effects, for example.

Divinatory strategies and methodologies such as Tarot highlight reading as a performance to self, as discussed on the chapters on Carding and Drafting. By making reading tangible, the performative nature of expanded reading, including divination, is demonstrated. In conventional reading the significant elements of that which is read are reanimated for the attention of the reader to grasp, often, although it is different for different readers, as the sound of the interior voice. This doubling of attention creates a sense of two positions, performer, and audience. This dynamic of performance is traceable by the anxiety it causes in some readers,

as was discussed in the workshop *Do You Read Me?* This anxiety relates to the time-based quality of reading, and the need to understand as well as process the form of the words or other elements simultaneously in real-time. In all the workshops we worked to disrupt this need for simultaneity by embracing the space of inputs as noise, prior to meaning. In divinatory methodologies such as Tarot, the performative stream of reading is slowed and made physically tangible, easing cognitive stress for some readers, breaking down reading into separate, spatialised streams of gesture and response, embracing the spaces of confusion in between. The shuffling of cards renders what is read in Tarot as always already out of rational context, and so leaves space for the mind to rely on intuition.

In the workshop on *Reading and telling with Tarot* we discussed how, as a divinatory methodology, Tarot demonstrates reading as a way of creating space for, and structuring, questions about practice as distinct, and as relief from, decision making about practice. This is also related to the way that, to make it tangible, the reading process must be slowed down to find this space in between gesture and other performative elements. The spaces in reading are where the unknown resides and context collapses. It is where, between the self that performs and the self that receives I can hear or feel what I cannot understand, and acknowledge it, forming questions about it. In this study I have been concerned with describing these spaces of collapsing context and ways to navigate them. Divinatory or speculative reading is reading that acknowledges this role of context collapse in meaning making, maintaining the position that, in reading, I am performing to myself and others, and in so doing that I become, to some extent, fictional to myself, allowing me to reorient myself to new contexts.

Neurodivergence

Neurodivergent phenomena offer signposts for thinking about and making tangible the invisible aspects of all forms of sensing, encouraging me to think about what sensing feels like for each individual, in other words to sense sensing itself and make it tangible. This has ramifications for the understanding of reading and all other visual and sensory creative practices. Throughout all three elements of the practice component of this study, thinking about the world through the lens of neurodivergence has, by freeing neurodivergent ways of being and manifestations from pathology, allowed me to consider a much wider range of sensory approaches to attention and therefore reading. Acknowledging neurodivergent and neuroqueer literacies is to attend to the multi-sensory effects of reading, helping to make them tangible.

In the context of neuroqueering and neurodivergence my drawings can be considered both a *stim* (self-stimulatory behaviour) and a *spin* or special interest. Thinking in these terms allows me to understand stimming as a potential mode of reading, a stimulatory pursuit of a special interest. I think of my drawings as a form of reading rather than writing because of their responsiveness to impulse and their extrinsic motivation. In this way the drawings may also correspond to Deligny's *repérer* or locating of the autistic self in the world through gesture, where the lines can be understood as traces of the movement of the hand in the world rather than being understood as a thought-out project directed by the hand with intention. In this sense, after Deligny, the drawings are an *acting* rather than a *making* or a *doing*. Like reading they are not passive, but neither are they entirely intentional.²²⁴

Working with the messy and entangled relations and interstices between drawing, reading, and writing in this way shows how the lens of neurodivergence allows me to think in an expanded

²²⁴ Ibid., Deligny, Drew and Porter, p. 212.

way about the reading of artists. Both neurodivergence and the pursuit of art require the acknowledgement of multiple relations to sensing and affect and to the idea that these differences can be described and communicated in multimodal ways. Yergeau and Walker's idea of neuroqueering, discussed in the Scouring chapter, offers the possibility that non-normative ways of sensing and communicating can be embraced and nurtured, enabling neurodivergent thriving in new ways. This positive belief in a diversity of modes of sensing and being chimes with the sensitivity to the world prized by artists, in strong contrast to earlier paradigms' positioning of, for example autism, as inherently unsuited to the arts.

