

Tarot as a Technology

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I situate Tarot at the worldmaking juncture where anti-oppression meets technological innovation among social justice activist communities in the United States. The adoption, appropriation, and adaptation of Tarot and other delegitimized technologies by and for marginalized communities to cultivate imaginations informed by ancestral wisdoms demonstrates the resilience and resourcefulness of social justice activism. In light of these innovations, I propose Tarot as a technology, extending the meaning of Tarot into a technology of care, for art educators to consider. My aim is to draw attention to common assumptions we make about technologies, what we choose to name as technologies, and assumptions technologies make about us, particularly in the field of art education. Art educators can use Tarot to begin an exploration of justice, where the card decks serve as tools and the reading strategies serve as techniques that constitute a practice of justice-oriented worldmaking.

KEYWORDS: Tarot, social justice, activism, technology

On June 5th, 2020, W.I.T.C.H. Boston¹ uploaded a redesigned Justice card from the iconic *Smith-Rider-Waite Tarot deck*² on their Instagram page. Merely days after the police killing of George Floyd, W.I.T.C.H. Boston explained the intentions behind creating and sharing this imagery in the caption:

By the light of the June full moon, by the shadow of the eclipse, we harness that energy to support the power of Black Americans as they bring light to the shadows of oppression on which this nation was built. Black Lives Matter. We remain

1 As stated on their website, “W.I.T.C.H. began in October of 1968 and was a collection of several independent feminist groups in the United States. W.I.T.C.H., for them, stood for many things, including ‘Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell,’ ‘Women Inspired to Tell their Collective History,’ ‘Women Interested in Toppling Consumer Holidays,’ and more” (n.d.).

2 This Tarot deck illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith in collaboration with A. E. Waite, members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, was published by the Rider Company in 1910. While most often referred to as the Rider-Waite Tarot deck, I refer to it as the *Smith-Rider-Waite Tarot deck* to emphasize Smith’s contribution.

prepared to fight white supremacy in all its forms. (W.I.T.C.H. Boston, 2020)



Figure 1. *No Justice, No Peace Card* (W.I.T.C.H. Boston, 2020).

Combining the celestial timing of its dissemination, naming of a witch identity, and iconographies of Tarot cards to convey its message of Black Lives Matter, this picture wove together contemporary heterogeneous practitioners of Tarot, astrology, and witchcraft, however temporarily, as social justice activists opposing and refusing oppressive frameworks, specifically white supremacy and anti-Blackness, in the pursuit of a more just world. “Tarot is trending,” Breena Kerr proclaimed in the *New York Times* back in 2017. More specifically, in *The American Interest* magazine, Tara Isabella Burton characterized that “progressive occultism” has become “the metaphysical symbol set threaded through the worldly ethos of modern social justice activism” (2019, para. 10).

In the *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*'s call for submissions under the theme of Pleasure Centers and Liberatory Practices, editors Joni Acuff and Sharbreon Plummer asked us: “How are artists and other practitioners beyond the academy exploring liberation within art education? What are the tools needed to begin an individual exploration of pleasure as an anti-oppressive framework within art education?” These questions prompted me to describe and share my practice of Tarot as a technology amongst communities of social justice activists. I first began engaging in this practice outside of my job in the neoliberal academic exchange and yet this community of practice sustains — no, fuels — my ability to return, again and again, to the struggle of engaging with the academy as a justice-oriented art educator. This community of justice-oriented Tarot practitioners I think with and speak of consists of overlapping groupings of people, including people identifying and/or positioned as persons with disabilities, immigrants, caregivers, abolitionists, intersectional feminists, LGBTQIA, trans, Black, Indigenous, Brown, persons of color, and more, with divergent, and at times conflicting, political stakes, commitments, and accountabilities.

