Unit 2: Positions through Contextualising



Written Response

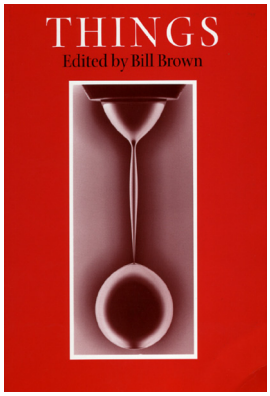
Bibliography

12 references organised in five turns.

Turn 01 · Why is residue worth taking seriously?

Before any question about reading, divination, or apparatus, there is a prior question: why should an everyday, overlooked, discardable thing be the site of serious research at all?

01. Bill Brown - Thing theory



Brown distinguishes between "objects" (functional, transparent, and used) and "objects" (objects no longer usable and beginning to absorb meaning: a chipped bowl, a broken watch, residue in an empty cup). He is interested in the moment of transformation: when does an object become an "object"? My tea dregs are in that moment. The tea is finished; the cup has fulfilled its purpose; what remains is no longer tea, nor is it yet an image—it is precisely this unfinished state that allows the interpretive mechanism to intervene and imbue it with meaning. Brown clarifies my core question: I am not studying tea, nor reading; I am studying when everyday objects can be symbolically rewritten.

02. The Stitch - MacGuffin Magazine, issue 11



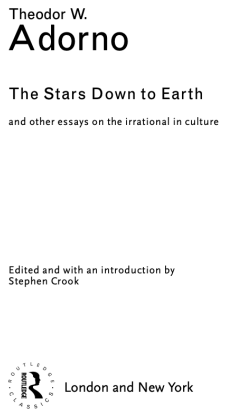
An entire issue of MacGuffin focuses on one tiny thing: a stitch. Through articles, photo essays, and interviews, the editors train their attention on something universally overlooked, and gradually surface a layered field of labour, gender, ritual, and materiality. The issue's editorial form mirrors the method I have been working toward in the studio: select something unnoticed, stay with it long enough, until the attention itself begins to surface structures that everyday use had hidden. Brown theoretically allowed me to take this residue seriously, while MacGuffin demonstrated in practice that a tiny thing can support a lengthy, multi-faceted exploration. It also marked a tension I wanted to avoid: in some pieces, warmth around the stitch crowded out the structural critique. I did not want my treatment of the tea residue to drift the same way — the mechanism around this object is not warm; it is unsettling.

Turn 02 · Why are we still reading it?

Granting that residue is worth attending to, the next question is not historical but contemporary: why does anyone today still want to read residue at all? Without this question, my project risks treating tasseography as a quaint Victorian artefact. These two references hold the project to the present.

03. Adorno, Theodor W.

Adorno's 1953 study of the Los Angeles Times astrology column showed that interpreting horoscopes was not a remnant of pre-rational thinking, but a thoroughly modern symptom—a mechanism he called "pseudo-individualization": a system that treats each reader as "you," yet structurally ignores any individual, thus creating a feeling of being attended to by some actually indifferent force. This shifted the focus of my research project. Previously, I had viewed tea divination as a closed historical spectacle—a Victorian exhibition. Adorno raised a deeper question: why do people still want to interpret these relics? This book extends my exploration from 1881 to the present. This directly influenced my studio iterations, which had to demonstrate the participation of contemporary readers, not just the authority of a Victorian dictionary.



04. Astrology in the age of uncertainty - Smallwood

Tolentino's 2018 New Yorker essay "How Astrology Took Over the Internet" offers the contemporary counterpart to Adorno: a journalistic account of the 2010s astrology boom situated within precarity, the wellness economy, and the search for narrative under late capitalism. Without Tolentino, my engagement with Adorno would have read as nostalgic — as if the 1953 LA Times column were the real object and the 2010s a degraded echo of it. Tolentino corrects this: the contemporary forms are not degraded — they are running on the same logic of pseudo-individuation Adorno identified, now scaled to apps, algorithms, and subscription wellness brands. The pairing of Adorno and Tolentino lets me argue that my project addresses a current discourse, not an antiquarian one. This pairing forms the spine of my critical position on contemporary readership, and grounds the move from Foulsham 1881 to the present that runs through the publication.

