

## The Antifascist Politics of Studioing

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### Abstract

This article argues that art education ought to be central to the struggle against contemporary capitalist fascism. The authors turn to the space and time of the studio as the unique contribution of art education to antifascist struggles. In particular, the pataphysics of the studio – including its emphasis on producing particulars, laws of exceptions, and impossible solutions – all set adrift the rigidification of desirous production under capitalist reterritorialization. In conclusion, the article offers an invitation to art educators to experiment with a particular studios practice the authors call “protocoling” in relation to racist stereotypes as a way to break apart fascist subjectivities and the capture of desire into paranoid assemblages.

Keywords: Fascism, Studio, Deleuze and Guattari, Pataphysics, Alfred Jarry, Kara Walker.

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## **A política antifascista de “Estudiar”**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo argumenta que a educação artística deve ser central na luta contra o fascismo capitalista contemporâneo. Os autores voltam-se para o espaço e o tempo do estúdio como a contribuição única da educação artística para as lutas antifascistas. Em particular, a Patafísica do estúdio – incluindo a sua ênfase na produção de detalhes, leis de exceções e soluções impossíveis –, assim colocando à deriva a rigidificação da produção desejosa sob a reterritorialização capitalista. Em conclusão, o artigo oferece um convite aos educadores de arte para experimentarem uma prática de estúdio particular que os autores chamam de "protocoling" em relação aos estereótipos racistas como forma de romper subjetividades fascistas e a captura do desejo em montagens paranoicas.

Palavras-chave: Fascismo, Estúdio, Deleuze e Guattari, Patafísica, Alfred Jarry, Kara Walker.

## **La politique antifasciste de "Studioer"**

### **Résumé**

Cet article affirme que l'éducation artistique doit être centrale dans la lutte contre le fascisme capitaliste contemporain. Les auteurs se tournent vers l'espace et le temps du studio comme la contribution unique de l'éducation artistique aux luttes antifascistes. En particulier, la Pataphysique du studio – y compris son accent sur la production de détails, de lois d'exceptions et de solutions impossibles –, mettant ainsi à la dérive la rigidification de la production désireuse sous la reterritorialisation capitaliste. En conclusion, l'article invite les éducateurs d'art à expérimenter une pratique de studio particulière que les auteurs appellent "protocoling" par rapport aux stéréotypes racistes comme moyen de briser les subjectivités fascistes et la capture du désir dans les assemblages paranoïaques.

Mots-clés: Fascisme, Studio, Deleuze et Guattari, Pataphysique, Alfred Jarry, Kara Walker.

## The Return of Fascism

Currently, we are facing a global upsurge of protofascist (Lewis, 2020b) or aspirational fascist (Connolly, 2017) political tendencies. While the use of the term “fascist” might sound like a reactionary, left-wing exaggeration, it is important to consider that even American General Mark Milley, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated “This is a Reichstag moment”, fearing a coup by Trump loyalists to overturn the 2019 election results. As such, the question of fascism is not simply an academic concern but is on the minds of even those in positions of significant political power. A key feature of this trend is an entrenchment of reactionary, highly militarized, and reductive notions of nationalist populism that are informed by xenophobic fears of otherness, difference, and the possible contamination of “authentic” identity through intercultural exchange. In the United States, there have been multiple symptoms of such fascism, including the rise of antisemitic violence, anti-Black alt-right demonstrations, and current denunciations of “critical race theory” (CRT) in K-12 schools. In terms of the latter, CRT is castigated as a left-wing, radical attack on American values and American identity. The attacks on CRT are an attempt, at least in part, to arrest American identity in certain terms: American = unashamed white person; American = heterosexual; American = uncritical citizen; American = obedient consumer. It would not be a stretch to think of this formulation as a distinctly American form of homegrown fascism.

The question we pose in this essay is as follows: Which art practices in particular challenge such fascist proclivities? What resources are internal to the arts that resist the lure of fascism? To answer this question, we will advance a theory of fascist subjectivity and then argue that the practice of “studioing” (Lewis & Hyland, 2022) provides a space and time wherein the affective and existential dimensions of fascist subjectivity can be suspended. At first, this might seem like a strange claim to make, as there certainly are fascist artists and studio practices. Indeed, authors such as Mark Antliff (2007) have demonstrated that a number of French, modernist artists supported the fascist project in the first half of the 20th century, finding in the avant-garde an aesthetic of revolution that had the power to overthrow existing institutions in the name of a fascist “new man”. Since fascism is, in part, predicated on myth making, artists had an important role to play in promoting the fascist political agenda. If Antliff is correct, then we must proceed with caution and not overly romanticize the political implications of *all* art making practices. Instead, we want to argue that studioing is a particular art practice that has antifascist potentialities within it. In particular, we find within the *pliability* of the concept of the studio and of studioing (as a verb) a certain potential that can interrupt and render inoperative the