Despite our differences, we converge on our practices of Tarot to care for ourselves and our interdependent relationships in this world at least in parallel with our social justice activism, if not as a way to imagine and manifest it directly. Through our time spent with Tarot as a technology shaping our lives, we share an oppositional position of *refusal* (McGranahan, 2016; Simpson, 2016) towards the hegemonic science-technology matrix rooted in oppression and manifested in what we commonly name as technologies and their worldviews. As opposed to *resistance* that emphasizes the unequal power relations within the hegemonic social order, Audra Simpson theorized that *refusal* is a presumptive claim of an equal relation by offering “its own structure of apprehension that maintains and produces sociality through time, manifest in a political posture of acute awareness of the conditions of this production” (2016, p. 329). By practicing and

developing Tarot as a technology, we are exploring what a world might be made with our refusal of what is commonly named as a technology and then justified to interact with. As technologies mediate our realities and what is named as a technology implies a judgement of worth, our time spent with Tarot is a refusal of the defaulted social progress, relations, and comprehension under the hegemonic science-technology matrix. In the following sections, I attempt to identify the significance of this practice, community, and work. In doing so, I introduce Tarot as a technology, and particularly a technology of care, with pedagogical potential, for educators and, perhaps, for students.

Technologies in and for Art Education

I sat down. I'm tired, anxious, and very scared. I drew a card. I saw a woman. I followed the name of the card to the guidebook that came along with the deck. I listened to these words³.

Technologies are of paramount importance to art education and art educators. Technologies, from pencils to lines of computer code to lesson plans, are the external *others* we engage *with* in the act of artmaking. In thinking through what we use to make things, Amelia Kraehe (2019) proposed that “it is timely and crucial to rethink technology and the various roles it plays in our lives. What do we mean by technology? What do different technologies afford? How do we engage technologies of making in art education?” (p. 4).

In discussing art education vis-à-vis technology, Mary Ann Stankiewicz (2003) offered this definition of technologies: they are “methods by which a social group provides itself with the *material objects* [emphasis mine] of their civilization” (Society for the History of Technology as cited in Stankiewicz, 2003, p. 318). However, technologies are not only the observable material objects that we call technologies but also the social order they presume, purpose, and impose. Jennifer Slack and Macgregor Wise (2005) cautioned us against understanding “technology as a ‘thing’” (p. 95) because “to focus on bounded artifacts --- on thingness -- is to deflect understanding from the ongoing energies, activities, relations, interpenetrations, and investments within which these things appear, take flight, and have effects” (pp. 96-97). In other words, we might come to name a certain object as a piece of technology, but the significance of that object lies not in its stand-alone material form but in the intentions and reflexivity it has come to manifest and materializes in practice. As Langdon Winner (1983) articulated, technologies are forms of life with values, intentions, and politics shaped by and shaping our social worlds. Read in this way,

3 The italicized vignettes that appear at the beginning of each following sections are narrations of my practice of Tarot as entangled with the writing this article.

technology can be defined as “a form of knowledge” (Wacjman, 1991, p. 14), including “what people do as well as what they know” (p. 14), that orient us towards particular epistemologies and guide our thinking, doing, and living.

Various scholars have thoroughly articulated the ways in which patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, sexism, racism, militarism, colonialism, ableism, and classism as forms of knowledge are integral to the development, dissemination, and deployment of emerging digital technologies (Wacjman, 1991; Balsamo, 1996; Nakamura, 2008; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009; Crogan, 2011; Byrd, 2016; Noble, 2018; Dooghan, 2019). For example, in contextualizing the emergence of computer games as the “defining technology of the contemporary digital information age” (Crogan, 2011, p. xiii), Patrick Crogan traced the trajectories of scientific research, including cybernetics and virtualization, funded by the United States military for the goal of war-making during the 20th Century; the “computer-based simulational technics” that undergird modern computer games emerged from these trajectories (p. xx). Through these histories, Crogan goes on to argue, “the latest phase of technological modernity is significantly different” from previous periods “because it moves beyond control toward the new watchword of *preemption* [emphasis original]” (p. xx).