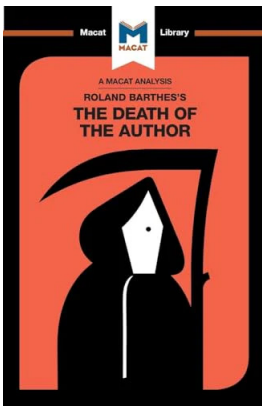


Turn 03 · Who is the reader, really?

If the dictionary is fixed but the meaning is not, where does meaning come from? This Turn moves the question from the artefact to the reader — and from the reader to the conditions under which that reader reads.

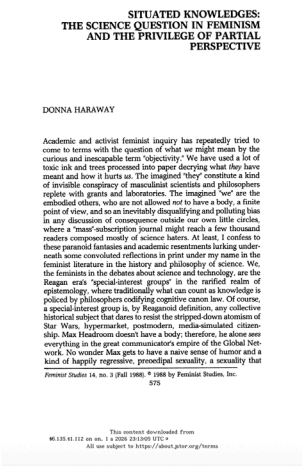
05. Barthes, Roland

Barthes proposes that a text's unity lies not in its origin (the author) but in its destination (the reader) — meaning is not deposited but produced in the act of reading. This is the structural justification for the central move in my studio project: when three readers look at the same tea residue and one sees a kangaroo, one sees two fish, and one sees a dragon, the divination apparatus is not failing — it is doing exactly what it is designed to do. The reader is the apparatus. What I take from Barthes more specifically is permission to design for multiplicity rather than against it: my book is not trying to teach the "correct" reading of residue; it is trying to make the production-site of reading visible. This is the strongest candidate for my extended critical analysis on a text.



06. Haraway, Donna

If Barthes tells me that meaning happens at the site of the reader, Haraway tells me that no reader is generic — every reading happens from a body, a place, a moment. There is no "view from nowhere." This is foundational for me in a way I underestimated when I first listed it. My entry into this project came from an earlier work where I hacked a Riso printer and exposed a hidden 90° calibration offset — a rule the machine never declared. That experience, more than any text, trained my eye to look for silent grammars in cultural systems. Haraway gives me the vocabulary for what that experience means methodologically: my reading of tasseography is a partial perspective, shaped by a designer who has previously been bitten by the silent grammar of a machine. Acknowledging this is not a disclaimer.



SITUATED KNOWLEDGES:
THE SCIENCE QUESTION IN FEMINISM
AND THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTIAL
PERSPECTIVE

DONNA HARAWAY

Academic and activist feminist inquiry has repeatedly tried to come to terms with the question of what we might mean by the curious and inescapable term "objectivity." We have used a lot of toxic ink and trees processed into paper decrying what *they* have meant and how it hurts *us*. The imagined "they" constitute a kind of invisible conspiracy of masculinist scientists and philosophers replete with grants and laboratories. The imagined "we" are the embodied others, who are not allowed *not* to have a body, a finite point of view, and so an inevitably disqualifying and polluting bias in any discussion of consequence outside our own little circles, where a "mass"-subscription journal might reach a few thousand readers composed mostly of science haters. At least, I confess to these paranoid fantasies and academic resentments lurking underneath some convoluted reflections in print under my name in the feminist literature in the history and philosophy of science. We, the feminists in the debates about science and technology, are the Reagan era's "special-interest groups" in the rarified realm of epistemology, where traditionally what can count as knowledge is policed by philosophers codifying cognitive canon law. Of course, a special-interest group is, by Reaganoid definition, any collective historical subject that dares to resist the stripped-down atomism of Star Wars, hypermarket, postmodern, media-simulated citizenship. Max Headroom doesn't have a body; therefore, he alone sees everything in the great communicator's empire of the Global Network. No wonder Max gets to have a naive sense of humor and a kind of happily regressive, preoedipal sexuality, a sexuality that