defining features of fascist subjectivity. We name this pliability the “pataphysics” of studioing, and it is precisely the unique features of such pataphysics that are simultaneously captured by fascist appropriation and resistant to such appropriation (Bök, 2001). The work of this essay is to outline the pataphysics of studioing in order to demonstrate its antifascist implications for rethinking art education.

Such a project is needed now more than ever, especially for art educators. While social justice is a dominant theme running throughout much of contemporary art educational thought, the problematic of fascist subjectivity remains marginal (Lewis & Krahe, 2020). But if we take Antliff’s thesis seriously – that art and artists played a central role in creating images necessary to popularize the myth of the fascist “new man” – then the terrain of struggle against fascism ought to be focused on the arts, both as a seedbed for producing *and* resisting fascism’s subjective and perceptual hold. Our notion of studioing turns to a concept *internal* to art practice itself in order to find resources to respond to contemporary strains of fascist revivalism (from within yet against), and thus prevent education in the arts from becoming an (unknowing) incubator for fascist desires. While much of what follows concerns political and social theory, our aim is less to import insights from other fields into art education (in order to define the politics of its practices). Instead, we are interested in how the arts contain *in themselves* important practices, spaces, and subject formations for combating a problem found in political and social theory. As such, what follows not only aims to foreground the question of fascism for art educators, but also to foreground art education (and the space, time, and existential risk of studioing practices) as essential for political and social theorists/activists.

## **Fascist Subjectivity: stereotypical thinking and sedentary Desire**

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983) offer a critique of fascist subjectivity in their famous, co-authored text *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In the preface to the book, Michel Foucault clearly states that the “strategic adversary” of the book is “fascism” (1983, xiii) not in the sense of political movements, but in terms of subtle, everyday forms of fascism that might manifest through the love of power and hierarchy as well as a desire for one’s own subordination and domination. Even in liberal democracies, Deleuze and Guattari continued to worry that fascism could take hold of an individual’s everyday psychological dispositions. Once internalized and normalized, these micro-fascistic impulses could be triggered by certain social,

political, and economic factors, leading to an upsurge of fascist political movements. As Guattari (2009) warned, "... new forms of molecular fascism are developing: a slow burning fascism in familialism, in school, in racism, in every kind of ghetto, which advantageously makes up for the crematory ovens" (p. 171). It is wrong to think that simply because historically existing fascist regimes ended with WWII that fascism has disappeared. Again, Guattari (2009) writes, "fascism, like desire, is scattered everywhere, in separate bits and pieces, within the whole social realm; it crystallizes in one place or another, depending on the relationships of forces" (p. 171). Indeed, Western capitalist, liberal democratic nations such as the United States are not exempt from fascism, and might very well be the epicenter for a fascist resurgence. As such, the techniques of schizoanalysis that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) offer promote a "non-fascist life" (xiii).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1983), fascism is essentially a rigidification of the infinite, multiple, nomadic, and productive possibilities of desire. Desire is, in other words, Oedipalized, meaning it is frozen, reduced, and calcified. Importantly, fascism is not an exotic exception to bourgeois subjectivity, but actually arises from *inside* the typical bourgeois familial love triangle. Indeed, fascism emerges as a political factor when the leader and the nation take over the roles of the oppressive "father" in one's libidinal economy – shifting scales from the micro to the macro and back again. Once Oedipalized, the self becomes rigidified into a potentially "reactionary" and "paranoic" "fascist tendency" (p. 340), which culminates in the formulation: "I am one of your kind, from the same place as you, I am a pure Aryan, of a superior race for all time" (p. 340). As one can easily see from this formulation, the fascist tendency is to create boundaries between self and other and in-group/out-group dichotomies that lead to increasing levels of paranoia and violence concerning the "other". Coldness and hardness set in, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) refer to as fascist "sedentary" desire (p. 340). The productive capacity of desire is replaced by the domesticated "herd instinct" (p. 342), which controls the movements of desire according to global aggregates (such as "the people" or "the nation" or "blood and soil").