In other words, these computational technologies based on simulation seek not only to control the present via the complete enclosure of the past but also to control the future by foreclosing other possibilities. Beyond the domain of games and war-making, Virginia Eubanks (2018) studied the digital simulations utilized for the state of Indiana’s welfare system, Los Angeles’ unhoused registry, and child welfare prediction in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Through these cases, Eubanks found that “poor and working-class people are targeted by new tools of digital poverty management and face life-threatening consequences as a result” (p. 11). Specifically, the poor are punished and entrapped by what Eubanks called a “digital poorhouse” (p. 12) produced by government technologies. Along the same lines of technologies’ reproductive qualities but specifically through the lens of Black feminist thought, Simone Browne (2015), Safiya Noble (2018), and Ruha Benjamin (2019), investigating surveillance systems, search engines, and the “New Jim Code” (p. 47) technologies respectively, have generated foundational insights regarding how anti-Black racism is not only reproduced technologically but also fundamentally “a precondition for the fabrication of such technologies” (p. 44). In that sense, Benjamin argued for the centrality of race itself as a technology, whereby approaching “racism in relation to other forms of domination as not just an ideology or history, but as a set of technologies that generate patterns of social relations, and these become Black-boxed as natural, inevitable, *automatic* [emphasis

original]" (pp. 44-45).

Key to these discussions is the refusal to approach and analyze *technology* as distinct and separate from *culture*. Instead, these scholars foreground a *technocultural* approach (Balsamo, 2011) to understanding how technologies fulfill their predictive, automating, and reproductive duties as systems of control with which they are often endowed. This approach sheds light on what technologies we choose to adopt and orient toward as a key moment and site of worldmaking.

While art educators engage with a wide range of technologies in practice, discussions of technologies in art education scholarship and, in particular, the naming of something as a technology, are often focused on new media, digital technologies, such as various computer software and hardware (Freeman, 1997; Roland, 2010, Overby & Jones, 2015; Han, 2015; Mathes, 2017; Knochel et al., 2018; Wang, 2018). As Stankiewicz (2003) observed, "for many art teachers, technology seems to mean only electronic, computer-based, digital devices for creating, transmitting, and accessing images" (p. 318). This common approach of using the term *technology*, colloquially and in art education specifically, primarily to denote new and emerging media based on digital technologies coincides with the idea that "technology is progress, just as progress suggests more and new technology" (Slack & Wise, 2005, p. 9). Here, developments and deployments of new technologies are equated with social progress. At the same time, the labeling of something as a technology provides significant justification for the messy introduction of a relatively new piece of mediation into existing practice. This introduction is inevitably messy as "old practices are then painfully revised" (Marvin, 1988, p. 5), and art educators have historically contended with the justification for various conflicts introduced by new mediations in the name of technologies (Gregory, 1996). As *old* technologies in art education practice, such as pencils and paper, is taken as a given, their existence in practice no longer warrants legitimization via the term technology.

Yet, not explicitly naming old, often analog, materials as technologies means that they are not equated with social progress, which raises the question of whose progress we are thinking about exactly? Careless adoption and adaptation of new, and particularly digital, media in the name of technologies run the risk of replicating, reproducing, and reinscribing systems of *control* developed to fuel the expansion of oppressions. This shed light on what we choose to name as a technology as another key moment and site of worldmaking.

As technologies are not neutral, what we incorporate into our practice as art educators and advocate for in the field of art education in the name of technology carries considerable weight and consequences. In particular, for art educators oriented towards social justice,

adrienne marie brown (2017) reminded us, “we are in an imagination battle. Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because, in some white imagination, they were dangerous” (p. 18). Specifically, if the technologies we employ and orient toward frame what we can imagine, then we need to pay attention to what we name as technologies, which are associated with the idea of progress, as well as what technologies we choose to engage with, which mediates our realities for imaginations. In that vein, numerous art educators have modeled the ways in which technologies, including both digital and analog varieties, can be engaged mindfully to practice social justice work (Acuff, 2011; Knochel & Patton, 2015; Yoon 2016; Keifer-Boyd & Smith-Shank, 2017; Sweeny, 2017; Justice, 2017; Keifer-Boyd, Knochel, Patton, & Sweeny, 2018; Lewis & Thurman, 2019; Garber 2019; Wolfgang 2019; Leake, 2019).