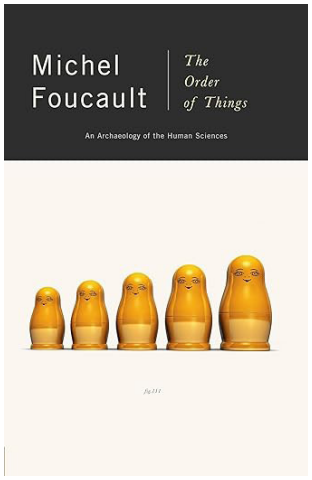
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Turn 04 · What is the dictionary doing?

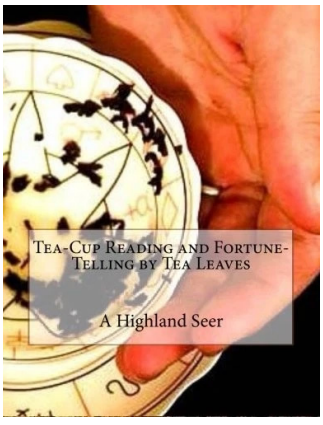
The reader produces meaning, but the reader does not produce it from nothing — there is always a dictionary at hand. This Turn examines the dictionary itself: as historical artefact, as theoretical object, as apparatus.

07. Foucault, Michel



Foucault opens with Borges's "Chinese encyclopaedia" — a taxonomy that classifies animals as "those belonging to the Emperor, embalmed ones, suckling pigs, those drawn with a very fine camelhair brush…" — to show that every classification system is a historically situated invention which presents itself as a discovery of natural order. The Foulsham 1881 Tea-Cup Reading dictionary is exactly such a system: it lists symbol after symbol as if cataloguing the world, but what it is in fact cataloguing is the social anxieties and aspirations of a particular moment — marriage, money, illness, the journey. Foucault gives me the theoretical ground on which to stand when I argue that the dictionary's authority is not natural but manufactured. The challenge he sets me, which my studio work has not yet fully met, is to make this manufacture visible rather than merely describe it.

08. Tea-Cup Reading and Fortune-Telling by Tea Leaves

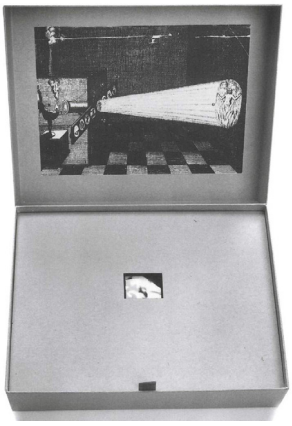


This is the primary source my studio response responds to. A small Victorian manual offered as a parlour amusement, it lists symbols A–Z with fixed dictionary meanings: anchor for hope, bird for good news, coffin for illness or loss. What makes this reference indispensable is not its content but its form — the typesetting, the alphabetised structure, the confident tone of taxonomy applied to chance — because the form is the apparatus. My publication graft-reproduces this form (faithful typesetting, faithful structure) and lets the form do the critical work: the dictionary, when reproduced earnestly enough, exposes its own arbitrariness. Per the brief, this is the project-reference my studio iteration is directly responding to, and is therefore a strong candidate for my extended critical analysis on a project.

Turn 05 · How do you make the dictionary visible?

Critique-by-description is not enough; I need critique-by-construction. This Turn gathers the methodological neighbours — practitioners who do not write about hidden grammars, but build apparatuses in which those grammars become legible by being operated.