Deleuze and Guattari (1983) focus on liberating desire from Oedipalization (which is the psychological precondition for fascism to take hold of our libidinal flows) as an antifascist strategy. Indeed, their solution rests not in mental capacities to critically crack open the ideology of fascism so much as in "schizing" desire itself. To *schiz* is to break free from fascist hardness and coldness in the name of "nomadic and polyvocal" (p. 340) desiring lines that produce new differences rather than negate such differences (as an outside threat to the internal consistency and of Oedipalized identity). Schizoanalysis is a procedure for rupturing fascist libidinal interests

by unleashing flows of desire that have the capacity to disorganize the striated, fascist social field that is organized hierarchically and schematically. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) summarize the productive nature of schizoanalysis as unleashing “pure positive multiplicities where everything is possible, without exclusiveness or negation, syntheses operating without a plan, where the connections are transverse, the disjunctions included the conjunctions polyvocal, indifferent to their underlying support, since this matter that serves them precisely as a support receives no specificity from any structural or personal unity...” (p. 309). Notice how schizoanalysis substitutes rigidity for pliability (a multiplicitous self). At the same time, it also troubles fascist manipulateness insofar as it is a play “without a plan” and thus is unwilling to sacrifice means for a predefined end. Finally, instrumental relationships are also interrupted by transversal relationships through which subject and object are equally implicated and changed in and through their relationality.

Guattari (2009) argues that fascism is ultimately about keeping desire “in line” whereas schizoanalysis is about setting desire adrift. Importantly for educators, he writes, “At home, a child ‘off the track’ is put down, and this continues in school, in the barracks, in the factory, in the trade union, and in the party cell. You must always stay ‘on the right track’ and ‘in line’. But by virtue of its very nature, desire always has a tendency to ‘stray from the subject’, ‘to get off the track’, and to drift from its proper course” (pp. 159-160). Fascism takes hold on a child by keeping desire on a certain track. Yet desire itself always already is adrift. This drift is the key to an antifascist schizonanalysis, which essentially accelerates such drift in order to explode fascist reactionary paranoia. We might even say that drift is the transcendental condition of possibility for any schizoanalysis at all.

Today, the tensions between drift (antifascist and nomadic positions) and rigidification of desire (the schizophrenic and fascist positions) take place within capitalism. Capitalism deterritorializes flows of desire: flows of money and circulation of commodities, flows of production and workers. Capitalism “schizophrenizes” society (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 232). Yet at the same time, capitalism places certain limits to the productivity and polyvocality of desires which it unleashed. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) summarize: “The more the capitalist machines deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value” (p. 35). In other words, capitalism develops the capacity to absorb surplus desires and make them operative under its axioms, and thus reterritorializes the flows it unleashes, via the family, the nation, and the state.

If the schizo is in some sense unleashed within and through capitalism, when the speed limit is placed upon it, schizophrenia transforms into paranoia (in which there is one source of meaning and all desire is coded according to a despotic power). This tendency of capitalism to reterritorialize flows culminates in the fascist state, which is “capitalism’s most fantastic attempt at economic and political reterritorialization” (p. 258) insofar as there is a perfect merger of industry, war, and state. Or we might think of the resurgence of nationalism(s) – both in the Americas and across Europe – in today’s geopolitical landscape. As such, fascism is not external to capitalism. Of course, there are subtle differences between historical forms of fascism, but what is important for us is how Deleuze and Guattari see a connection across various economic, political, and social assemblages. On the whole, it would seem that fascism is a problem for capitalism in terms of how it manages its own internal, economic crises as well as how these crises affect the development of individual flows of desire. Deleuze and Guattari do not suggest retreating from the flow of desire defining capitalist productive capacities but rather its full embrace, lifting the speed limit that culminates in a fascist state. They write, “For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character” (p. 239). In other words, to live an antifascist life is to explode the capitalist speed limit (as fast as it is) through the complete schizing of the self and its desirous production.

While Deleuze and Guattari point toward certain art forms and works of art as having emancipatory and critical capacities for breaking open the rigidity of fascism as the extreme and paranoid subject formation emerging within the contradictions of capitalism, what we are most interested in is how certain artistic *spaces* and *practices* can interrupt and suspend fascist tendencies, producing new ways of thinking and desiring that embrace and also produce difference. In the next section, we will explore how the pataphysical space-time machine of the studio might offer one such example of inducing antifascist existential risk.

