Welcome

This free deck has 297 words from the Stimpunks glossary. Each card has a word, a short definition and a symbol. Where someone coined or named a word, their name is in brackets. Created by Stimpunks in collaboration with Helen Edgar, Autistic Realms.

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How to Use These Cards

Start anywhere: there is no right order. Use the cards to learn, talk, reflect, play or communicate, at your own pace. Go deeper at stimpunks.world and stimpunks.org/glossary. Free to share and adapt under CC BY-SA 4.0, with credit to Stimpunks.

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Abraction

The damage caused when an abstraction, model or system is applied where it must not be, so an over-generalisation lands on real, embodied individuals. When lawmakers over-rely on statistics to represent people, the result is abraction.



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Acceptance

Seeing being Autistic as part of who a person is, not a problem to fix. Where awareness dwells on deficits, acceptance means supports when needed, universal design and structural change to ableist systems. Acceptance is an action.



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Addiction

Maia Szalavitz calls it a learning disorder, not a crime or degenerative disease: compulsive behaviour that persists despite negative consequences, often learned while coping with trauma, poverty, shame or an overreactive nervous system. Compassion works better than punishment.

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ADHD Tax

The extra costs people pay because of inattention, impulsivity or executive function challenges: late fees, fines, forgotten subscriptions, food left to spoil. The hidden ADHD tax is also paid in time, physical wellbeing and mental health.



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Administrative Burden

The learning, psychological and compliance costs people face in dealing with government: finding information, filling in forms, and the stress, stigma or loss of autonomy that comes with it. Burdens fall hardest on the least advantaged.



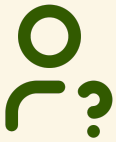
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Advice Process

A way of deciding without a hierarchy: anyone can make any decision after seeking advice from everyone meaningfully affected and from people with expertise. Advice must be considered, but it is not consensus; the decision-maker chooses (Bakke).



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Affinity Group

A group of people who come together through free association around a shared interest, or the group linked to a particular semiotic domain. Online, no niche is too small for affinity groups to form and grow.



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Affinity Space

A loosely organised place, online or offline, built around shared passions, goals and practices rather than shared demographics. Newcomers and experts learn from each other there, which may suit monotropic minds (Gee, 2004).



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Algorithm

An opinion embedded in maths, in Cathy O’Neil’s words. The people who build algorithms curate the data, define success and embed their own values, so algorithms are as prone to bias as their makers.



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Alien

The feeling, shared by many Autistic people, of being stranded on the wrong planet, unlike everyone around you. Meeting other Autistic people can feel like finding others from the same planet: finally coming home.



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Allyship

Supporting the inclusion of a marginalised group you do not belong to, such as neurotypical people backing neurodivergent people. Good allies reframe, amplify, pay and buffer the trauma, sharing the exhausting work of pushing against ableism.



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Aloneness

Chosen solitude: a private space to think, imagine, reflect and recharge without having to process language and social cues. For many creatives and neurodivergent people it is a need, and anything but lonely.



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Altruism

Intentional action ultimately for the welfare of others that carries at least the possibility of no benefit, or a loss, to the person acting. Selfishness beats altruism within groups, but altruistic groups beat selfish groups.



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Americans with Disabilities Act

The United States civil rights law, signed in 1990, that bans discrimination on the basis of disability and requires reasonable accommodations at work. Critics say it asks only the bare minimum of care, with no enforcement.



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Anti-library

Books you have not yet read, kept as a research tool rather than a trophy. A good library is mostly unread books: a reminder of what you do not know, and a place to turn when needed (Taleb).



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Applied Learning

An umbrella term for ways of learning by applying knowledge and skills to real-world tasks, such as project-based, problem-based and experiential learning. Its key features are authenticity, cognitive challenge, active learning and sustained experiences.



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ARLES

The Stimpunks Design Method: five layers of neurodivergent life, redesigned from the bottom up: Attention, Relational, Lived Experience, Environment, Systems. Skip the lower layers and systems reform collapses. Broken systems, not broken people.



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Art

A very human way of making life more bearable, as Kurt Vonnegut put it, however well or badly you do it. We learn best by making something meaningful, and what we make reaches real people.



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Artificial Intelligence

Technologies such as large language models: useful for some tasks, like translation, transcription and summarising limited data, and of interest for accessibility, but over-hyped, forced on everyone, and troubling for ethics, the environment and privacy.



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Artificial Scarcity

When disability systems are underfunded and understaffed, so support is rationed through waiting lists and denials of service. Caregivers, teachers and disabled people themselves are pushed to present their needs as necessary and virtuous.



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Asynchronous Communication

Sending a message without expecting an immediate response, such as an email or text answered later. Many neurodivergent people prefer it because it gives time to process information and plan what to say, without real-time pressure.



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Attachment Theory

A theory, developed mainly by John Bowlby, that early caregiver bonds shape how a child forms later relationships. Treated as fact, it casts children as blank slates, blames mothers, and has harmed Autistic and neurodivergent people.



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Autigender

A word some Autistic people use for their relationship with gender, not a gender called autism. Being Autistic shapes how they understand and feel about gender, a social construct, and an autigender person's gender can be anything.



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Autism Grievance Parent

A parent who brands themselves an autism expert while promoting reactionary ideas about autism and resentment towards Autistic advocates. Often wealthy and influential, they claim to be bullied while working against Autistic people's interests.



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Autism Warrior Parent

A parent who tries to cure their Autistic child, or imposes non-Autistic goals on them, rather than trying to understand how the child is wired. Battling autism instead of understanding it derails Autistic lives.



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Autistic Chronophobia Theory

The theory that an Autistic person, especially one not yet aware they are Autistic, will feel an escalating fear of running out of time when social and economic integration is denied for too long (Irion).



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Autistic Language Hypothesis

The idea that Autistic verbal communication is different, not disordered: functional and effective in its own right. Building on the double empathy problem, it suggests Autistic people find context in the words themselves (Cullen).



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Autistic Polling

Asking the same question again and again to check in: am I OK, are you OK, are we OK? Polling lowers anxiety and tests whether it is safe to communicate further. It is not echolalia.



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Autistic Rapport

The ease, enjoyment and connection many Autistic people feel when spending time with other Autistic people. Studies find better rapport and more effective communication between Autistic people, sometimes described as ‘a certain magic’.



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Autistic Shielding

Leaning into your Autistic ways of being instead of masking them: stimming, unusual style and passions, shown without shame. Projecting your weird to find your weirdkin, it protects you while letting similar people in.



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Becoming

The ongoing process of growing into who we can be: learning, developing and taking part fully in society. Becoming holds potential, growth and transformation, and together with belonging and being, it shapes children's lives.

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Bikeshedding

Spending a great deal of time on trivial, easy-to-grasp details while crucial matters go unattended, like a committee arguing over a bike shed while neglecting the design of a nuclear power plant (Parkinson).



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Biological Essentialism

The view that neurotypes are natural kinds with timeless biological essences. A remnant of the pathology paradigm, it is theoretically untenable and fuels toxic discourse; neurotype is, to some extent, fluid.



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Biophilic Design

Designing spaces that connect people to the natural world, with natural light, organic textures and nature-inspired colours. It aims to reduce stress and support wellbeing, helping people who find ordinary spaces overwhelming feel grounded.



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Biopsychosocial Model

A model in which biological, psychological and social factors all shape a person's experience. Applied to neurodiversity, it shifts the focus from treating a disorder to adjusting the fit between person and environment (Engel, 1977).



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Bodily Autonomy

The right of people to control what happens to their bodies and make their own decisions about them. All disabled people have bodily autonomy: nobody should force them into sterilisation, surgery or medical care.