Context Collapse

Context collapse can be used to think about how to approach Milton's double empathy problem. Though the double empathy problem shows that those who are more invested in a normative position struggle to empathise with those of a neurodivergent disposition just as much as the other way round, thereby debunking the stigmatising theory of autistic mindblindness, the problem of empathising across this divide remains. I use the idea of context collapse to model why and how this is happening. As discussed in the Carding chapter and explored in the *Daughters of Necessity* texts, the idea of context collapse suggests that in performing the self we are all more or less fictions to each other, and it matters whether differences in the extent of this fictioning of self can be translated, overcome, or accepted in some way or if they have to be, any of these. Perhaps understanding this process of reading each other as fictions can lead to other forms of empathising that do not require sameness or even understanding as the basis of connection. It is this re-reading of empathy that neuroqueer thinking from Deligny to Yergeau to Milton and Chapman can help with. Reading emerges from this juxtaposition of context collapse and double empathy to repair, acknowledge and work with context collapse, with reading positioned as a structurally necessary recognition of not-knowing.

If I understand the performance of myself as involving some extent of fictioning, can I recognise this unknowability of the other as perhaps some kind of encryption, or means of necessary self-protection? It is possible to reframe intimacy and understanding without demanding total disclosure or legibility in the same way as I can read a poem or story for the first and even second time without forcing it to make immediate sense. Working with an expanded understanding of reading suggests that there are multiple valences to the reception of signals from the world and other people. In accepting that they do not all need to be understood all the time, the time and resources to gradually shift attention to and tune into the valences that do need to be understood now, can be reallocated accordingly.

Reading is always collaborative and co-creative and as such is an exercise in trust. Being explicit about ideas such as context collapse and what is at risk or at stake in reading helps to establish a clear sense of potential harms in misunderstanding or misreading, and what is made vulnerable in opening to reading. Addressing the risks of reading, by thinking with context collapse, is a necessary first step in thinking about the ethics of bringing expanded reading with divinatory and speculative systems such as the Tarot into an art school context. The value of focusing on receptive aspects of art study cannot be gained by bypassing the real problems encountered by neurodivergent art students, leading them to have every reason to distrust and protect themselves in such environments. Safer spaces must not only be deliberately constructed, they must be maintained, as a collaborative, negotiated and ongoing relation between teachers and students, students and each other and by students in relation to themselves, with an acknowledgement that context collapse can never be wholly eradicated from the reading relation. Learning to be generous and gentle first to the self and then to the others encountered in reading is crucial to nurture the bravery required to empathise across

context collapse and the unknown factors implicit in any encounter. I found that, in working with reading as an object of research as well as a method, there was a far greater need for both gentleness and bravery than I had expected. This was necessary in all aspects of the practice elements of the research and became evident particularly after suffering significant mental health repercussions from overwork and stress.

Art School

Applying practices of expanded reading in the art school challenges normative pedagogical practices and assumptions commonly demonstrated in such a context in the UK. These are characterised by the structuring role of executive function and intention in relation to widespread ideas about planning, development and executive function in art making. Generic tropes of art pedagogy such as the project proposal and its relation to theorising and reading in contextual studies, the artist's statement and its relation to medium specificity, expertise, and disciplinary positioning, and identity, life drawing and its relation to motor skills, goal-setting and internal visualisation, or indeed the studio crit and the requirement of certain types of oracy, rhetoric and sociality determining suitability to participate in it, all show the extent to which neurotypicality and investment in the idea of cognitive norms shape art study in the institution and indeed are offered as proof of its legitimacy in comparison with other subject disciplines. The way in which norms of practice at art school exclude neuroqueer and neurodivergent students is discussed in detail in the chapters on Sourcing, Carding, Assembling and Drafting.

Tarot is a system for visualising and rendering tangible the reading process that is uniquely appropriate for potentially neurodivergent spaces such as art schools. Working with students in the *Reading and telling with Tarot* workshop drew attention to the fact that Tarot appeals to art students for multiple reasons. As a visually, gesturally, historically, and contextually rich

performative storytelling methodology, Tarot allows for a range of relations to the divinatory, including those that are more speculative and ambivalent than explicitly spiritual, while also leaving space for those whose relationship to such reading is anchored by belief in spiritual matters. Most powerfully, Tarot offers a structure with which to organise performance to self that allows the individual to frame their own questions about their practice and research as well as holding space to attend to their own receptive and responsive capacity.