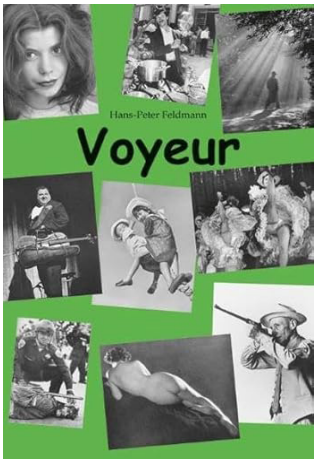
09. Hiller, Susan



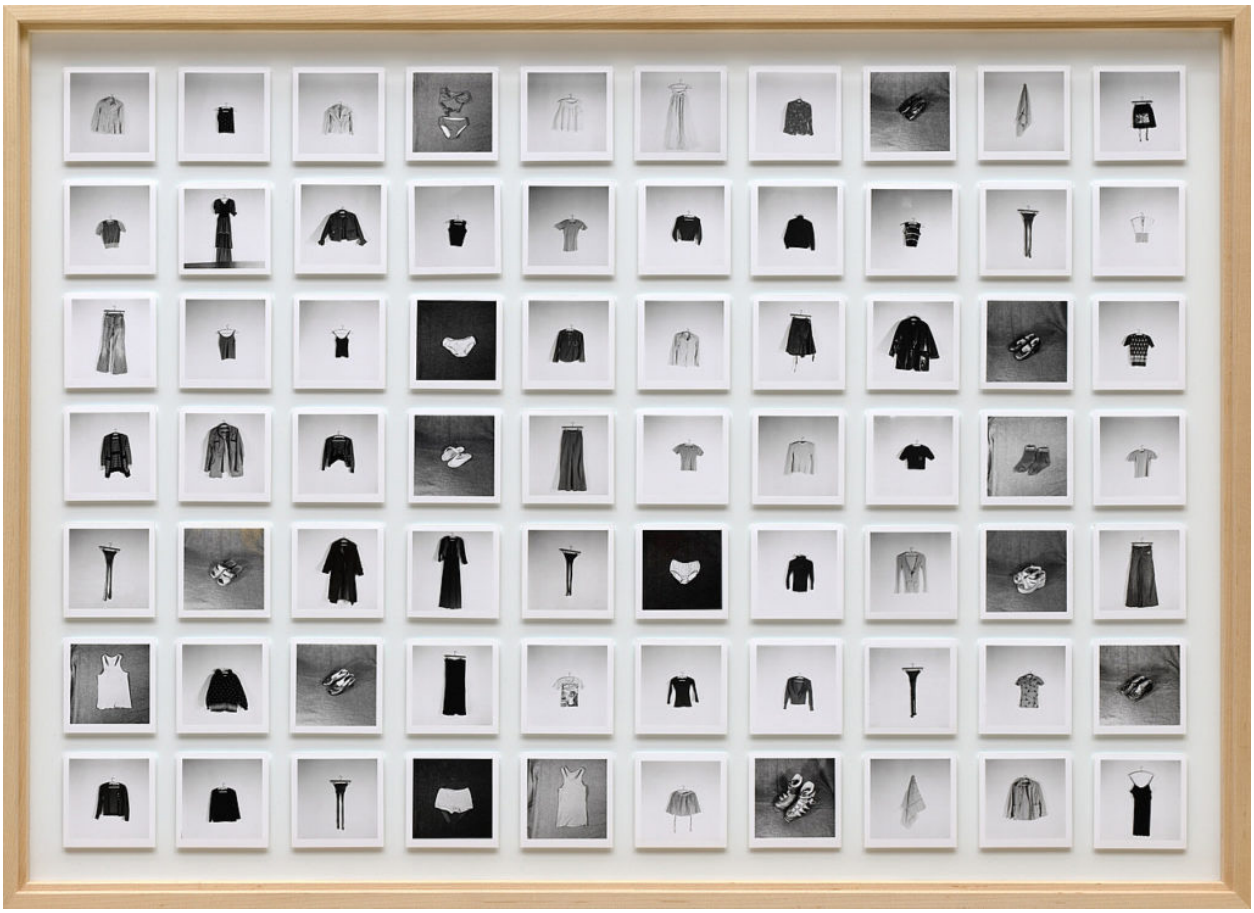
Over four years, Hiller filled fifty cardboard archaeology boxes with collected objects — vials of holy water, family snapshots, pressed plants, hair — each catalogued with the dry voice of an ethnographic museum. The work is exhibited as an archive, but it is an archive without a stable object: the labels gesture toward classifications that the things refuse to confirm. What Hiller models for me is a method: she does not critique the museum's apparatus from outside; she stages it from within, faithfully enough that the apparatus betrays itself. This is the position I am trying to reach with Foulsham's 1881 manual — to inhabit the dictionary's grammar so closely that its arbitrariness becomes visible to the reader, without my having to point at it.