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Bodymind Affirmation

The practice of welcoming your whole self, body and mind together, into a space, and inviting your needs to be met rather than suppressed. Move, stim, pace or rest as you need: you belong here.



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Bricolage

Making something from whatever happens to be to hand: improvised, do-it-yourself creation, from the French bricoler, to tinker. Paired with constructionism and toolbelt theory, it opens up possibilities for spiky profiles.



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Burrito Test

A test, used by disability advocates, of whether a place is an institution: if you cannot get up at 3am and microwave yourself a burrito without asking permission, it is one, whatever it calls itself.



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Canary

The idea that Autistic and neurodivergent people are like miners' canaries, the first to be harmed by toxic environments. Their struggle is not weakness but an early warning that the environment is uninhabitable (Wilson).



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Care

Everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world, our bodies, selves and environment, so we can live in it as well as possible. Care makes all other work possible (Fisher and Tronto, 1990).



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Care Web

An informal network of disabled and non-disabled people who care for one another. Unlike charity, care webs are reciprocal and value interdependence, and they are shaped by the needs and desires of the disabled people running them (Piepzna-Samarasinha).



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Change

Octavia Butler wrote that all you touch you change, and all you change changes you. Systemic change grows from small actions and connections, and begins by dismantling the system within and finding your own role in it.



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Checklists

Short lists of essential steps that help prevent serious but easily avoidable mistakes. Good checklists are a cognitive net, not a wagging finger: they make sure people talk, distribute power and fit the flow of work.



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Childism

Empowering children by transforming norms and structures, much as feminism does for women. Childism recognises that young people are systemically marginalised, critiques adultism, and seeks children's radical equality on their own terms.



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Chronic

Health conditions that cannot be cured and so must be managed, usually with a daily baseline of symptoms and periods of flares. Many chronically ill people wait years for a diagnosis and wonder whether they are disabled enough.



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Chronic Constellation

The collection of co-occurring conditions common among hypermobile and Autistic people: bendy bodies, such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, plus bendy minds, such as ADHD, autism and OCD, often bringing pain and dysautonomia (Groh).



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Clumping

When the flow of attention halts because it sticks together, forming blockages that keep certain information out of awareness. Thoughts can get stuck in a monotropic channel, looping without moving forwards
(McDonnell and Milton, 2014).



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Co-Design

Co-design means the people affected by a design hold power over it from the beginning, not at the end, including defining the problem. It is power-sharing at the architecture stage, not consultation at the testing stage.



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Coddle

A word that once meant to treat tenderly and now means to overindulge. Aimed at neurodivergent and disabled people, it is a red flag and a clobber word for neuronormative domination. Compassion is not coddling.



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Code

The instructions that make a computer work, one tiny step at a time, billions of times a second. Coding is a human craft as wide as sport or writing, and one misplaced character can break it.

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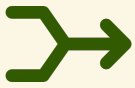
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Code-Meshing

An approach to speaking and writing that treats all dialects and languages as equal in complexity and value. Instead of switching to one ‘standard’ English, people mix dialects, styles and registers, as they naturally talk (Young and Canagarajah).



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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

A talking therapy that looks at how thoughts, feelings and behaviour affect each other. It helps some people, but it can fail Autistic people, treating their thinking as disordered when it may be correct, and teaching more masking.



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Collaborative Morality

The idea that early humans survived by sharing food, parenting and care, buffering each other's vulnerabilities. This made room for many kinds of minds, including Autistic traits, to be respected for the distinct abilities they brought.



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Collective Risk Shift

The moving of risk and responsibility from companies and governments onto workers and families: healthcare, retirement, job training and qualifications. People now carry alone the costs that employers once shared (Hacker, 2006).



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Comedy

Good comedy punches up at people who abuse power, never down at people already pushed to the margins. Mocking people in pain is bullying, not satire, and, as Hannah Gadsby says, self-deprecation from the margins is humiliation.



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Commonplace Book

A notebook, or a box of cards, for collecting the quotes, ideas, stories and observations you come across, organised for later use. Marcus Aurelius and Montaigne kept one, and so have ordinary people throughout history.



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Community of Practice

In the Wenger-Trayners' words, a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. It needs a shared interest, community and practice.



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Community Organizing

Bringing affected people together so their shared power can win local improvements and shift the power structure towards social justice. Building community also means constantly unlearning the habits that keep domination going, as bell hooks wrote.



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Compassion

Compassion is not coddling. Design for Real Life calls it accepting people as they come, in all their pain, and acting on that empathy. Disabled and neurodivergent people are edge cases, and edge cases are stress cases.



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Conceptual Portmanteau

A way of presenting an idea on the web that bundles a claim with layers attached to it: embedded definitions, simpler or more technical phrasings, images, video, audio and explainer paragraphs. It aims to make meaning clearer.



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Concision

Noam Chomsky’s word for how the media favours power. Ideas that match the official line need no explanation and fit between two adverts, while ideas that question it need evidence and time, so they go unheard.



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Conservatism

A politics summed up by Wilhoit's Law: in-groups whom the law protects but does not bind, and out-groups whom the law binds but does not protect. At its heart, argues George Lakoff, lies strict father morality.



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Constructionism

A theory of learning in which people build knowledge best by actively making something meaningful in the world. It grows from Piaget's constructivism and sees programming as a way for children to think about their own thinking (Papert).



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Crip

Short for cripple, once a slur, now reclaimed by some disabled people as a badge of pride. As a verb, to crip is to twist and unsettle things, bringing disabled wisdom into systems and cultures.



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Crip Linguistics

A way of looking at language through disability. It holds that nobody is truly poor at language and no language is disordered, and it treats language as care work, where people provide access and build meaning together.



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Crip Tax

The hidden extra costs of being disabled in a world designed for non-disabled bodies: equipment, care, special diets, delivery fees, accessible housing and more. A reclaimed, tongue-in-cheek name, it is meant to make people notice.



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Cripple Punk

A disability pride movement by and for physically disabled people. It rejects pity, inspiration porn and the ‘good cripple’ myth, welcomes the bitter and the uninspirational, and does not pander to the able bodied (Trewhella).

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Critical Race Theory

A framework, begun by legal scholars in the 1970s, for studying and changing the relationship between race, racism and power. It asks how a society that officially rejects racism keeps being racist, looking at structures, not single acts.



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Critical Thinking

Sceptical thinking, which The Demon-Haunted World calls the means to construct and understand a reasoned argument and to recognise a fraudulent one. Its tools make up a baloney detection kit, and losing them can be catastrophic.



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Critical Wellness

An approach to education that addresses how race, culture, trauma, mental health, bias and hard circumstances affect students' ability to be whole. It does this without blaming children, families or communities for their circumstances (Howard).



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Cyborg

Not a future fantasy but disabled people here now, who rely on technology to keep their bodies going. As Jillian Weise writes, disabled people who use tech to live are cyborgs, and their lives are not metaphors.



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Dandelions, Tulips, and Orchids

A plant metaphor for how sensitive people are to their surroundings. Dandelions thrive almost anywhere, most people are tulips in the middle, and orchids bloom in supportive places but struggle more in harmful ones.



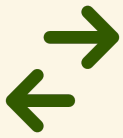
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DARVO

Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender: how wrongdoers often react when held to account. They deny it, attack the person who spoke up, then claim to be the victim. It is built into systems disabled people navigate.



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Data Void

A search term with few, poor or no results, which manipulators can fill with misinformation, conspiracy theories and hate. Voids are hard to spot and matter most when something suddenly sends many people searching (Golebiewski, 2018).