Art school allows for the multimodality needed to negotiate and undertake expanded reading practices such as those I employ in the practice submission, including Tarot, autoethnography, and drawing, as an aspect of performance. Such a relation to practice required that this research be undertaken in an art school environment where there is enough multimodal tolerance for the employment of arts methods to allow their relation to reading to be interrogated. This is not to suggest that art school as it usually is, is an ideal environment for expanded reading practices to take place in. Indeed, the prevailing relationship with reading in many art schools is fraught with frustration, avoidance, lack of time, and frequent interruption, as I have shown above, and in the chapters on Scouring, Carding, Assembling and Drafting. The strategies generated by my study are intended to help, ease, and enable reading in the art school environment, while at the same time expanding the sense of reading to include the full potential of artists' reading as it is already happening, often unacknowledged and unrepresented. The idea of art and visual practice is widely characterised by creation and productivity. In contrast, this study has worked to acknowledge and characterise art according to its receptive capacity.

Outcomes

By slowing and making tangible the process of reading multimodally and multi-sensorially, the idea of reading can expand to include the full receptive capacity of art, thus acknowledging

and including the reading of both artists and neurodivergent people. Beyond inclusion for its own sake, this expansion enriches the idea of both reading and art itself by acknowledging the role of context collapse and challenging the positivist and binary construction of art as creative and reading as passive. Reading as the receptive capacity of art is not a passive state of consumption but a carefully enacted practice of opening, attending, questioning, absorption, reflection, and study. Positioning such reading as a tool for arts' pedagogy challenges embedded, normative and ableist assumptions about progress, achievement, and talent implicit in current pedagogical scholarship and practice in arts' education. Expanded reading, as part of the divinatory, speculative lineages exemplified in this study by the Tarot, questions the imperatives of productivity, efficiency and creativity that have led to the ongoing exclusion of disabled and neurodivergent artists and students from arts' study. Significantly, it is these same assumptions that, against all ethical concerns, drive the recent exponential industrial expansion of the computational automation of visual representation and its reading. The use of Large Language Models (LLMs) and General Adversarial Networks (GANs) as part of the development of so called Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for art-making and teaching, has become widespread and is being aggressively promoted by governments, corporations and technologists as education providers in the name of innovation and competition.²²⁵ The very notion of intelligence at the core of AI thinking is challenged by neurodivergent scholarship on the histories of minds and their diversity.²²⁶ Given that, technologically, both LLMs and the deck of Tarot cards employ randomness, and the constructing of prompts or queries, as well as reading in similar ways – the innovation of LLMs is, significantly, the deployment of enormous processing power to the automation of reading so extensive and fast human mortality

²²⁵ In 2024 the UK Government commissioned an AI assistant Aila for school teachers working in any subject to plan lessons. *Oak National Academy: Aila (Oak's AI Lesson Assistant)* (no date) GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/algorithmic-transparency-records/oak-national-academy-aila-oaks-ai-lesson-assistant> (Accessed: 23 February 2025)

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapman 2023, p52

previously rendered it impossible – the potential application by neuroqueer and neurodivergent art students of divinatory structures of expanded reading to art practice seems both urgent and generative. Such an application would be possible at a fraction of the cost in energy, resources and extractive labour and information practices of the application of AI.^{227, 228} Indeed, the similarity between historical approaches to divination and the current use of AI chatbots such as Chat-GPT is undeniable. The syllabus for a course run at NYU by artist, technologist and educator, Allison Parrish for well over a decade offers a strong historical basis for this comparison and makes the case for teaching divination in relation to technologically informed arts' study²²⁹ With these comparisons in mind it seems important to note that, as a pedagogical tool, expanded reading, if integrated into arts' study ethically, as this study hopes to lay the groundwork towards doing, could offer an unprecedented framework with which to approach teaching and nurturing a critical and informed structural understanding of AI.