Tarot as a Technology

“Justice is knowing the feeling of home. Knowing you are worth your breath, receiving validation, and having full authority over your body. Justice is fabulous and she wants you present for her revolution.” (Road, 2017, p. 18)

It is in the context of enlarging our imaginations that I position Tarot as a technology for art educators to consider, where anti-oppression meets technological innovation at the juncture of worldmaking among social justice activist communities in the United States. Building on Jennifer Slack and Macgregor Wise’s articulation of technology mentioned previously, I use Tarot as a technology to include, but not be limited to: the Tarot card decks as boundary objects with various associated interpretative strategies circulating in communities of Tarot practitioners; the ways in which Tarot acts as a technology of care for individuals refusing oppressive systems; and the oppositional politics undergirding current developments of various related magical, spiritual, astrological, divinatory, esoteric, and occult practices. By boundary object, I mean an object that is “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). I propose Tarot as a technology, particularly of care, for art educators to begin an exploration of justice, where the decks serve as tools and the reading strategies serve as techniques that constitute a practice of justice-oriented worldmaking. By describing social justice activists’ engagements with Tarot as technological innovation, my aim is to draw attention to common assumptions we make about technologies, what we choose to name as technologies, and assumptions technologies make about us, particularly in the field of art education.

What is Tarot? Most commonly, Tarot is seen as a fortune telling

practice using a deck of cards with no basis in science, particularly the capital S kind of Science rooted in Western Enlightenment ideals of “objectivity, rationality, empirical reliability, comprehensiveness” (Harding, 2011, p. 369). Specifically, as Harding characterized, “The West’s sciences and technologies were supposed to be the jewels in the crown of modernity. To achieve social progress, value-neutral scientific rationality and technical expertise must replace traditional religious beliefs, myths, and superstitions about nature and social relations” (p. 2). In tracing the histories of Tarot, many scholars pointed towards 15th Century Italy as Tarot’s beginning (Jorgensen, 1992/2020; Gregory, 2012; McConnachie, 2017). There, early forms of Tarot were said to have emerged as a deck of playing cards that drew symbolism from a diverse set of knowledge traditions, including cartomancy practices⁴, astrological zodiacs, alchemical philosophies⁵, and theological virtues (Jorgensen, 1992/2020). Tarot spread across Europe and various local versions of the deck flourished for tricks and gaming purposes. Its explicit connotation as a divinatory practice emerged during the 18th Century in Europe when scholars associated Tarot’s origins with various religious practices, including Egyptian mythologies, Hebrew Kabbalah, Chinese I-Ching, and more (McConnachie, 2017). At the same time, it gained traction within various occult communities, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was an organized occult secret society “founded in London around 1887 as a Masonic organization” (Jorgensen, 1992/2020, p. 44), and its embrace of Tarot led to the publication of the *Smith-Rider-Waite* deck in 1910. This *Smith-Rider-Waite* deck became one of the most commonly practiced decks and recognizable iconographies of Tarot today in the United States (The Cut, 2020). The ubiquity of this particular deck solidified various conceptions of Tarot into a familiar set of images in popular culture, loosely identified with fortune telling.

An integral part of Tarot as a technology lies in the deck of cards as a recognizable and yet flexible boundary object with various associated interpretive strategies circulating across different communities of practice. As succinctly characterized in Christy Road’s Kickstarter campaign for the *Next World Tarot* deck, “The Tarot is an ancient spiritual tool that has been re-written over and over to aid and abet varying value systems and communities” (n.d., para. 1). In its most common contemporary form, a Tarot card deck commonly consists of 4

4 Cartomancy practices refer to a divinatory meaning-making process facilitated with a deck of playing cards.
5 “Alchemy is the quest for an agent of material perfection, produced through a creative activity (opus), in which humans and nature collaborate” (Pereira, 1998, para. 1). Specifically, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), it is “a medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life.”

78 different cards, with 22 trump cards termed Major Arcana and 56 cards divided into 4 suits termed Minor Arcana. At the same time, a deck usually comes with a guidebook to aid in one's

interpretation of the pictorial images on each card. In practice, Tarot cards are combined with a range of interpretive strategies in which cards are randomly drawn and placed in specific positions called a spread, such as the Kabbalistic Tree of Life spread or the Chakras spread. Each position in the spread denotes a different meaning and each card contains different connotations to be deciphered. Tarot as a technology unfolding in practice involves the Tarot practitioner engaging in a set of procedures that combines the cards, their positions, and their relation to each other to generate meaning. At this point, the practitioner must mobilize their subjective lens and context of interpretation to draw connections across past and present as an act that projects into the future.