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Deficit Ideology

A worldview that blames inequality on supposed deficiencies in disenfranchised people and communities, not on unjust conditions like systemic racism or economic injustice. Its surest sign is fixing the people, not what disenfranchises them.



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DEIAB

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging. Diversity is a range of differences, and belonging is feeling accepted and at home. Equity redistributes access and opportunity, and without it, diversity and inclusion mean little.



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Demand Avoidance

When a demand lands and your body will not let you do the thing, even something you love. It is not defiance or laziness. Underneath is anxiety, and underneath that, a need for autonomy. Force makes it worse.



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Design Justice

Design that centres people usually pushed to the margins by design, using collaborative, creative practices. It treats everyone as an expert in their own lived experience and puts impact on the community above the designer's intentions.



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Design Questioning

An alternative to design thinking that looks at each step from the disabled user's view. By questioning the systems that disable us, it stops treating disabled people as the problem, or as mere recipients of design (Jackson, 2019).



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Designed Dignity

Designing respect, agency and fairness of expression into technology from the start, rather than patching in access once people are shut out. Disabled users become design partners, and their ways of communicating expand what technology can recognise.



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Developmental Pace

The rate at which a person arrives at a skill, a concept or a capacity. It varies enormously between people, and within one person across different areas. ‘Behind’ is information about the ruler, not about the learner.



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Diagnosis

Both a category and a process, as Blaxter put it: the main way medicine names and explains illness and disability. Diagnosis can open doors to support, but it does not make anyone Autistic, and self-diagnosis can be liberatory.



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Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

Marsha Linehan’s therapy for people living with Borderline Personality Disorder, teaching mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance and emotional regulation. A neurodivergent-friendly version swaps interpersonal effectiveness for sensory needs, adds meltdown tools, and is about skills, not compliance.



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Different

As Randimals say, what makes us different makes all the difference in the world. Difference is no deficiency: Hannah Gadsby calls it a teacher, and Carol Black calls our differences the genius and conscience of our species.



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Differentiated Instruction

Not a single teaching strategy but a framework for using many, often evidence-based: good classroom management, grouping students for instruction, assessing readiness, and teaching to each student's zone of proximal development.



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Digital Gardening

Tending a personal website that is part notebook, part blog, where half-formed ideas grow in public. Unlike a dated blog post, a digital garden keeps changing as notes are edited, and its links invite readers to wander.



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Digital Sociology

The study of people and society after digitisation. It puts social problems such as inequality, race and gender first and technology second, and it draws on many disciplines and a commitment to liberation.



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Disability Dongle

A well-intended and elegant, yet useless solution to a problem disabled people never knew they had, often dreamed up in design schools. It wins designers praise while ignoring disabled people's real concerns (Jackson, 2019).



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Disability Double-bind

In an ableist society, disabled people are damned if they do and damned if they don’t. They must prove they are disabled enough for support, yet productive enough to be legitimate, carrying a burden of invisible work.



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Disability Police

Strangers, or people in authority, who decide someone does not look disabled enough and demand proof, cry fraud or harass them. Disability is not always visible, and, as Annie Segarra points out, many wheelchair users can walk.



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Disabled

An identity, a culture and, in Liz Jackson's words, a community, not just a diagnosis. Many prefer identity-first language, disabled person, because society's barriers are what disable them, and disability is part of who they are.



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DisCrit

Disability Critical Race Studies: a framework joining Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies. It holds that racism and ableism are interconnected, each reinforcing the other, and it centres the voices of disabled students of colour.

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Diversity

Diversity is strength and difference is a teacher, as Hannah Gadsby says. Like biodiversity in a rainforest, a wide variety of minds makes any community more robust and adaptable. But without equity, diversity and inclusion mean little.



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Dolphining

When a neurodivergent mind takes a deep internal dive mid-conversation and resurfaces somewhere else entirely. The connection is invisible from outside but logical inside. It is not rudeness or randomness, just a monotropic mind tunnelling, then breaching.



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Dopamine Dressing

Wearing clothes to lift your mood, choosing colours, textures and styles that make you feel good. For many neurodivergent people it is part of unmasking: dressing as your authentic self instead of trying to fit in.



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Dress Codes

School clothing rules, which are reliably sexist, racist and ableist. They label girls' bodies as distractions, police culture and identity, and force chafing uniforms on Autistic pupils, who may need soft, comfortable fabrics.



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Echophenomena

The echoing of words, sounds, movements and other stimuli, such as echolalia and echopraxia. Clinical writing calls them involuntary and pathological, but echoes, like stims and tics, can be embodied ways of communicating for Autistic people.



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Edges

The margins, where disabled and neurodivergent people are edge cases, and edge cases are stress cases. For bell hooks, the margin is a site of radical possibility and resistance. Our designs and compassion are tested there.



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Education

The ability to write your own life story rather than simply living the one you were given. As Christopher Emdin says, it is not memorisation but the activation of the imagination and a path towards liberation.



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Efficiency

Putting efficiency before effectiveness, so what is easiest to measure becomes the target. In schools it means teaching to the test. Yet, as David Labaree argues, effectiveness needs some inefficiency: spare capacity for hard times.



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Elopement

When an Autistic person leaves a place because their body urgently needs to get away. It is a crisis point, close to a meltdown or shutdown, and like them it is a stress response, not autism itself.



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Embodied Attunement

In phenomenology, how we experience the world through our bodies' physical, sensory and emotional interactions with our surroundings, body and environment attuned to each other. Autism can be understood as misattunement with a neurotypical environment.



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Embodiment

Being able to stay with our body's sensations, our emotions and our surroundings without tipping into fight, flight, freeze or fawn. As the book Embodied Education puts it, there is no learning without the body.



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Emergence

How large, complex patterns grow from many small, simple interactions, as connections build into ecosystems and societies. In the words of Emergent Strategy, emergence is how we change, and emergent strategy is changing on purpose, together.



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Emergent Allostasis

Health as Hogenkamp, Sanghavi and Natri define it: a system's ongoing capacity to keep its regulation coherent through predictive adjustment. Not the absence of symptoms but the sustained ability to adapt, with stability coming from constant prediction.



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Emotional Bid

Anything we do to signal that we want attention and connection: a question, a story, an offered hand. The other person can turn towards it or away. The Harmontown podcast calls bids the pixels of relationship communication.



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Empathy

The unempathetic Autistic is a damaging myth. Many Autistic people are hyper-empathic, flooded by others' feelings to the point of distress. Empathy goes two ways, and every human, not only Autistic people, can fall short of it.



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Employee Resource Group

A voluntary, employer-recognised group of employees who share an identity or concern, such as race, gender or sexual orientation. ERGs offer support, mentoring and a voice, help new staff belong, and depend on psychological safety.



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Engineered Exclusion

How AI systems reliably push disabled users to the edges through design choices: where the data comes from, what models aim for and how they are tested. Whole ways of communicating, such as AAC, go unrecognised.



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Enshittification

A pattern of platform decay. Platforms are first good to their users, then abuse them to favour business customers, then abuse those customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then they die (Doctorow, 2023).



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Epistemic Authority

Authority over what counts as knowledge in a field. Neurodiversity emerged from Autistic community spaces, so, as Cole Denisen argues, claiming authority over it without Autistic scholarship or community accountability is not inclusion but extraction.



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Epistemic Enablement

The conditions that let people contribute knowledge from their own perspective, in their own form. Where epistemic injustice names the harm, enablement names the repair: communication preferences valued, processing time designed for (Catala, Faucher and Poirier, 2021).