10. Feldmann, Hans-Peter



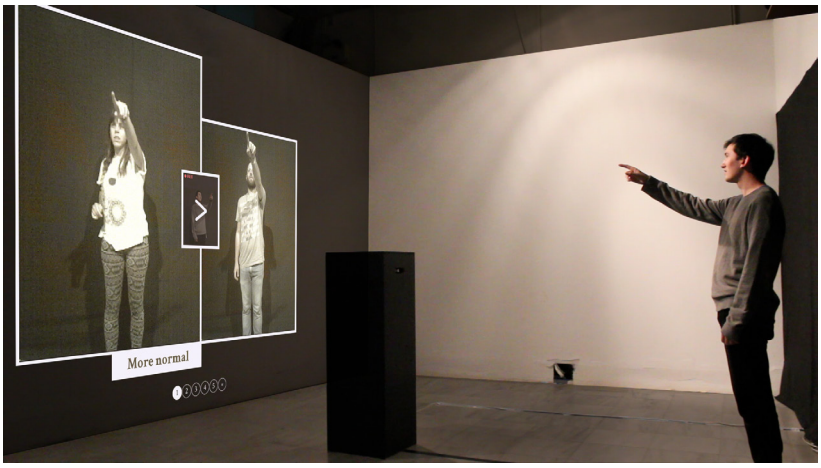
Feldmann gathers found photographs from postcards, magazines, family albums and arranges them in unnumbered, unattributed sequences. No captions, no key, no claim. The book asks the reader to do all the work of meaning-making, and in doing so reveals how much of "what a photograph says" is supplied by the viewer rather than the image. This is a project-form demonstration of the position I take from Barthes — and it offers me a permission I had not given myself: that a book can refuse to caption its own images. The current draft of my publication is heavy with text scaffolding. Feldmann shows me what it would mean to withdraw the scaffolding and let the readings happen in the reader.