While available historical accounts of Tarot privilege its European lineage, my inclination and attention toward Tarot is derived from the contemporary, creative and innovative development of this technology by social justice activists. Tarot unfolds in practice for care in justice-oriented worldmaking across activist communities, such as on The Detroit Blk Gurls Do Tarot Facebook group (Adams, 2019) and at the Allied Media Conferences held in Detroit, Michigan. By taking seriously how the technologies we use orient us toward particular epistemologies, various activists who are also Tarot practitioners have developed Tarot as a technology to shape future possibilities by making and publishing decks with explicit anti-oppression politics. Various Tarot practitioners have reclaimed the pictorial images in decks and the language in guidebooks to prefigure a world where the lives, experiences, and knowledge of the poor, colonized, LGBTQIA, Black, Indigenous, Brown, people of color, and people with disabilities are not only centered and legitimized but also cherished and celebrated.

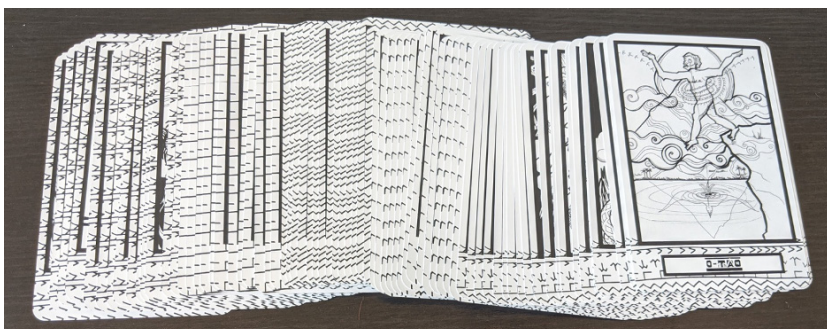


Figure 2. *Encountering the Kapwa Tarot deck* (Photo by author).

I want to highlight four of these reclaimed Tarot decks here. The first one is the *Shrine of the Black Medusa Tarot* (2014) created by Casey Rocheteau, where Rocheteau collaged various Black Americana iconographies explicitly celebrating “Black culture, queer magic and hoodoo divination” (para. 1) to remake Tarot cards as “a tool for the future crafted from images of the past” (para. 1). As a sponsored project of the Allied Media Projects, it is described as follows:

The mission of the Shrine of the Black Medusa is to connect people and ideas across generations and geographies & create tools and objects that represent and uplift Black people. SBM is rooted in an understanding that many practices from the African continent were lost through the slavery, and that malicious uprooting of culture creates a need to uncover our past and create new tools for understanding our present conditions. (Allied Media Projects, n.d.)

Working alongside Rocheteau to rework imaginations of futures by the reclamation of past and present through Tarot as a technology, Jana Lynne “JL” Umipig and collaborators created the *Kapwa Tarot* deck (2018), where they revised the cards based on their Pilipinx ancestral wisdom to speak to the Pilipinx diaspora. While recognizing that Tarot “has readily been commodified and glorified by capitalistic means of commercialism,” Umipig writes, “I acknowledge this as I share with you this adaptation that was created for a greater purpose”: to “create visibility and access to the teachings of my Pilipinx Ancestors that I have worked to remember through my growing, and are an act of creation that means to utilize a familiar divination tool in the diaspora for the service of that sharing” (p. 10). Through concern about the prevalence of unaddressed mental health crises among Asian Americans, Khúc and collaborators from the *Asian American Literary Review* created the *Asian American Tarot* deck (2017) “featuring original art and text that work to reveal the hidden contours of our Asian American emotional, psychic, and spiritual lives, as well as the systems of violence that bear down upon them” (para. 4). Some contributors to the *Asian American Tarot* deck engaging in various social justice activism were also featured in the *Next World Tarot* deck (2017) created by Cuban-American artist, writer, and musician Christy Road and collaborators, in which the Tarot cards were drawn to represent “co-conspirators, heroes, inspiration, and family; living both on earth and in the spirit world” (Road, 2020, p. 3). As Road characterized it, this deck is “an illustrated oracle articulating the end of the world as we know it” (p. 3).