While working on this Ph.D., I was powerfully aware of the parallels between divination and AI as these new technologies were being developed and put into widespread use in realtime across almost every field of human endeavour. Indeed, such awareness motivated even my earliest research proposals. From the beginning of the study I was clear that, if I began using AI while doing this research it might become impossible to understand the research without it, or to think about divinatory practice, or indeed, research or arts' practice as distinct from AI. This moment felt like the last moment it might be possible to do so. In order to avoid the study becoming embroiled in AI fever beyond its own scope, I made the decision early on not to use

²²⁷ Nidham Jegham, et al. *How Hungry Is AI? Benchmarking Energy, Water, and Carbon Footprint of LLM Inference*. 2025. *ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2505.09598>.

²²⁸ C Soto and Jackie Wang. (2023) *Will AI replace writers — and the rest of us? An L.A. scholar-poet games out the future*, *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2023-08-23/will-ai-replace-writers-christopher-soto-jackie-wang-game-out-the-future> (Accessed: 23 February 2025).

²²⁹ Allison Parrish, *Electronic Rituals, Oracles and Fortune Telling* course syllabus at NYU <http://eroft.decontextualize.com/> (Accessed 16th August 2025)

any AI services to further my research, and, although by the end of the study this had become hard to avoid – with AI services becoming integrated into all forms of web search by default to name just one area of research activity affected— I certainly avoided the use of Chat-GPT or any other AI chatbot or writing assistant at all. With this in mind I hope this study can be understood as being about divination and expanded reading, rather than an investigation into the relationship between reading and AI. In maintaining this separation, my intention has been to make it possible to begin the construction of a critical and ethical challenge against the normative assumptions, rooted in racist and eugenicist behaviourist thinking about minds and the production of knowledge, that are fundamental the development of AI.

CONCLUSION

‘a ball of 10 cm diameter made of a thick thread of 1 mm diameter possesses (in latent fashion) several distinct effective dimensions.

To an observer placed far away, the ball appears as a zero-dimensional figure: a point. (Anyhow, it is asserted by Blaise Pascal and by medieval philosophers that on a cosmic scale our whole world is but a point!) As seen from a distance of 10 cm resolution, the ball of thread is a three-dimensional figure. At 10 mm, it is a mess of one-dimensional threads. At 0.1 mm, each thread becomes a column and the whole becomes a three-dimensional figure again. At 0.01 mm, each column dissolves into fibers, and the ball again becomes one-dimensional, and so on, with the dimension crossing over repeatedly from one value to another. When the ball is represented by a finite number of atomlike pinpoints, it becomes zero-dimensional again.’

Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*

A wound-up ball of string or yarn is called a ‘clew’.

Two of Swords



Figure 25



Figure 26 The Two of Swords from the Tarot de Marseille

Summary and Objectives

This study has investigated reading at art school by expanding reading to include its tangible outputs, its divinatory precursors, and its multi-sensory and multimodal effects and affects. These objectives have been addressed in theory and practice through the development of art works in the form of an autoethnographic text, *Daughters of Necessity*, drawing, handwriting, collage, and video in *Clew*, and in the thesis, with regard to histories of neuroqueer authorship and rhetoric, and of writing about art school. Workshops conducted with students of Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam combined theorising about expanded reading with teaching practice, giving me a chance to test the value of these ideas, and the application of expanded reading practice, in the context of pedagogy. In the thesis, I trace the trajectory of all these efforts to work with reading as a research object. In it, I have structured my thoughts using the meta-methodological model of spinning – a material and physical process requiring a similar quality of attention to reading – to ground my thinking about reading in material and tangible form.

Research Questions

By acknowledging divination as a form of reading and precursor to conventional literacy I have expanded and drawn attention to the multimodal potential of reading in arts practice and pedagogy. Working with divinatory structures such as the Tarot has allowed me to represent reading and make it tangible. In what is left of the art school, I have employed Tarot to draw on reading as the receptive capacity of art to repair and reorientate collapsing contexts. In this way, art school has offered a site in which to confront the idea of empathy without sacrificing difference, and where what is held in common does not imply sameness. This work has allowed artists' reading and the neurodiversity paradigm to inform and illuminate each other, opening art practice and pedagogies to new ways of sensing and receiving. By focusing on reading rather than on writing, art practice itself has been recontextualised as study, with a focus on the

receptive rather than on the creative, and in so doing, widening not just access to study, but also expanding potential for epistemic justice for neurodivergent people.