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Epistemic Trespassing

When experts with competence in one field move into another where they lack the evidence or the skills, and pass judgement nevertheless. Trespassing is everywhere in this age of interdisciplinary research, so it calls for intellectual modesty (Ballantyne).



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Eugenics

The false, unscientific belief that humanity can be ‘improved’ by controlling who has children. Bound up with racism, ableism and colonialism, it has caused widespread harm, above all to marginalised people, and is still alive today.



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Evidence-Based

A label for practices that meet a set of evidence criteria. In autism intervention research the standards are far too low, so practices labelled evidence-based may bring little or no benefit and may even cause harm.



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Evolution

Life as cooperation, not only competition. Reading Darwin through capitalism made evolution a competitive game, but species survive by learning to be in community, and humans evolve through culture and shared niches as much as genes.



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Experiential Learning

Hands-on learning by doing and reflecting on what has been done, including growth from failure. Learners have voice and choice, connect with their community and make things of real value. Not learning, then doing: learning while doing (Dewey).



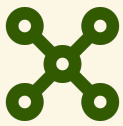
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Expertise

Less about effort inside the head than knowing how to marshal resources beyond the brain: the body, physical space, other people. Experts experiment, test and backtrack more than beginners, yet these extensions are far from equally shared.



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Exposure Anxiety

Feeling your own existence too close up: acute self-consciousness and an overwhelming fear of interaction, where any attention, even praise, can feel invasive. It is involuntary, and directly confrontational environments make it worse (Williams).



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Extractive Abandonment

How so-called surplus populations, people deemed economically unproductive, are abandoned yet made profitable to capital. Disabled and chronically ill people are cordoned off while profit is made from them through rehabilitation, nursing homes and medicalisation (Adler-Bolton and Vierkant).



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Fandom

Communities built around shared passions. Unmasking Autism argues that Autistic people created fandom, and Steve Silberman describes Autistic nerds travelling across the country to meet others who shared their niche interests. Many begin to unmask there.



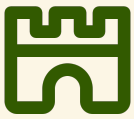
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Fantasy Economy

A misleading story, serving corporations and the wealthy, that blames wage stagnation and inequality on failing schools and workers rather than on the wider political economy. Economic problems are framed as educational ones with educational solutions (Kraus).



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Feedback Loop

Where a system’s output is fed back in as input for future operations: the smallest unit of learning. Hierarchy and power dampen feedback loops, because, in Jorn Bettin’s words, power is the privilege of not needing to learn.



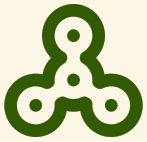
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Fidgeting

Small, rhythmic movements that help us filter sensory overwhelm, find a focus and think; a form of stimming. Suppressing the natural urge to move uses up attention, and it helps shut neurodivergent people out of school.



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Flexibility

Letting people choose what works, since there is no one size fits all in access. Flexible time, pace, place and tasks help Autistic and disabled learners and workers flourish, and home working avoids the accommodations grind.



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Flow

Complete absorption in the present moment. Monotropic attention makes flow common for Autistic people, bringing joy, rest and relaxation, but being wrenched out of an attention tunnel causes distress and dysregulation (Csikszentmihalyi).



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Flow Patrol

Continuously testing what we make as users with lives, backstories, aches, pains and bad days, designing with people, not for them. Flow patrollers are designated dissenters who advocate for users, knowing edge cases are stress cases.



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Flying Squads

Groups of young people who set out into their city with no fixed destination, deciding together where to go and how to spend their time. They push back on the idea that learning belongs in any one space.



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Food Aversion

A neurobiological, safety-based response to the taste, texture, temperature or smell of food, common in Autistic people. It cannot be persuaded away. Not picky eating but selective or sensory eating, where safe foods keep us nourished.



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Forced Intimacy

The ableist expectation that disabled people lay themselves bare, answering intrusive questions and proving their disability, just to get access they depend on. The opposite of access intimacy, it wears people down and can feel like a violation.



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Framing

Frames are unconscious mental structures that shape how we see the world. Words activate frames, even when we argue against them, so new thinking needs new language. As George Lakoff puts it, reframing is social change.



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Friendship

Central to children's lives, yet Autistic children are often excluded and left in a social void. The gap comes largely from the double empathy problem, so it must be bridged from both sides, not by Autistic children alone.



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Fuel Bubble

A metaphor for managing energy and attention: space, interests, safety, regulation and flow woven into a careful balance of inputs and outputs that helps someone thrive. Intrusions use up fuel, while passions and others' fuel bubbles add it.



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Fundamental Attribution Error

Overestimating the power of the person and underestimating the power of the situation, so we blame character for what the social environment shapes. It drives deficit thinking and grit talk, and exhausts marginalised students, patients and employees (Ross).



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Gender

Autistic perspectives can show which parts of gender are socially constructed, revealing it as fluid and many-sided. Not a binary or even a continuum, but a copia: a growing abundance of possibilities and words for understanding ourselves.



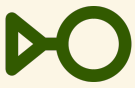
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Genderpunk

An informal name for a culture of resistance to gender norms: an identity that in itself pushes back against gendernormativity, homophobia and transphobia. Anyone of any gender who shares the mindset can be part of it.



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Gendervague

As Lydia X. Z. Brown explains, a term coined within the Autistic community for a specifically neurodivergent experience of trans or gender identity, inseparable from neurodivergence. Gender often matters mostly as other people's assumptions projected onto us.



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Gestalt Learning

Learning in chunks, where the whole is more than its parts. Many Autistic children learn language as gestalts: whole phrases or scripts, often from media, tied to context and emotion. Embracing gestalts is neurodiversity-affirming practice.

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Grading

In Alfie Kohn’s view, grades dull interest in learning, push students towards the easiest task and lower the quality of their thinking. They unjustly sort and gatekeep, so the question is how to drop grades, not improve them.



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Hacker Ethos

A culture of flexible improvisation, rapid iteration and distributed collaboration, open to possibility and uncertainty. Allison Parrish's new hacker ethic adds questions to ask while making: who gets to use this, and who is left out.



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Harm Reduction

Principles and strategies for surviving the harms around criminalised behaviours such as drug use and sex work, created by those communities themselves. It prioritises self-determination and body autonomy, supporting people without judgement, stigma or coercion.



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Healing Justice

Collective healing, rooted in abolition and anti-capitalism, that centres self-determination and draws on transformative, disability, reproductive and environmental justice and harm reduction. As Cara Page and Erica Woodland write, freedom is not freedom without care.

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Hierarchy

Ranking people one above another by status or authority. Hierarchy dampens feedback loops and blocks learning, because people with power are spared the need to learn. It is a social construct, not a law of nature.



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Holistic Thinking

Seeing everything as interconnected rather than splitting the world into systems or boxes, as many Indigenous peoples do. Separating things can harm: a plastic straw ban made without disability justice took away an access tool disabled people need.



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Holotropism

Having wide open sensory gates. Building on monotropism with deep ecology and holistic anatomy, holotropes meet the immense world by hyperfocusing on one sensory or cognitive path, or by synthesising experience into coherence (Mirra).



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Homework

Work set for home that is generally less about learning than about getting it finished. It is not consistently linked to achievement, it is inequitable, and it causes family stress while crowding out play, friends and sleep.



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Horizontal Learning

Exploring the lay of the land without racing up a skill tree: trying possibilities, taking risks and mucking around, unhurried. Schools stress vertical learning, but, as James Paul Gee says, good learning needs horizontal learning too.



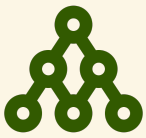
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Human Interdependence Paradigm

An alternative to meritocracy that redefines the purpose of education: each person cultivates their unique strengths and uses them to solve real problems for others, while relying on others' strengths in turn (Zhao and Zhong, 2025).