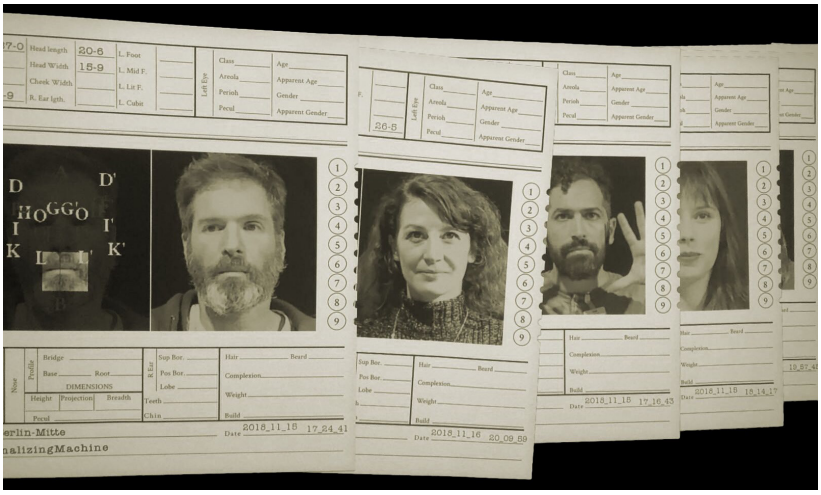


11. Zer-Aviv, Mushon, Stavy, Dan and Weissenstern, Eran



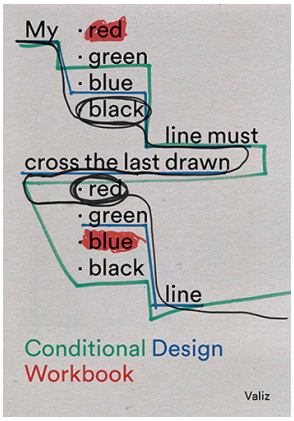
Zer-Aviv and collaborators build a working classification machine modelled on Galton's and Bertillon's physiognomic taxonomies and invite visitors to operate it: to choose, from a series of faces, the one they consider most "normal." Their choices are then fed back into the machine, training it. The visitor leaves having participated in the very algorithmic bias the work is critiquing. This is the strongest methodological model in my bibliography: Zer-Aviv does not describe bias, he constructs an apparatus that lets visitors produce it. My book attempts the same move on a smaller scale: a reader who opens Reading the Residue and recognises a "kangaroo" in a silhouette has already participated in the divination apparatus.

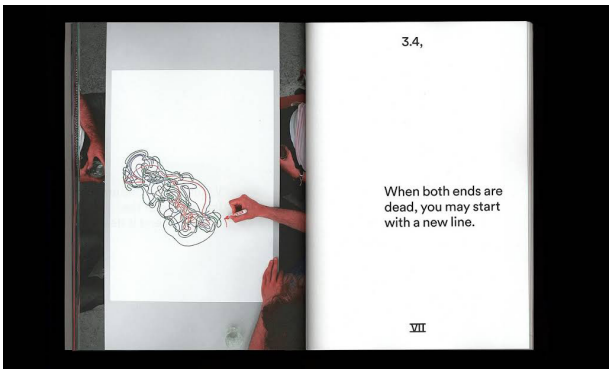




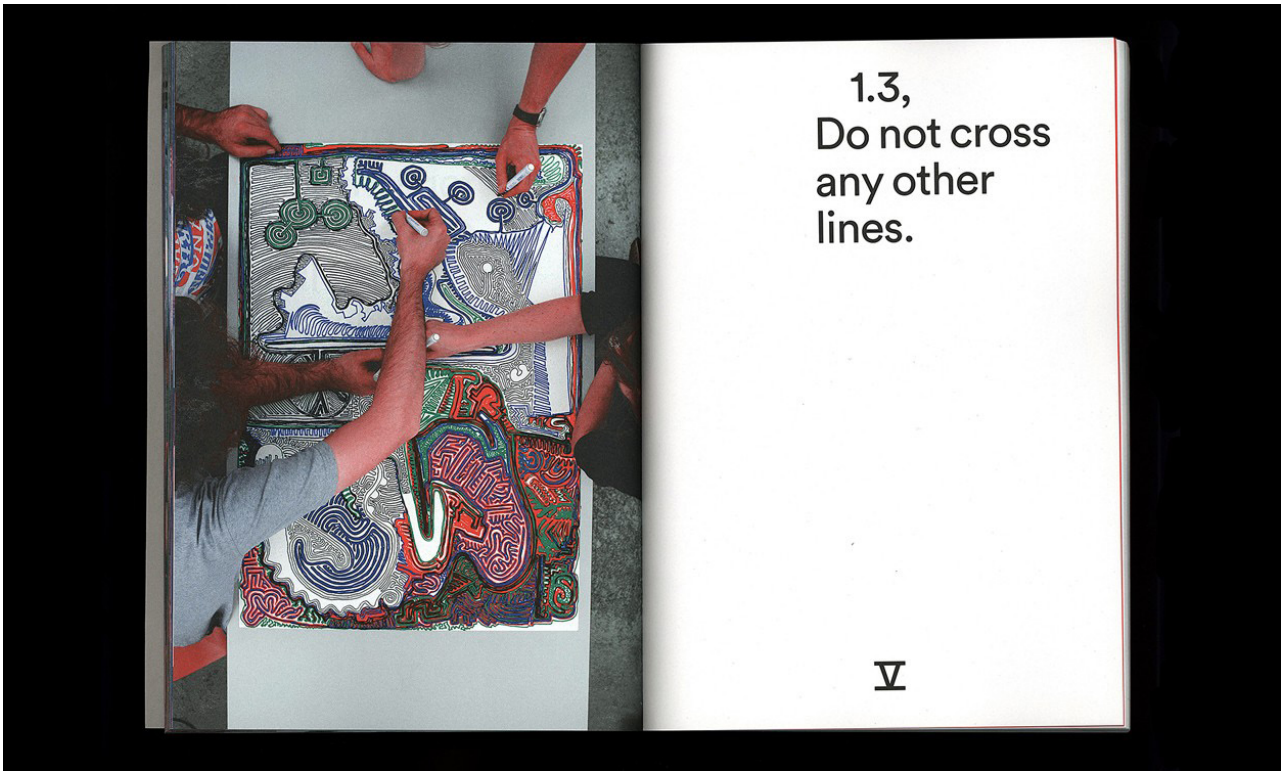
12. Maurer, Luna, Paulon, Edo, Puckey, Jonathan and Wouters, Roel