Contributions

This work offers a methodological contribution by presenting spinning as meta-methodology. I offer spinning and its stages of production as opportunities to think about states of attention and receptivity in time to movement, tension and tensility, and to consider this as a form of reading. This is the primary image of an expanded reading that this study upholds, with the thread-as-outcome as the tracing of an intangible process: a reading made object. In spinning, the balance between receptivity and productivity must be constantly maintained, allowing creative and receptive modes of attention to synchronise. This makes spinning ideal for tuning and balancing attention. It also helps with thinking about how attention works in reading and how to approach the question of how to trace and expand reading rather than, as per the conventional approach to literacy, by attempting to deal primarily with writing. It also makes the link, important to me as a neuroqueer scholar, between spinning and stimming as a relation to object, attention and intention in reading. Through having chosen to emphasise reading over writing this study addresses a long-standing imbalance between the two modes, helping in turn to think about how other modes of production such as spinning, as pursued at art school, inherently imply their own receptive capacities, and therefore ways of reading.

As methodology, my expanded reading, derived from the meta-methodology described above, makes a further contribution by combining methods such as Tarot, autoethnography, drawing, and digital collage as ways to trace and make reading tangible. This methodology offers an account of this expanded reading and its tangible outputs led by neurodivergent and neuroqueer thinking, centring the needs of an art school milieu as a field of reading. Bringing Tarot into

the art school and centring the reading of cards as a reparative practice is a direct challenge to stigmatising beliefs about the cards as occult or even fraudulently spiritual in their function and speaks proudly to their history as a feminine coded, speculative, spiritually versatile wisdom tradition of storytelling. In addition, through attention to Tarot reading as an example of expanded reading, I have shown how reading is already gestural, embodied, multimodal, multi-sensory and interactive.

My neuroqueer appropriation from my psychiatric diagnosis of the term ADHD develops a further methodology complementary to and entwined with expanded reading. ADHD as methodology offers an approach to reading as address where before only pathologisation had been available, demanding an attitude of gentleness to self and the others involved in reading, the prioritisation of tuning attention, and the repair of relations to the world through expanded reading. This repairing of relations is informed by an understanding of Damian Milton's double empathy problem as a form of context collapse, and as context collapse, read through the lens of Fernand Deligny's work on networks and the surrealist sensibilities of art school, as an opportunity for repair and thus reorientation. Although Milton's double empathy problem refers specifically to the binary of autistic and 'non-autistic' this study seeks to neuroqueer the arbitrary and divisive exceptionalism of that framing and ask what neuroqueering can do for this problem of empathising across or in spite of neurotypically understood difference. ADHD as a way of being for so long considered antithetical to autism is here envisaged as reaching out in a neuroqueer gesture of solidarity across the apparent empathic divide to address and redress the 'problem' of double empathy without resorting to a need for sameness. In this way I resolve my self-diagnosis as autistic with my 'official' diagnosis as ADHD, embracing both. One of the major contributions of this study is personal, the resolution of my own self-diagnostic journey, while also of wider impact in that tracing my own self-diagnostic journey,

methodologically I model the role of this journey in the context of art study and expanded reading for others autoethnographically.

Limitations and future

A significant shaping force for this study has been my mental health, which following the onset of stress-induced psychosis in 2021, saw me taking a break from study for eighteen months during which time I was briefly hospitalised in a mental health facility and began taking anti-psychotic medication. Given these circumstances, it has been of great personal importance to me that the study has foregrounded neurodivergent experience at art school; however, at the same time this very experience has left me often unable to progress the research as far and as fast as I would have liked. In order to centre my own needs as a student and limit harm, I have, led by crip scholarship around time, attempted where possible to do the work of addressing this impatience with myself as both necessary and productive limitation, and as part of methodology.²³⁰ Choosing that the practice focus on setting up ongoing processes rather than on finished projects has ultimately helped me in finding my way to developing the concept of ADHD as methodology. With this in mind, works produced by the Ph.D. as outputs should be considered research artefacts and works in progress, in the spirit of Fernand Deligny against ‘the thought-out project’. This still leaves scope for processes to continue and develop where desirable, and for outcomes to be more fully realised, particularly as regards dissemination, in the future.