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Human Needs

Something every person is born requiring in order to thrive. Above all, humans need regulation of body, mind, senses, emotions and psychology, with drivers such as protection, predictability, connection, recognition, autonomy and novelty.



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Human Scale

The size at which trust, safety and collaboration still work, set by human cognitive limits of around 150 stable relationships. Small human scale groups are resilient and adaptive, while much larger organisations put individual people at risk.



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Human-Centered Education

Education built on four values: learning rooted in purpose-finding and community relevance, social justice at its heart, an end to dehumanising practices such as grades, homework and behaviourism, and respect for every learner's innate human worth.



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Hyperlink

The basic building block of the web, linking words to their sources. Hyperlinks show your work, add nuance and open rabbit holes of learning, which makes them one of the strongest tools we have against disinformation.



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Identity

Who we understand ourselves to be, and the place to see which forms of oppression operate in our lives. A positive Autistic identity is linked with better mental health and wellbeing, and peer support can help grow it.



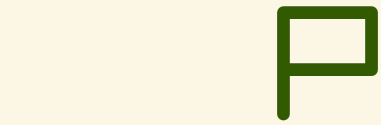
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Identity Politics

Politics that grows out of our own identity and oppression: working for our own liberation and, through coalition, the liberation of all. The term described disabled and mentally ill people using stigmatised identities as paths to activism (Anspach).



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Inclusion

Welcoming people in simply because they are human, which is more than tolerating them. Inclusion is something people are due, not something they must earn, and without equity it means little.



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Infodump

Sharing a special interest in great, enthusiastic detail. In Autistic culture infodumping is welcome and a way of building connection, and encouraging someone to infodump is a sign of caring. Listening to it is a love language.



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Inspiration Exploitation

Turning disabled people's lives into uplifting stories for non-disabled audiences, often praising them as brave just for living ordinary lives. It makes disabled people into objects and blames disabled people's attitudes, not barriers, for disability.



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Intelligence

The ability to perceive information and use it adaptively, found everywhere in the living world. Annie Murphy Paul calls it a shifting state, not a fixed property of a person, extended by bodies, spaces and other people.

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Intelligence Quotient

A score from tests designed to judge whether a person is developing within a so-called ‘normal’ range. Standard tests often underestimate Autistic people. As Ann Memmott says, human worth cannot be placed on such a scale.

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Interdisciplinary Learning

Learning that starts from a complex problem or interest in the world and draws on many perspectives, frameworks and skills to address it. It mirrors how we learn outside school, through critical thinking, collaboration and reflection.



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Intermittent Collaboration

In Daniel Pink's words, group work punctuated by breaks to think and work alone. Research found that intermittent interaction keeps the best of both worlds: groups learn from each other while exploring enough to find the best solutions.



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Interviews

Job interviews are a major barrier for Autistic people, who are judged on eye contact, small talk and social style. Many camouflage at great cost. Without visual and social cues, Autistic candidates outperformed non-Autistic ones.



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Invisible Disability

Disability that others cannot see, though every disability has invisible parts. People with invisible disabilities are constantly challenged to prove they are disabled. Disability is not a binary, and you cannot tell just by looking.



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Iteration

Learning through repeated tries, revision and sharing work in progress, because learning is not linear. Iterative cultures make space for failure and build in mercy, which is vital to learner safety.



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Labels

Words that name who we are. Labels imposed by others can pathologise, but labels we choose ourselves can bring community, rights and pride. As Ira David Socol argues, an equitable culture starts with people choosing their own labels.



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Lateral Reading

Checking a website by leaving it and opening new tabs to see what other sources say about it. Fact checkers who did this took in less text yet understood more, and faster, than historians reading each page closely.



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Laziness

A moral judgement that does not hold up. Laziness Does Not Exist argues that there are always barriers we cannot see, and what looks lazy is often a self-preservation instinct in people pushed to their limits.



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Leadership

Often little more than the dominance behaviour other primates use to keep their rank. Instead of trusting leaders and managers, grow networks of competence and coordination, so decisions rest with whoever holds the knowledge.



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Learner Safety

Feeling secure enough to try things, wonder aloud, test ideas and get things wrong while learning. Belittling, put-downs and harsh correction destroy it. Learning is invited, not commanded, and builds on inclusion safety.



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Learning Exhaust

The trail of things you make while learning in public, such as blogs, tutorials, talks, videos and newsletters, instead of learning in private and lurking. Create the resource you needed as a beginner.



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Learning Loss

The claimed drop in measured learning after time out of class, as in the pandemic. Critics call it a narrative built on bad data. For Rachel Gabriel, only an imagined future is lost: learning is never lost.



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Learning Management System

Closed, top-down course software that turns schooling into a to-do list of points, metrics and tasks. It bakes in behaviourism and surveillance, and its primary operation is collecting data. Indie ed-tech offers an open alternative.



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Least Restrictive Environment

A US legal principle that disabled children are taught alongside non-disabled children as far as appropriate, and removed only when that cannot work. It underpins inclusive education, but it rests on the deficit model.



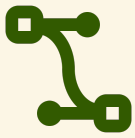
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Liberatory Design

A creative problem-solving practice that centres equity and designs for liberation. It shifts power between those who design and those affected, and adds two modes to design thinking: notice and reflect.



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Library Economy

A collectively organised system of commons that gives everyone access to shared goods and resources, through tool, clothing or furniture libraries. It puts humanity and cooperation, not capital and competition, at the centre.



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Lily Pad

A bounded block of grouped content, such as a coloured box on a web page, that gives readers a place to land, pause and choose where to go next. Lily pads reduce cognitive load and support monotropic attention.



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Long COVID

A chronic condition that follows COVID infection, lasts at least three months, can affect any organ system and can be severely disabling. Patients themselves coined the term and drove much early progress in understanding it.



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Lost Cause

A myth that the Confederate cause in the American Civil War was just, heroic and not centred on slavery. It spared white Americans the shame of their history and lives on in Lost Cause theology (Pollard, 1866).



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Lowering the Bar

A racist, sexist and ableist narrative with no basis in reality, which claims that diversifying hiring and supporting people from under-represented groups means hiring less qualified people. Like the meritocracy myth, it is a major barrier to inclusion.



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Luddite Sensibilities

Not a rejection of technology, but a refusal of technology used for domination. It means taking technology from the control of institutions and giving it to individuals for liberation. The original Luddites opposed exploitation, not machines.



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McNamara Fallacy

Making decisions using only what can easily be measured, then treating whatever cannot be measured as unimportant, or as if it does not exist. It is named after Robert McNamara, US Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968.



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Media Literacy

Being a critical consumer of media, thinking about its purposes and intentions, and also creating media for authentic audiences. It is slow and intentional: pause before you share, and ask what the maker was trying to do.



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Meritocracy

The widely held belief that individual merit is always rewarded. In a structurally racist, sexist and ableist society it is a myth: it justifies the status quo, entrenches privilege and fuels internalised ableism, racism and sexism.



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Metric Fixation

As Jerry Muller defines it, the seemingly irresistible pressure to measure performance, publicise it and reward it, even when it fails. As an old saying goes, not everything that counts can be counted.



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Mindset Marketing

The selling of grit, growth mindset and other packaged mindsets to schools as products. These campaigns are a veneer on the deficit model, shifting responsibility for change from systems to children while ignoring poverty, racism and ableism.



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Modality

A mode or channel of meaning, such as language, images, sound, gesture or touch. Communication is always multimodal, and disabled ways of languaging are mostly about modality, so offering many modalities is care work.