## The Pataphysics of Studioing

As has been argued elsewhere (Lewis & Hyland, 2022), the studio space is distinguished by its pataphysical pliability. Pliability in this context has four possible meanings. First, within the studio, objects, materials, and even forms of subjectivity are released from their conventional functions, meanings, and ends in order to be opened up for free use. Second, pliability refers to the space of the studio itself as

a space that, throughout history, has been mobile, crossing strict class distinctions, and has taken on a variety of novel forms (from aristocratic museums to artistic laboratories to monastic chambers for contemplation). Third, studios create conditions wherein the very coordinates of identity become pliable. Studios contain the potential to transform the defining features of one's class, race, or gender into raw material for artistic reinvention, thus inducing a specific kind of schizing of the self. In other words, the space of the studio is a space of suspension of who we are, how we are supposed to be, and what we are supposed to do (with said materials, gestures, relations, and so forth). Studio spaces collapse the normal scaffolding of the self, making the self unstable, and therefore open to new potentialities. Simply put, the studioing (or studious) self is an *anarchic* self, resolutely antifascist in its resistance to any axiomatic of desire. Finally, pliability indicates that the space and time of studioing practices concern the drift of desire. It encourages a certain amount of falling off track (as Guattari might say), willingly giving the self over to circular movements and patterns that might not lead toward a specific, predefined end.

This pliability can be productively thought of as a materialization or actualization of certain pataphysical procedures. Drawing on the work of Alfred Jarry (1999), pataphysics can be defined in terms of three paradoxical dimensions: a science of particulars, an examination of the laws of exceptions, and the production of imaginary solutions. In this section, we will pay particular attention to the question of desirous flows or drifts within studioing practices, arguing that such drift embodies these three dimensions of pataphysics, and in turn, reveals the antifascist potentiality of studioing to combat fascist tendencies in the name of multiplicities and difference. This pataphysical move is justified insofar as pataphysics was an important footnote in the history of philosophy for Deleuze (1997a), indirectly inspiring notions of the schizoid subject and of the productivity of desire.

First, pataphysics is a science of particulars. Whereas modern science concerns ordering specifics in relation to larger, more general categories or species, pataphysics resists these kinds of inductive and deductive maneuvers, opting instead to focus on the production of particulars and their horizontal, analogical relationships (Lewis, 2020a). In relation to questions of desirous drift, pataphysics insists on generating particulars that escape from the molar identities of groups. This does not mean that pataphysics retreats from the social field, but rather it invests in social groups that are not recognizable by the state and are not overcoded by leaders or parties that would present themselves as interpreting and representing the desires of the masses. Pataphysical experimentation with drift generates particulars that cannot be labeled in advance as belonging to this or that "type" of group. If science classifies, then the



science of particulars declassifies. These are singular group formations that do not yet have a name, do not yet fit nicely into the order of things, and thus mobilize desire in ways that overcome limits imposed by and through Oedipalized organizational forces, institutions, and practices. Particulars can pole vault out of their “proper” historical or social context to create strange conjunctions with other anachronistic elements, forces, and styles that do not draw distinctions between past, present, and future. In Jerry’s pataphysical science, particulars are set free from the constraints of time and space, free floating clinamens within what he refers to as “eternity” or a cosmic energy field that enables particulars to travel across space and time and produce creative (if not unholy) couplings.

The pliability of particularities involves the abandoning of who and what we think we are and how we ought to situate ourselves within a social field. This is, in other words, a radical experiment on the self through the self without an “identity” there to guide such experimentation toward a recognizable outcome or goal. Stated differently, the privileging of particulars is an anarchic strategy for uprooting Oedipal forms of libidinal organization on micro and macrolevels. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might call it, studioing as a practice of self-pliability is a “becoming-other” where otherness is not what is external to the self so much as its internal difference. This process of becoming, schizes the rigidity of the fascist self, cracking it open to new kinds of contaminations and new perverse, transversal relationships that call into question the stark molar lines of demarcation separating and hierarchizing differences within Oedipalized, fascist tendencies. In short, the fascist might be cold and hard, but the pataphysical self is hot and flexible (composed of flows of particulars that resist any notion of hierarchical categorization).