Beyond the technological innovations named above, developments in Tarot coalesce with a wide range of other divinatory, spiritual, and magical practices to provide a family of related techniques and tools for social justice activism, such as the book *You Were Born for*

This: Astrology for Radical Self-Acceptance by Chani Nicholas (2020) and the *Oracle for Transfeminist Technologies* by Sasha Costanza-Chock and collaborators at the MIT Co-Design Studio. By harnessing the interpretive strategies of these practices for prefigurative politics (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018), this family of technologies that centers and contours the world that we long for but is not yet here provides affirmation for social justice activists in the grind of justice-oriented worldmaking work.

In thinking through how Tarot come to sit at the intersection where anti-oppression meets technological innovation, I consider the ways in which both social justice activism, particularly around queer folks, people of color, and other marginalized people in the “trauma diaspora” (Jones, 2019, p. 14), and Tarot practices refuse the current hegemonic epistemology under the dominant scientific order. In recounting the development of Tarot during the Enlightenment in Europe where notions of scientific rationality emerged, Danny Jorgensen (1992/2020) described how Tarot was “forged into a socially marginal and perceivedly illegitimate current of Western culture through the systematic exclusion of these ideas and their adherents from both religious and scientific claims to knowledge and supporting communities” (p. 38). Meanwhile, contemporary social justice activism is rooted in a direct counter to Eurocentric ideas of science and modernity, which is “visible in not merely the global spread of colonial exploits but also in the spread of the notion of European domination as the natural expression of superiority over biologically inferior and culturally primitive others” (Chan, 2013, p. 13). In many ways, Tarot and people of color share the valence of being illegitimate and queer under the hegemonic gaze. While epistemologies are merely “strategies for justifying beliefs” (Harding, 1987, p. 3) that outline theories of knowledge, knowledge produced, accumulated, and circulated among occult practitioners and people of color communities has been historically and systematically erased, marginalized, and appropriated (Aldred, 2000; Federici, 2004; Djurdjevic, 2014). As these communities do not adhere to the strategies of established scientific methods to justify their beliefs, their practices and knowledge are discarded via the label of superstitious, pseudoscientific, irrational, subjective, and emotional (Harding, 2011).

However, despite claims of illegitimacy, social justice activism among queer folks and people of color is committed to imagining a world “that transitions ideologies and norms, so that no one sees Black people as murders, or Brown people as terrorists and aliens, but all of us as potential cultural and economic innovators” (brown, 2017, p. 19). Here, Tarot provides social justice activists a way to “socially accomplish a knowledge of what is envisioned by them as an uncommon reality” (Jorgensen, 1992/2020, p. 196). By refusing Science and embracing Tarot as a technology with all

its alleged illegitimacy, social justice activists are turning toward different epistemologies to forge and inhabit a different world. The adoption, appropriation, and adaptation of Tarot and other delegitimized technologies by and for marginalized communities to cultivate imaginations informed by ancestral wisdoms demonstrate the resilience and resourcefulness of social justice activism: use the technologies we have available to us in innovative ways to make the world we need. As Chani Nicholas (2020) succinctly explained in an interview:

Even if we can't take up that space externally, for safety reasons, I think it's really important if we allow ourselves to take up that space internally. Astrology supports that, because it only ever speaks to your essence in a nonjudgmental way. So as queer folks living in this place in history we need these systems of knowledge that support our understanding of ourselves to say, 'You are you. This is exactly what was meant for you. This is exactly who you're supposed to be.' (para. 10)

Tarot as a Technology in and for Art Education

She wants me present for her revolution. I listened. So, I'm here.

How might Tarot as a technology intersect with art education? How might we, justice-oriented art educators, incorporate this technology into our practice? While I don't have any definitive answers, I share my experiences of how my Tarot practice has intersected with my practice as an art educator. I employ a narrative methodology to reflect, research, and rewrite my messy intersecting practices as an art educator and Tarot practitioner. I follow James Haywood Rolling's (2010) articulation of narrative methodology as a form of social inquiry that "seeks to proliferate new tellings, not primarily to redeem a set of 'facts,' but to articulate 'the significance and meaning of one's experiences'" (p. 7).