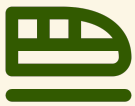
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Monotropic Inertia

The resistance a monotropic attention system has to changing state, making both starting and stopping hard through one mechanism. It is not laziness or defiance, and the same inertia is what makes deep flow possible.



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Moral Injury

The deep distress of being made to act against your own moral values, often because of systems and institutions. Teachers know the right thing to do but cannot do it. It differs from burnout, which comes from stress.



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Moral Panic

When the public is manipulated into a frenzy over something that poses no real danger. As with the witch trials, the aim is not to protect people from a threat but to exploit their fear for someone's gain.



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Multiage

Learning in mixed-age groups instead of dividing children by age. Older children mentor and lead, younger ones aspire and offer fresh ideas, and every child can grow at their own rate within a shared community.



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Multiliteracies

Literacy made plural: meaning varies with context and comes in many connected forms, including text, image, gesture, speech and sound. ‘Apt to context’ replaces a single standard of ‘correct’ (New London Group, 1994).

ab

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Mutuality

Shared benefit felt, acted on and lived out in relationships between people and groups. It runs through everyday life, and when those in power fail us, it is neighbours looking after each other that keeps communities going.



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Nature

The living world we belong to. Being outdoors connects us with one another and with the land, and sensory connection helps us care. As Fresh Banana Leaves teaches, as long as we protect nature, nature will protect us.



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Neoliberalism

In David Harvey's summary, the idea that human wellbeing is best advanced by freeing individual enterprise within free markets and private property rights. In practice it meant privatisation, deregulation and austerity, turning even friendship and learning into markets.



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Nesting

Arranging our physical and sensory surroundings so we can keep our flow and move between tasks in a world not designed around us. What looks like chaos is a carefully arranged safe space that we own and control.



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Neuro-anarchy

Stepping outside the neuronormative standards of your own neuroculture, including Autistic culture, to form an identity on your own terms. It is a radical decentring of normativity and a form of protest.



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Neurocentrism

Judging other neurologies by the yardstick of your own, the way ethnocentrism judges other cultures. Autism research often does this, comparing Autistic people with non-Autistic people and describing them only by what they lack.



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Neurocousin

A person who is not Autistic but is recognisably Autistic-like, especially in communication and social experience. The word cousin was first used this way at an Autism Network International conference in 1993.

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NeurodiVenture

In Autistic Collaboration's definition, an inclusive, non-hierarchical organisation run by neurodivergent people, offering a safe, nurturing space for divergent thinking, creativity, exploration and collaborative niche construction. They are small, human scale groups such as worker co-ops.



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Neurokit

Your neurokit is the set of things that support you as a neurodivergent person in daily life, gathered and kept close like a kit. Each one is personal, so the question is simply what is in yours.



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Neurome

Like a biome, but for minds: a place where unusual minds can flourish, accepted for their differences and their sensory needs. A neurome is not fixed to one time or place, and a book might be one.

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Neurominority

In Nick Walker's definition, a population of neurodivergent people who share a similar, largely innate and pervasive form of neurodivergence, which the neurotypical majority meets with prejudice, discrimination or oppression. Autistic and dyslexic people are examples.



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Neurospicy

A playful, community-created word for being neurodivergent, born online in the early 2020s partly to push back against the label ‘mild autism’. Some find it eases disclosure; others find ‘spicy’ racist and sexist.

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Neurotypical Perspectivelessness

When institutions stop seeing neurotypicality as one cultural viewpoint among many, so its ways of sensing, thinking and communicating seem neutral and universal. Neurodivergent struggle is then the predictable result of that design, not individual deficit.



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Noncompliance

A vital social skill: being able to say no, even when others would rather you could not, and yes to what you care about. Autistic noncompliance is not rebellion; it is refusing what harms us.



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Object Personification

Giving human qualities to objects, such as feeling sorry for unused papers or a lone leftover crisp. Researchers found it common among Autistic people; it can comfort and ease loneliness, but it can also cause distress.



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Objectivity

The claim to see neutrally, from nowhere: what Donna Haraway calls a conquering gaze, letting the unmarked represent others while escaping representation. It hides whose norms rule and discredits marginalised people. Whoever measures belongs in the measurement.



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Oligarchy

Rule by the wealthy few, set against democracy from the very beginning. Oligarchs and their circle sit above the law, blocking prosperity and social advancement for everyone else, and govern by myth and manufactured crisis.



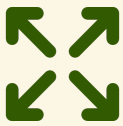
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Omni-directional Learning

Learning where everyone is both educator and learner, depending on context, instead of a top-down hierarchy. As Autistic Collaboration describes it, in small societies without formal authorities, everyone learns from everyone by watching, copying and asking.



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Open Space

A self-organised un-conference where participants build their own agenda of sessions around a shared theme. Whoever comes are the right people. Its one law: if you are not learning or contributing, move yourself to where you can.



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Peer Respite

A non-clinical, completely voluntary alternative to the psychiatric hospital, run by people with their own stories of mental health recovery, trauma or homelessness. The doors are not locked: guests can rest, rebuild and stay part of their community.



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Phone Calls

For many Autistic people, phone calls are a major barrier to healthcare, jobs and basic services; the ring alone can bring anxiety. Written options like email, text and webchat help, so services should not rely on phones.



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Place-Based Education

Learning designed around the local natural, cultural and built environment, which become the texts. It is nothing new: Indigenous people have learnt in local context for centuries. Civic engagement is central, as learners act to improve their places.



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Plain Text

Text made only of human-readable characters, with no formatting or binary data. It is portable, durable, flexible and humane: readable on any device, future proof, and never captive to one app or business model.

TXT

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Play

How humans, and nearly all mammals, evolved to learn: enjoyable, spontaneous, freely chosen and focused on process rather than outcome. Autistic people play differently because they learn differently, and their play is too often pathologised instead of respected.



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Popular Education

Education for critical consciousness, where everyone teaches and everyone learns, starting from lived experience. It is never politically neutral: it sides with marginalised people, and it is not complete without action on what is learnt (Freire).



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Postmortem

A written record of an incident: its impact, the actions taken, the root causes and the follow-up to stop it happening again. Blameless postmortems let people give full accounts without fear of punishment, so everyone learns from failure.



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Power

In Karl Deutsch's words, power is the ability not to have to learn. Privileged groups never need to learn the empathy or communication style of oppressed groups, and can blame every failure of understanding on them instead.



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Precarity

Living without security, where work, time and any advantage could vanish suddenly. Disabled people know this all too well. The deeper problem is scarcity combined with insecurity, in a society where only wealth feels anywhere near safe.



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Predatory Inclusion

Bringing marginalised consumer-citizens into schemes that promise mobility and democratisation, but on extractive terms. Platform capitalism specialises in it: the gig economy includes surplus workers in the digital economy only to extract from them.



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Prepping

Being prepared, not to hide in a bunker, but so you are better placed to help your community. Preparation rests on gear, skills and relationships, and relationships matter most. Build resilient communities.



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Privacy

Living privately means sensing what to show in each social setting and finding places where you can show more of yourself. Online, it means a password manager, never reusing passwords, and questioning surveillance, especially of students.



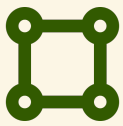
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Prosocial

Design principles for working together in small groups, drawn from the work of Elinor Ostrom: trusted relationships, fair sharing of costs and benefits, inclusive decisions and fast, empathetic conflict resolution. Adapted for Autistic people to put trust first.



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Psychological Torture

As UN Special Rapporteur Nils Melzer defines it, deliberately inflicting severe mental pain or suffering without physical pain. It attacks needs such as security and dignity. Torture that leaves no mark is still torture, even when called therapy.