Moreover, the cultivation of pataphysical contamination confounds the fascist’s obsession with purity, which must be defended continually in order to concretize hierarchies. The land must remain pure, free of those viewed as alien. Likewise, the individual must remain free of ideas not already sanctioned by fascist powers. Eradication of “impurities” promotes a distorted understanding of “health”, where well-being is achieved in large part through the negation of beings dissimilar to oneself. The project of fascism is in some measure sustained by the pretense of providing comfort to a distinct group that has been convinced its health is in jeopardy. This false conception then legitimizes the violence and degradation used to restore well-being. In this sense, the activity of studioing undermines the fascist notion of health by destabilizing purity through the introduction of ex-centric particulars, engendering counter-narratives and anarchist iconographies. It also serves to neutralize cults of personality by subverting the formation of monolithic identity through the nurturing

of multiplicity. Identity enters into a state of burgeoning difference, preventing the stereotype of the idealized, fascist leader from solidifying. In this regard, irony, parody, and paradox – with their tendency for generating multiple, opposite, and parallel meanings – can become strategies of pliability, fostering particulars that confound the fascist identity. The resulting health stands in stark contrast to any notion of health predicated on hardness and coldness, and instead embraces health as the embrace of pliability and contamination.

Second, pataphysics concerns itself with the laws of exceptions. This might very well appear to be paradoxical as exceptions are exceptional precisely because they do not abide by laws. Yet as the work of Giorgio Agamben (2005) demonstrates, exceptions do not abolish the law, rather, they are states that protect the law precisely by suspending it. Such states can be witnessed in any number of historical moments, as when governments proclaim a state of emergency. For us, what is most important is the connection between states of exception and fascism. Indeed, the rise of Nazism to power in Germany in the 20th century was defined by an extended, indeterminate state of exception which granted Hitler, as sovereign, absolute power. Or we can think of the (quasi-fascist) state of emergency induced by American-style liberal democracy in the wake of 9/11 that allowed for any number of otherwise illegal incursions into private lives of citizens in the name of safety. If this is the case, then what are we to think of the antifascist potentials of pataphysics? Would not pataphysics itself be a proto- (rather than anti-) fascist aesthetic? Here we return to opening worries concerning the connections between avant-garde artists and fascism.

Perhaps we can resolve this question by turning to Walter Benjamin (1999) who once wrote that if we live in a perpetual state of exception brought about by sovereign decisions *from above*, then it is “our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism” (p. 392). For Benjamin, the real state of emergency/exception is not from above but from *below* in the form of worker (and children) strikes and other revolutionary gestures by the oppressed, marginalized, and excluded. Thus, the source of the exception shifts from those in Power to those who have little power (institutionally speaking). But there is another important shift here worth bringing to the fore. Fascism always acts to *absolutize* the state of exception, or make it permanent in the name of Power. It desires to produce a State out of the state of exception, and thus subject any and everyone to the possibility of unjustified and unsanctioned violence and arbitrary decisions by a sovereign. Pataphysics insists instead on the eventual nature of the emergency. Exceptions are events that rupture or schiz social formations and organizations, opening up possibilities for new kinds of social groups and subjects to emerge, yet such moments

are precisely that: moments or happenings. Benjamin's examples are illuminating in this respect, as both worker and children's strikes are specific happenings that do not attempt to absolutize the emergency, instead, these are events that rupture the rupture of the state of exception (from above). We can thus think of the strikes as moments in which subjects can study the laws of the exception from below so as to unleash the flows of desires and affective intensities otherwise restrained by molar aggregates (the herd instinct). And this brings us to the third distinction. The state of exception from above transforms everyone into bare life (Agamben, 2005) or life that does not have the safety of rights or laws to protect it from sovereign violence. Such an exception reduces life to that which can be instrumentalized and manipulated so as to fulfill the function of a sacrifice. But the exceptional event from below does not insist on such instrumentalization and manipulation of life. Instead, it is a momentary manifestation of the (weak) powers of life to demand something else, to prefer not to abide by the sovereign decision over and against it, and thus embrace its own insurgent powers of (anarchic) drift.

To think of the self as an eventual site of the exception in the practice of studioing means highlighting the *risks* of such experimentation. On the one hand, it means that the self is exposed, vulnerable, perhaps unrecognizable and thus potentially given over to sacrifice or abandonment. At the same time, it also means that the self in the state of exception is open to the drift of desire. In this sense, the exception emphasizes the risk in studioing, while also gesturing toward its antifascist, healthy potentials.