The Conditional Design group propose a methodology in which the designer specifies the rules rather than the outcome; the artefact is whatever the rules, executed by participants or processes, happen to produce. This is the mirror image of what tasseography does — and what I will do when I design my own reading system. Where Foulsham's manual fixes the outputs (anchor = hope) and hides the rule that produced them, Conditional Design makes the rule the work and lets the outputs vary. Reading this workbook alongside Foulsham clarified my own position: my project is not anti-rule, it is anti-hidden-rule.









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Critical Analysis #1

Adorno, The Stars Down to Earth: how rational submission wears irrational clothes

In "The Stars Down to Earth" — the title essay of the 1994 Routledge collection — Adorno turns to a seemingly trivial cultural object: the daily astrology column of the Los Angeles Times, which he analysed over a sustained period in 1952–53. His thesis is striking in its inversion of common sense. Astrology, Adorno argues, is not a survival of pre-rational thought clinging on at the margins of a rationalised society. It is, rather, a thoroughly modern symptom — a mode in which the reader of an advanced industrial society submits to abstract, opaque systems (the market, the bureaucracy, the workplace) while receiving the experience of being addressed personally. The column offers, on the one hand, "scientific-sounding" authority (the planets, the calculations, the typographic seriousness of the printed prediction), and on the other, a tone of intimate counsel. The reader is told what to do today — with confidence, but also with the alibi that the advice descends from a system larger than any individual.

What makes the essay important to my project is not its content alone but its method. Adorno does not philosophise about astrology in the abstract; he reads a specific column, in a specific newspaper, in a specific year, and lets the formal properties of that column — its rhetoric, its address, its typographic conventions, the way it splits the reader's day into compartments — carry the argument. The form of the column is the apparatus. This is the move I am attempting in my own studio response to Foulsham's 1881 Tea-Cup Reading: not to write about the dictionary's authority but to reproduce its form so faithfully that the form itself betrays its grounds. Where Adorno reads the LA Times, I am, in effect, "reading" Foulsham — and where Adorno's reading takes the form of an essay, mine takes the form of a graft-publication.

The essay also forces a difficult revision of my earlier framing. I had been treating tasseography as a closed historical curiosity — a Victorian artefact to be excavated and re-presented. Adorno makes this position untenable. If astrology in 1953 Los Angeles was already a modern phenomenon — not a leftover — then tasseography in 2025 is even less excusable as antiquarianism. The reader who picks up my book today is not encountering a relic; they are encountering an apparatus that is structurally continuous with the horoscope apps on their phone. My project, read through Adorno, is therefore not about Foulsham; it is about why the form of the divination manual continues to work on a contemporary reader. This is precisely the shift the studio iteration must respond to.