When I began practicing Tarot again in 2016, I had never imagined that it would intersect with my practice as an art educator, which includes the act of writing about it in an academic journal. This compartmentalization of my various practices speaks to the ways in which I have internalized the claims of illegitimacy that limit my imagination. I hadn't approached this practice of mine through the lens of *research* and I hadn't systematically documented its unfolding in my life to accumulate the coherent material traces required for them to qualify as *evidence*. And yet, it found its way. Thus, my source of *evidence* here is my narration, and my hope is that through this narrative process I can "tell a story that informs others of who we are, where we come from, where we are going, and what our purpose may be" (Rolling, 2010, p. 6).



Figure 3. *Encountering the Next World Tarot deck* (Photo by author).

In May of 2018, I was visiting Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, staying at the home of my close friend and generous interlocutor Meadow Jones. Upon entering the guest room, I was greeted with a pile of small gifts. Among them was Christy Road’s *Next World Tarot*. Meadow’s choice of this deck of Tarot wasn’t made lightly, as she’s been an integral life partner throughout my years in the United States. She observed that I gravitate toward various mystical, magical, and divinatory practices to sooth myself through moments of pain, despite how they are ridiculed and named by others. Knowing I have familiarity with these technologies and having a shared affinity for the *woo*⁶, she shared this boundary object Tarot deck as a form of knowledge that’s collectively generated by social justice activist communities in the United States to aid me in my current transition.

6 I use *woo* elastically here to mean both the *woo-woo*, which is a term used to describe the “dubiously or outlandishly mystical, supernatural, or unscientific” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.), and *㷘* which is a Chinese character in proximity to *sorceresses* and pronounced as *woo* in English.

Upon graduating from an art education graduate program in 2017, I began teaching in an interdisciplinary program in higher education that integrates critical studies of media and technology with creative practice. My dissertation research was on engaging digital game modifications through critical pedagogy, so I mostly taught courses around critiquing and creating games as media arts. Many of my students, both graduate and undergraduate, were self-identified gamers and aspiring/practicing game designers. With digital games being the “paradigmatic media of empire” (Byrd, 2016) and considering the horrors of #GamerGate in 2014⁷, I emphasized the consumption, production, and circulation of games in political, cultural, material, and historical contexts in my teaching. At the beginning of my tenure, I was upfront and explicit about my positionality and the experiences that came with it, as I truly believe in the “pedagogy of vulnerability” as outlined by Joni Acuff (2018, p. 178). This required teachers to “open their social identities and experiences for critical reflection and scrutiny in an effort to engage a community of learners in ‘critical thinking and reflection on diversity, including the topics of power, oppression, privilege, and social justice’” (p. 178).

And yet, semester after semester, over and over again, my vulnerability was taken as a weakness and weaponized against my sense of reality in class. In one instance, during a discussion on representation in games, a student proclaimed to me in front of the class that “male privilege and white privilege is not real, if one more person says that I will UGHHH” (personal communication, 2018) before he buried his face behind the computer screen for the rest of the class session. After that incident, that student and I had a private conversation where I saw myself as a pedagogue continually trying to ‘see’ and reach for him while I left my “self-doubt, anxiety, and shame as the ‘Other’ teacher” (Yoon, 2019, p. 87) unattended, brewing, and spilling over in my “relation of cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011, p. 1) with the academy. I noticed myself growing in resentment, cynicism, and “disillusionment” (Hetrick, 2017 p. 33). I noticed myself going through the motions of instruction and unable to engage in the pedagogy of vulnerability because I was too afraid. I noticed myself projecting my previous encounters onto students and reducing “the students as equal to their cultural identity” (Emdin as cited in Acuff, 2018, p. 176). I noticed that I could not meet “each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf” (Emdin as cited in Acuff, 2018, p. 176).

7 #GamerGate refers to the 2014 threats and harassment campaigns toward individuals, particularly feminists, working in the digital games industry. For a more detailed discussion, see “A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying About #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity” (2015) by Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw, cited below.