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Punk

Overturning the dominant order through art, music and culture, and dragging into the open what was meant to stay hidden. As Alice Bag says, punk was created by women, people of colour and queers. Kindness is punk.



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Quiet Hands

A familiar order from special education, drilled into Autistic children through applied behaviour analysis, to stop flapping their hands. It takes away a natural language. Julia Bascom's answer is loud hands: speaking, however we do, as ourselves.



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R-Word

A slur against intellectually disabled people, rooted in eugenics and used to justify sterilisation, segregation and institutionalisation. Self-advocates have campaigned against it since the 1970s. It still hurts, and it will never be reclaimed.



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Rabbit Hole

Going deep into something and ending up somewhere strange: one citation leads to another, one tab becomes seventeen. For monotropic minds, the rabbit hole is not a detour but the destination, and inside, it looks like flow.



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Racial Weathering

How racism wears the body down: repeated stress responses leave a weathered body weaker, ageing faster and more prone to chronic disease. Racialised and stigmatised people weather fastest and worst (Geronimus, 1992).



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Radical Inclusivity

Going beyond accepting differences: working together to dismantle systemic barriers and create neuroqueer spaces with freedom for cognitive and somatic liberty. It starts with inclusion safety and grows through continuous acts of neuroqueering.



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Radical Intimacy

As Sophie K. Rosa puts it, treating connection, care and community as sites of struggle. Capitalism thwarts our intimate lives, so remaking the world means human scale care that brings us closer to ourselves and each other.



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Reading

Ben Foss names three types of reading: eye reading, ear reading and finger reading, and none is better. Treating eye reading as the only real reading is a social choice that breeds shame. Audiobooks and Braille count too.

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Relational Pattern Languages

Simple, repeatable ways of describing how people connect, collaborate and belong in shared spaces, naming patterns like solitude and refuge, small-group learning and community gathering. They help us design for real nervous systems, not one enforced norm.

#

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Relationship Accommodations

In Raffael Boccamazzo's words, the reasonable adjustments we make that allow the other person to meet our needs. In neurodiverse relationships, unmet needs usually come from misunderstanding, not lack of effort, and accommodations help bridge that gap.



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Resentment

A political tool that turns people against those below them instead of those above. Neurodivergent and disabled people meet it as accusations of faking, with accommodations framed as unfair privileges. Resentment of minorities is baked into white supremacy.



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Respectability Politics

Pressure on marginalised people to be nice, polite and never angry to earn acceptance. Individuals may need it to survive, but Lydia X. Z. Brown writes that a movement needs nothing of it. Niceness can dodge inequity.



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Rest

Rest, along with ease and care, is something our culture keeps from us. Fergus Murray says we urgently need a society better at letting people rest, and Tricia Hersey says our collective rest will save us.



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Roaming Autodidact

The idealised learner that education technology is designed for: self-motivated and able, cut off from place, culture and history, and almost always imagined as western, white, educated and male. Designing for them leaves everyone else out (McMillan Cottom).



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Rot Economy

The growth-at-all-costs mindset, traced by Ed Zitron, where only revenue growth matters. Companies degrade their own products to please shareholders, hollowing out useful, even beloved, services and rushing ahead at the expense of safety and people.



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Sadopopulism

Governing through policies that hurt the people who voted for them, then turning their pain and fear against others. As Timothy Snyder puts it, the government makes you hurt, and then you want somebody else to hurt more.



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Scenius

Genius that belongs to a community rather than one gifted person: the intelligence and intuition of a whole cultural scene. No one creates alone; creativity grows from people supporting each other (Eno).



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Schoolishness

In Susan D. Blum's definition, being made for, by and about school rather than the real world: packaged learning, uniformity, evaluation by others, set timetables and right answers someone already knows. It rhymes with foolishness.



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Scientific Essentialism

The view that natural kinds are defined by essential properties. Applied to autism, it assumes one essential property must explain every instance, rather than recognising autism's heterogeneity. Softer models see clusters of interacting causes instead.



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Segregationist Discourse

The rhetoric of segregation with its most openly racist phrases dropped: states' rights, free enterprise, freedom of association, privatisation, the myth of meritocracy and opposition to public assistance, all recast in language that avoids naming race.



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Self-Organizing

As Harrison Owen says, all systems, including human ones, organise themselves. Given open space and trust, learning emerges rather than being made to happen. Autistic people thrive when free to organise themselves in mostly neurodivergent teams.



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Semiotic Domains

Any set of practices that uses modes such as language, images, symbols, sounds or gestures to communicate distinctive meanings, from video games to cellular biology. Each has its own affinity group and design grammar (Gee).



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Sensory Fluid

A neuroqueer, non-gendered approach to clothing and self-presentation that follows the state of your nervous system, not fixed rules about fashion. Some days you want sparkle, some days soft: you dress for your spoons and social battery.



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Sensory Hell

Sensory input that is the reverse of stimmy: completely unbearable. A busy supermarket is the classic example, but any place or sensation can become one. The pain is real, not bad behaviour, and can lead to meltdown.



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Shame

In Ben Foss's words, guilt is feeling bad about something you did, and shame is feeling bad about who you are. Shame cuts off connection and thrives on hiding. As Debra Kidd says, shame is not a weapon.



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Sleep

Many Autistic people have sleep difficulties throughout life. What helps often runs against standard sleep hygiene advice: sensory comfort, daytime physical activity, time for focused interests and predictable family routines. Sleep should be treated individually, not by manual.



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Slow Pedagogy

Teaching that values the present moment and follows children's own pace, rhythm and interests. It makes unhurried time for wonder, care, observation and revisiting ideas, and treats going off track as a possibility rather than a distraction.



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Somatic

Of the body. Somatic psychology holds that body and mind are one system, so habits of tension, posture, breath and movement shape the psyche, and changing how we use the body can change how we think and feel.



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Somatic Rudder

The body’s part in steering our thinking. As Annie Murphy Paul writes, internal sensations like a shiver, a sigh or tensed muscles alert us when a useful pattern is detected, guiding decisions faster than conscious analysis.



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Southern Strategy

A US Republican political strategy, embraced by Nixon, of winning white voters, especially in the South, through coded racial appeals such as law and order and forced busing, stirring racial fear and resentment without openly naming race.



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Space Bunny

Space Bunny is the white rabbit mascot of the Stimpunks learning space, standing for playfulness, curiosity, wonder, hope and expanding learning potential. Follow the rabbit down the rabbit hole: learning follows the desire lines of your own curiosity.



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Spaced Repetition

A way of remembering by testing yourself on something repeatedly, spacing the reviews further apart over time. Each successful recall strengthens the memory and lengthens the gap before the next review, making it the opposite of cramming.



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Sparkle Brain

A word for an Epileptic, Bipolar or PTSD brain, and for any neurodivergent brain. Big tent, extra electric and shiny like a disco ball, it answers anyone who sees such brains as broken (Higgins).



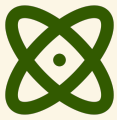
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STEM

Science, technology, engineering and maths: above all a marketing term serving the fantasy economy. Promoted by elites as the key to prosperity, it rests on myths of STEM worker shortages and a permanently deficient workforce.



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Stimpunk

A blend of stimming and punk: open, proud stimming, resistance to normalisation, and the DIY culture of punk, disabled and neurodivergent communities. Inspired by cripple punk and genderpunk, it brings to the front what is usually hidden.



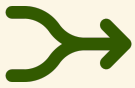
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Strategic Essentialism

A political tactic where members of a subordinated group temporarily simplify their shared identity to build coalition and achieve goals, despite real differences among them. It can widen inclusion, but pushed too far becomes strategic erasure.