Adorno's analysis does, however, present a position I want to push against. His diagnostic tone leans toward Frankfurt-School pessimism: the reader is figured as captured, the apparatus as totalising. My studio work needs the reader to remain — at least in part — an active participant who can be brought to see the apparatus, not only suffer it. This is where Adorno needs to be read alongside Barthes (#5 in this bibliography) and Tolentino (#4): Barthes returns agency to the reader at the moment of reading, and Tolentino — writing in 2019 about the contemporary astrology boom — gives me a more recent, less wholly pessimistic vocabulary for why people choose to read residue at all. The pairing means that what shapes my next iteration is not Adorno alone, but the triangle Adorno–Barthes–Tolentino: a position that takes the apparatus seriously without collapsing the reader into it.

Adorno, T.W. and Crook, S. (2007). The stars down to earth and other essays on the irrational in culture. London Routledge.

Critical Analysis #2

Tea-Cup Reading and Fortune-Telling by Tea Leaves (1881): the apparatus that pretends to be a list

The 1881 manual Tea-Cup Reading and Fortune-Telling by Tea Leaves, published by W. Foulsham & Co. of London and attributed only to "A Highland Seer," presents itself as a guide. It explains how to prepare a cup, how to drink it correctly, how to invert it and rotate it, and — most extensively — how to interpret the resulting residue by consulting an alphabetised dictionary of symbols. Anchor signifies hope, journey, or successful enterprise. Bird signifies good news. Coffin signifies illness or loss. The book proceeds A to Z with the assurance of a reference work. It is this assurance — and the formal apparatus that produces it — that makes the manual the primary source my studio response is built to interrogate.

Read for its content, the manual is a curiosity. Read for its form, it is something more interesting: a piece of nineteenth-century parlour publishing that has imported the visual rhetoric of the encyclopaedia into a domain — the chance configuration of wet tea leaves — that has no business being encyclopaedised. The typography is sober. The page layout is rule-bound: alphabet, entry, gloss, next entry. There are no images of actual residues; instead, idealised silhouettes are offered as keys. There is no acknowledgement that two readers looking at the same cup might disagree, nor that two cups might never produce the same shape twice. The dictionary is fixed; the residue is also, in the photograph, fixed; only the reading is variable — and the manual chooses not to notice this variability. This silence is not an omission; it is the apparatus working. The form's confidence is what allows the reader to believe that meaning was discovered rather than supplied.

This reading aligns Foulsham 1881 directly with the position Foucault sets out in The Order of Things (#7 in this bibliography): every classification system is a historically situated invention which presents itself as a discovery of natural order. The Foulsham manual is a near-perfect specimen. It catalogues social anxieties of late-Victorian Britain — marriage, money, illness, the long journey, the rival, the lover — as if they were natural categories that residue might independently fall into. Read through Foucault, the manual stops being a quaint divination guide and becomes a small archive of what its moment needed to believe was readable.

The decision this analysis forces on my studio work is structural, not stylistic. Reading the Residue — my publication response — has so far operated by reproducing Foulsham's form faithfully: the same typographic register, the same alphabetised logic, the same confident tone. The graft is intended to make the apparatus visible by inhabiting it. But faithful reproduction carries a risk that the tutor feedback on Week 3 made unmistakable: if the reproduction is too complete, the apparatus closes around it again and the reader never feels the seams. The next iteration must therefore find a way to keep Foulsham's form recognisable while introducing the contradiction the manual itself refuses to admit — that the residue, photographed honestly, is not the silhouette the dictionary needs it to be, and that different readers reading the same residue produce different fortunes. Drawing on Hiller's From the Freud Museum (#9) and Zer-Aviv's The Normalizing Machine (#11), the next version of the book will work less by reproducing the dictionary and more by operating it, in front of the reader, until the dictionary's authority becomes felt as a choice rather than a finding.

READING, T.-C. (1920). Tea-cup Reading and the Art of Fortune-telling by Tea-leaves. By a Highland Seer ... Fourth Impression. London: W. Foulsham & Co.