I needed a way out, and I needed a way to care for both my students and myself. My friend Meadow was right. I was, indeed, leaning more and more into the side of me that didn't have the language to defend myself against claims of superstition. I was recognizing and deliberately choosing the delegitimized components of myself that I maintained through practices of code switching (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1984). That is the side of me that learned to follow the sexagenary cycle of the lunar calendar¹ while given my English name in the elementary school classroom; the side of me that learned the practice of reading Tarot in the alleyways of Zhongxiao E. Road while internalizing how to produce a sociological fact using scientific research methods at a university in Taipei; the side of me that learned to decipher sortilege from temples while deciding whether or not to pursue graduate studies in the United States; the side of me that was always triangulating my understanding of reality by engaging in the "promiscuous traffic between different domains of knowing" (Conquergood, 2000, p. 145) via different technologies; the side of me that I cultivated in secret through careful compartmentalization until it began to intersect with my professional practice in profound ways.

I began asking questions about my teaching practice through Tarot. I would sit down, shuffle the cards, and replay the situation bothering me. Specifically, I would name the significant people and things in my mind, our various contexts, and the narratives of what had happened from my vantage point. Then, I would distill my concerns into questions and ask Tarot for metaphors² while drawing cards placed in specific spread arrangements. Last but not least, I would turn over the cards and begin close reading, both of the cards themselves and the guidebooks, to generate and hold multiple and at times contradictory interpretations of the situations. I recognized myself during my Tarot practice, especially with the innovative decks named previously. Over time, my Tarot practice became a site of refuge for my teaching practice, where its unapologetic words of anti-oppression and validation guided me to reflect on, interrogate, and reconfigure my internalized "self-doubt, anxiety, and shame as the 'Other' teacher" (Yoon, 2019, p. 87). It did so in part because it helped me place language playfully and experimentally on my otherwise unrecognizable, unnamable, and unconsummable experiences in the present. In doing so, I was able to be with and live in the present. By living in the present, I mean relentlessly, fearlessly, and continuously engaged in the project of making reality. Making reality involves revising, reconfiguring, and remaking the past and future

8 The sexagenary cycle 天干地支 refers to a system of naming time that is commonly practiced with the lunar calendar for Taiwanese folk religions. For a more detailed discussion of Taiwanese folk religions, see 台灣的民間宗教與信仰 Taiwan's Folk Religion and Belief [translated title] (2000) by Jianchuan Wang and Shiwei Lee.

2 Thank you, Meadow, for this language of describing Tarot's guidance as *metaphors*.

as malleable materials at the nexus where they interface: the present moment. And here, Tarot cards act as the tool and reading strategies act as the technique to construct this moment.

I have come to realize that I was engaging with Tarot as a technology of care in those moments. By care, I mean “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher & Tronto as cited in Tronto, 1993, p. 103). However, as expectations to care are never ending in social justice activism, science and technology studies scholars’ words on care redirected my attention: “The question, then, is not ‘how can we care more?’ but instead to ask what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of ‘how to care?’ is insistent but not easily answerable” (Atkinson-Graham et al., 2015, p. 739). On this point, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) reminded me that an ethic of care is always a contextually specific “hands-on, ongoing process of re-creation” (p. 6) and never a set of normative moral obligations. By weaving my practice as an art educator together with my practice as a Tarot practitioner, I was opening up the space where the question of how to care for myself and my students and, by extension, our world, in a just way could be continuously posed in an environment that reconciled the contradictory epistemologies that I balance. Most importantly, I found joy.

Conclusion

As adrienne marie brown reminded us, “what you pay attention to grows” (brown, 2017, p. 42). I encourage art educators to pay attention to *what* we pay attention to in the name of technology. In this article, I position Tarot as a technology in order to draw attention to assumptions technologies make about us and common assumptions we make about technologies, particularly in the field of art education. I encourage art educators to pay attention *to* Tarot, as I argue that technological innovations in Tarot can intersect with anti-oppression politics via their shared refusal of the hegemonic science-technology matrix. Further, I encourage art educators to pay attention *through* Tarot. By narrating my experiences with Tarot as a technology of care during my practice as an art educator, I suggest that Tarot provides a space for art educators to explore justice.

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