Third, pataphysics offers imaginary solutions. Again, we appear to be dealing with an irreconcilable paradox as Jarry is asking us to accept the material reality of "solutions" that are nevertheless "imaginary" and thus nonfunctional (and therefore not really solutions at all). Compare this with fascism's "final solution". In fascism, there is a search for a solution that will end all problems. For such a solution to exist, it must posit a definable problem that is clear, simple, and can be directly solved. The figure of the Jew in Nazism fulfilled this function – the cause of all problems – and the final solution was a mechanism for addressing this cause once and for all. The teleological outcome of this final solution would then be the "eternal" establishment of the Third Reich. Or, one can think of the function of "illegal immigrants" in Trump's fascist line of thinking as a roadblock to "making America great again": these "bad hombres" were the ultimate cause of all American problems and thus erecting a wall (as a final solution) seemed feasible (if not reductive and overly simplistic). Such a solution promises to cure perceived societal ailments, restoring the nation's health. In a recent fundraising email, Trump proposed that "Our Country is being poisoned with the millions of people that are illegally flowing through our borders", and "Our

Country is dying from within and nobody is doing anything to stop it". The erection of the wall becomes a central mechanism for ensuring purity. In such cases, problems have to be solved absolutely, without remainder, in order to fulfill a mythic regeneration of society. To do so means transforming complex social, political, economic, and even aesthetic issues into simply stereotypes (what we might today call conspiracy theories) that can be solved in one bold stroke (if there is a leader with such power and vision willing to "speak the truth" and take decisive action). Historical, open-ended becoming transforms into a fixed historical narrative with a predetermined, preordained conclusion.

Yet, Jarry's notion of "imaginary solutions" suggests something radically different. Instead of a final solution (a solution to end the need for further problem solving), the imaginary dimension of these solutions means that *there is never one final solution*. Instead, what is asked of us is to play with permutations and combinatorials of imaginary solutions, to experiment with variations, to engage with becomings and various drifts of desire. Thus, the problem never ceases to be a concern, and instead acts as a generator for more variations. This is not some kind of "infinite deferral" of action. Instead, it is a way in which we can encounter potentiality as such: the potentiality for new uses or new solutions that resists simply instrumentalization. One can think here of Deleuze's (1997b) analysis of Beckett's TV plays in which figures trace out various repeated patterns on a square, seemingly without end, never "solving" the aesthetic problem of the quad definitively. The imaginary *repotentializes* the solution, multiplying it infinitely. In a certain way, we can thus think of imaginary solutions as resisting the fascist tendency to *instrumentalize* solutions (meaning that all solutions have to produce pragmatic, measurable, quantifiable outcomes). Instead of instrumental solutions we arrive at a point of *aesthetic* solutions that never seem to actualize their own powers to "solve" anything so much as generate more imaginary solutions in the name of continued, open-ended experimentation in use.

In sum, the more that the studio intensifies its pliability, the more desire drifts off line, and in turn, the more studioing comes to embody an antifascist, and ultimately an anticapitalist politic.

## Conclusion: Protocols for an Antifascist Life

One way in which desire is set adrift during studioing is through the writing and enacting of protocols (Lewis & Hyland, 2022). In this sense, protocol writing and enacting are specific ways in which the art education classroom can be transformed

into a studio, and in this sense, become a space and time for antifascist, pataphysical experimentation. A protocol is a simple formula for suspending and rendering inoperative the functions, subject positions, and identities of those who studio so as to break apart fascist paranoid and reactionary lines of desire. In other words, protocols help manifest pliability, multiplicity, and drift of desire. Just as Jarry created a “blueprint” for an (impossible) time machine in order to evade the laws of physics, so too our protocols are minimal conditions for opening up the pataphysical possibilities of desire to break apart the learning logic of fascism. While such experiments in themselves might not be intentionally antifascist, it is our argument that the writing and enacting studious protocols *implies* a certain political horizon that neutralizes the fundamental rigidity of the protofascist personality type.

We end this article with several protocols focused on destabilizing stereotypes (and stereotypic perceiving/thinking) that unleash the full pataphysical potential of the art classroom’s studiousness. As Deleuze and Guattari would argue, stereotypes are consistently linked to fascist paranoia concerning the other. The ontology of the stereotype concerns the rigidification of difference within predefined, abstracted categories (thus erasing particulars). There are, by definition, no exceptions to a stereotype, which overcodes all identities. And finally, stereotypes present “solutions” to mapping relationships between micro and macro scales of experience, but only insofar as they produce barriers preventing flows of desire from connecting or plugging into the innumerable differences that drift above and below the rigidification of stereotypic identities. One small way to break the fascistic-capitalist speed limit would thus be to challenge the capture of desire by and through stereotypes. Thus, what we call for is experimentation with protocols for pataphysical play with stereotypes.