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Straws

For many disabled people, plastic straws are access tools for drinking, nutrition and stimming. Bans and alternatives bring choking, injury and hot drink risks, and having to ask for one puts an unfair burden on disabled people.



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Stress Incoherence

A state where long-standing inner settings no longer fit current conditions, bringing constant prediction errors, exhaustion and spiralling dysregulation. What gets called disorder is a mismatch with the environment, not a personal defect (Hogenkamp, Sanghavi and Natri, 2026).



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Structural Ideology

The understanding that unequal educational outcomes come mainly from structural barriers and unequal access to opportunity, not from deficits or a lack of grit in students and families. Equity means fixing injustice, not kids (Gorski, 2016).



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Subtype

An attempt to split Autistic people into separate groups, such as ‘profound autism’ or PDA. The neurodiversity movement broadly opposes subtyping: it lacks validity, weaponises our heterogeneity and is unlikely to meet support needs.



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Suicide

Autistic and other neurodivergent people face a much higher risk of suicide. Research points to camouflaging, loneliness, thwarted belonging, unmet support needs, burnout and bullying as risk markers, while acceptance and belonging protect.

If you are struggling, please talk to someone you trust or a local crisis line.



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Support Swapping

When neurodivergent people support each other in turn: one reminds a friend to drink water, and the friend asks if they have taken their meds. Working together, we fill the gaps in each other's spiky profiles.



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Systems Generated Trauma

Severe harm done to disabled children and their families by the very public services meant to help them: health, social care and education systems that are complex, dysfunctional and actively harmful. Often unintended, it is rarely acknowledged.



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Techno-Legal Solutionism

In Reid’s definition, the belief that complex social problems can be solved through legally mandated technical fixes, such as age verification in child online safety laws. It assumes lawmakers can simply make tech companies ‘nerd harder’.



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Techno-solutionism

The simplification of complex social problems into apps and algorithms: the belief that technology will magically fix what is broken, often before the problem is understood. Communities it harms should be free to refuse it (Morozov, 2013).



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Technoableism

In Ashley Shew's account, ableism that treats technology as a way to eliminate disability, as if disability were a bad thing to be fixed. Often sold as empowerment, it designs at disabled people rather than for them.



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Thick Data

Qualitative, human-scale data that brings out people's emotions, stories and context, or, in Tricia Wang's words, the sticky stuff that is hard to quantify. Blending big data and thick description, it restores meaning that big data strips away.



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Third Places

Places beyond home and work or school where people find community without having to buy anything. Neutral, open, playful and welcoming to regulars, a home away from home. Radical third places also build in access and accommodations.



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Threshold Anxiety

The dread that lands at the edge of a change, before it has begun: a doorway, a first day, a new job or school. For monotropic minds, every transition is costly. Broken thresholds, not broken people.



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Tone Indicators

Tags such as /j for joking, /s for sarcasm and /gen for genuine, added to text messages to make tone clear. Tone is hard to read in text without voice or body language, especially for some neurodivergent people.

/

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Tonic Masculinity

Positive, supportive masculinity: men who show kindness and care for others, share power, are not scared of strong women and do not shy away from their vulnerabilities. Mr Rogers is held up as its model.



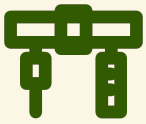
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Toolbelt Theory

The idea that learners build their own collection of tools and supports, high and low tech, and learn to choose what suits the task, the place and their abilities at the time. Fairness based on needs, not sameness.



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Toxic Masculinity

A loose term for harmful male behaviours linked to domination, humiliation and control, such as emotional detachment, aggression and objectifying women. Driven by fear of seeming feminine, it is one masculinity among many: men can choose otherwise.



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Toxic Positivity

Insisting on staying positive whatever happens, which invalidates people and blames failure on bad attitude rather than structural conditions. Often ableist and steeped in deficit ideology, it cannot fix what policy builds. Sometimes anger is right.



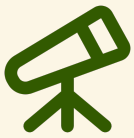
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Transcendent Thinking

Thinking that goes beyond the here and now to find the deeper meaning, historical context, civic significance and bigger ideas in a situation. In teenagers it is linked with brain growth, identity and later life satisfaction (Immordino-Yang).



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Transepistemics

Learning from many knowledges and ways of life to give everyone more conceptual tools for sustainable, relational futures. Learning Indigenous place names, which carry intimate knowledge of the land and its ecosystem, is one example (Meighan, 2023).



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Transformative Justice

Justice that goes to the root of harm and transforms the conditions that create injustice, rather than punishing. Created and held by communities, not the state, it begins by asking why harm happened and what we can learn.



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Triskelion

The ancient triple spiral, Stimpunks' symbol for timeless patterns in primordial spaces. It stands for flowing between spaces while staying connected, for monotropism, flow states and emergence, and for a world of constantly unfolding newness and potential.



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Tryborg

A non-disabled person who poses as a cyborg through the latest gadgets, with no real dependence on technology. Tryborgs claim expertise on cyborgs, mostly disabled people, while lacking lived experience, and build technology in their own image (Weise).



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Veil of Ignorance

A thought experiment: design a fair society without knowing who you will be in it, including your class, race, gender, abilities or family. Rational people would then choose what is best for the least advantaged (Rawls, 1971).

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Very Grand Emotions

Justice, fairness, truth, knowledge and similar values, felt by many Autistic people as their primary emotions. Living by them in a society that feels sub-ethical and uncurious brings constant stress that can lead to meltdown and burnout.



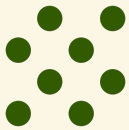
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Visual Snow

A neurological condition in which people see static, flickering dots and flashing lights all the time, eyes open or closed, like looking through a shaken snow globe. It can also affect hearing, thinking and sensory processing.



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Vocational Education

John Dewey’s vision of vocational education: not narrow trade training that adapts workers to the existing industrial system, but broad learning that makes workers masters of their own fate and, ultimately, transforms that system.



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W.E.I.R.D.

Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic: the societies most research is done on and by, though their people are often psychological outliers. These cultures pathologise neurodivergent people who do not fit their competitive social game.



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Warm Line

A peer-run support line, staffed by people with their own lived experience of mental health difficulties, offering peer support. Warm lines have been shown to reduce loneliness and people's use of mental health crisis services.



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Web

The open World Wide Web, owned by no one and designed for sharing information and building knowledge together. A domain of one's own gives learners their own space to think, and control over their work, data and identity.



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White-Male Effect

The finding that some men, in the US mostly white, higher in status and sure of their own efficacy, see risks as smaller and more acceptable than others do, and embrace new technologies while minimising their threats.



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Why Sheets

Short, free, double-sided handouts that briskly make the case for a progressive education practice, such as avoiding homework, tests or worksheets. They help educators explain why they do what they do, and why they avoid some things (Kohn).



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Wild

Wildness as Nick Totton sees it: a continual tendency to connect and grow more complex, the opposite of domestication's simplification. Reconnecting with wild mind brings an awareness in which we will not harm the world for short-term comfort.



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Woke

From African American Vernacular English: aware of and attentive to racial and social injustice. Used in Black communities for a century, as when Lead Belly urged listeners in 1938 to stay woke to the dangers of racist violence.



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Workflow Thinking

Seeing knowledge work as steps bound up with our tools, and asking which tools and practices suit each step. Not about efficiency above all, it offers agency, creativity and confidence, and supports flow states.

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Writing

In John Warner's words, conveying a specific message to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Best taught as a process of discovery, not a finished product, it can put Autistic people on an equal social footing.



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