Building on the work undertaken as part of this research, holding workshops with undergraduate students of Fine Art, I hope in future to be able to conduct further similar workshops in other art schools, combining all three approaches trialled at Sheffield Hallam into

²³⁰ Alison Kafer. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 26-27.

a longer programme explicitly concerned with expanded reading, as outlined in the chapter on Drafting. This programme would offer an introduction to divination with Tarot, reading out of context, and reading objects, with Tarot as the main framing device, as a means to stretch and challenge ideas of reading in the art school. Such a programme would complement wider programmes of both studio practice and contextual studies, working as a bridge between theory and practice. In addition to conducting teaching of this kind in conventional art schools I am interested in taking versions of this programme or lectures based on it to alternative art schools, spaces, and collectives, particularly those already embracing the neurodiversity paradigm and/or practicing mad solidarity and liberation.

As well as continuing with workshops there is scope to continue my practice in various other ways. Though I have presented *Clew* in a seminar and at a conference I have not yet sought wider publication or exhibition for *Daughters of Necessity* or *Clew*, preferring to keep them as artefacts for study while working on the thesis in order to focus on the Ph.D. as a whole. Feedback on the presentation of *Clew*, accompanied by an edited text excerpted from the thesis, even from very limited audience, was overwhelmingly positive, and suggests that sharing it more widely would be of benefit both to audiences and to the research. I believe that *Clew* has great potential for incorporation into a lecture practice, possibly as part of the above workshop programme, illuminating as it does the way in which I have developed strategies to visualise reading. Working with an extensive archive of notebooks and other visual artefacts, there is also the potential to continue or extend working with the methods with which *Clew* was developed. This is also true of *Daughters of Necessity* although in the case of the texts I feel that seeking publication would be more appropriate at this stage rather than continuing to add to the work. While the two pieces stand independently as works in themselves, also of interest is the possibility of joining together these two strands of work in a more substantial way. This

could include using extracts of *Daughters of Necessity* as voiceover for *Clew*, or working with the collages that make up *Clew* to illustrate an artist's book of *Daughters of Necessity*. In addition to continuing to work with existing material, I look forward to re-starting my personal notebook practice once the Ph.D. is completed.

Further Questions

This study has, for reasons of scope and avoidance of appropriation and extraction, deliberately focussed on the English-speaking world and the tradition of art education in the UK. This is not to deny that there are more expansive ideas of both reading and divination available both historically and culturally, outside of this deliberately narrow remit. In fact, it is exactly to state that the lack of consideration for reading I interrogate is likely particular to modern English secular creative practice, and it is for this reason it is precisely here that I locate this research. This study takes 'as read' that there is no tradition of literacy to which reading is unimportant, but I have chosen to situate the research where there is most to be gained from its reparative approach. Future research would however ideally have the scope to further acknowledge, for example, the important roles of reading in the Islamic, Jewish, or Chinese traditions of literacy and how these relate also to the history of divination.²³¹ It has been my observation that where practices of calligraphy thrive, as in the above cultures, there reading is also taken seriously. Much of the work I undertook in *Clew* to visualise reading could be furthered by more detailed research into calligraphy, including the illuminated texts of Medieval English, especially their relation to the development of Tarot cards.

²³¹ Michael Muhammad Knight. *Sufi Deleuze: Secretions of Islamic Atheism*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2023, p. 41, 'The name *al-Qur'an* literally means "The Recitation" (or "The Reading," with "reading" as understood within an aural tradition prior to a fully elaborated script or the development of a book culture)'.

In looking for directions to extend the research conceptually, nowhere is reading less tangible than that reading which takes place in the black boxes of artificial intelligence's large language models. As artificial intelligence becomes commonplace as a strategy for making and thinking in creative practice at art school, both in the production of texts and of images, further research into expanded reading and art school would need to confront the now vast reading capacity of computational machines in use in the study of art. Attending to divinatory reading with its employment of chance, could illuminate the use of randomness and stochastic values in machine learning and artificial intelligence, potentially reframing the fallacies of techno-determinism and data-positivism as extraction and imperialism. That divination, and so, reading are precursors to machine learning is not widely acknowledged and this study has attempted to lay the groundwork for such a statement to have a strong basis.



Figure 27

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