Engagement with stereotypes in art classrooms is nothing new (Chung, 2007; Chung & Kirby, 2009). Indeed, it is the hallmark of certain approaches to critical media/visual literacy. In this approach, students are asked to critically deconstruct sexist, racist, heteronormative, homophobic, and classist stereotypes in media culture and then produce their own counter images that embrace and celebrate diversity, democracy, and equity. We are not criticizing this approach, but we want to offer an alternative, less didactic form of engagement with stereotypes. While critical visual literacy is predicated on a certain amount of political and moral *certainty* (guided as it is by a model of democratic citizenship), studioing does not necessarily have such firm foundations. Instead of teaching children *what* to desire or *how* to desire, it focuses on making manifest the risky, uncertain, awkward, ambiguous, polymorphous dimensions of desire unmoored from any pre-existing, socially sanctified moral or political guidelines. Thus, studioing encourages students to reflect on desire as such *before* putting desire to work to achieve certain ends (democratic or otherwise).

To start, one might introduce the idea of the stereotype through the work of certain artists such as Kara Walker. While much controversy surrounds Walker's use of stereotypes of Blacks in her elegantly creepy silhouettes (Brinkhurst-Cuff, 2019) what we want to emphasize here is that Walker forces the audience to confront the question of desire and how that desire might have certain interests in maintaining the circulation of racialized stereotypes (for both Black and white viewers). Disturbingly, panoramic works such as *Darkytown Rebellion* (2001) do not tell the audience what to do with their desires for racist imagery so much as it allows the question of desire to be raised and discussed within and against the nexus of American racism, capitalism, and fascism. Her ominously carnivalesque scenes of rape, torture, but also desire are haunted by questions such as: What is the appeal of this imagery? How is the viewer implicated in racialized violence through desire for certain stereotypes, even if these stereotypes have become taboo? Indeed, Walker's key insight seems to be that American desire remains territorialized by the imagery that holds together a fascist libidinal economy demanding a hierarchical ordering of races and industry predicated on slavery and then on economic disenfranchisement. But once put in circulation, desire, for Walker, can become unhinged from investing in forms of stereotypes that lend themselves to fascist projects and opened up to new uses and new kinds of subject formation (often uncanny and perhaps uncomfortable if not somewhat schizophrenic). In other words, the way beyond stereotypes is precisely *through them*, accelerating the speed of desire to deterritorialize the power of stereotypes in order to flow into some, as-of-yet unforeseen and unnamed libidinal miscegenation. Indeed, we would argue that Walker herself is a provocative conjurer of a decisively American and Black pataphysics in which stereotypes (rigid, one-dimensional generalizations) give way to particulars (that do not clearly fall within existing political affiliations or destinations), where the state of exception imposed on Black people in the United States suddenly becomes an artistic state of exception from below (allowing for queer or uncanny desiring lines to drift), and where she only offers imaginary solutions that do not present "conclusions" so much as prompts for further experimentation/problematicization (with what to do with these perverse desires once they are exposed and set in motion). Using her own libidinal investments as a starting point, Walker exposes her desire in all its fetishistic and perverse ambivalences, thus risking misrecognition/misunderstanding, or worse, political ostracism by more militant and didactic artists, such as Betye Saar. Missed by Saar and other critics is how Walker's engagement with stereotypes produces *antifascist potentialities* through pataphysical experiments within and throughout

imaginary cathexes without instrumentalizing desire for particular political or ethical ends held in advance as guiding principles.

Stated simply, Walker does not destroy the stereotype but rather exposes how they simultaneously capture desire (into fascist paranoid formations) and how this very same desire is always already drifting beyond such capture. It is always already falling off line, transforming the stereotype into something uncanny. Indeed, this *drift* is the movement of *education* in which desire is rerouted, pluralized, and multiplied beyond its functional conscription in maintaining fascist assemblages.

Perhaps we can think of Walker's art making process as actualizing a certain kind of artistic protocol, and thus embodying the antifascist potentialities of studioing as a space and time for schizing imagery. If this is the case, then we, as art educators, can draw inspiration from not only her work, but from her practice in order to formulate simple protocols that can be used for studious experimentation. But it is important to note that there are risks involved with mentioning Walker in the context of art education, and drawing inspiration for her studioing practice for K-12 classrooms. Of course, there are always risks within pataphysical experimentation as they encourage desire to fall off track, but the current rise in fascist hate crimes and racial stereotyping globally gives us pause. While pataphysics questions underlying essentialist claims of identity, and indeed rejects any notion of identity that might be predicated on the Oedipalization of desire, it is not apparent to us that just anyone can appropriate Walker's studioing practice or her Black pataphysics. In an important sense, Walkers' position as a Black, female artist allows her to take up Black stereotypes in very specific ways. Her Black pataphysics comes out of a complex history of racism, slavery, and media spectacle as they have affected the formation of her desires and her possibilities for experimenting with drift through art making. As hinted above, Walker has often found herself alienated from Black activists, artists, and art critics precisely because she has resolutely sided with the unexpected, unanticipated, and peculiar forms of becoming which her desire for and against stereotypes has produced. It is precisely the controversial nature of her studioing practice – and how it pries open the painful pliability of desire and its investments into stereotypical thinking – that makes Walker's art an exception (in the pataphysical sense) – without law, without respect, without measure... an uncomfortable becoming. This is not to say that white artists cannot also engage with this material. Rather, we merely want to point out that an artist's relationship to a stereotype is historically overdetermined so that one is truly rendering the stereotype inoperative rather than inadvertently reinforcing its power to agitate fascism's destructive and violent force over and against desire's creative search for impossible solutions. Walker's use of stereotypes might

produce a certain level of health for her – defying both white and Black expectations for how these images ought to be handled – but such health is not guaranteed for everyone and not all becomings are productive for all bodies. This is of particular concern when inviting K-12 students to work with stereotypes in diverse classrooms. Desire is, as always, part of a social and political matrix of social forces and individual intensities, thus not all artists can (or should) engage with stereotypes in the same way. As Guattari (2009) ominously warned, everybody wants to be a fascist, meaning that the reterritorialization of the drift of desire even within the flows of capitalist deterritorialization are always already at work, and nowhere is this more potent than in the libidinal economy surrounding racist stereotypes in the United States. Remember, pataphysical dimensions are not outside or over there (some utopian space beyond what is already present), but exist on the surface of the very desirous flows that constitute fascist assemblages. As such, use at your own risk:

- **Protocol One**

1. *Find a stereotype in visual culture.*
2. *Hack into the stereotype in such a way as to destabilize its meaning and function.*
3. *How does this produce a new use for the stereotype that troubles fascist investments?*

- **Protocol Two**

1. *Find a piece of writing that invokes a stereotype.*
2. *Write down all the words associated with the stereotype.*
3. *Create new ways of describing the stereotype without using any of these words.*
4. *What new sensations, affects, and desires are produced? How does the stereotype operate under these new semiotic conditions?*

- **Protocol Three**

1. *Create a silhouette of a stereotype.*
2. *Cut up the original and rearrange the pieces to create a new silhouette that transforms the stereotype into another figure.*
3. *What understandings does the new silhouette suggest? How did the process of altering the original change the relationship to the stereotype?*



- **Protocol Four**

1. *Use a printmaking technique to depict a stereotype.*
2. *Alter the plate between each impression to slowly change the image, so that each print is different, slightly or significantly, from the one before.*
3. *Continue this process until the image of the original stereotype can no longer be distinguished through the impression.*
4. *What narrative(s) does the sequence of prints create?*

- **Protocol Five**

1. *Find a stereotype in visual culture.*
2. *Create a parody of the stereotype.*
3. *Create a parody of the parody.*
4. *Display the three images as a triptych.*
5. ***How do the images function as a group? What do they reveal (if anything) about the nature of stereotypes? About our investment in how stereotypes appear?***

In each case, “answers” are not given, lessons are not “taught,” and outcomes are not particularly important. Paranoid investments in stereotypes are exploded, and the stereotype becomes raw material opened up for experimentation and new use. These protocols induce swerves in how desire is captured by and through stereotypes. This kind of antifascist education does not directly engage with critical-consciousness raising about the evils of racialized capitalism in the United States, as with critical visual literacy approaches. Instead, it works directly on the relationship between desire and the image, thus taking the power of the image seriously, not simply as a false representation but as the means by which fascist tendencies, capitalist accumulation, and racism form a sedimented bloc with the potential to generate very real fascist social movements.

Our wager is thus: Studioing can induce desirous flows beyond the stereotype, but only if it approaches stereotypes as libidinal investments into a certain psychological and social formations (in this case, American racism) and works with such imagery, discovering within it a psycho-social pliability for heterogeneous (non-paranoid), schizo-becomings. Only when it does so can the particular assemblage of American fascism be opened up for alternative, pataphysical experimentation with what remains in potential.

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