Conclusion: (D)rifting

We end with a rather enigmatic portrait of studioing that will enable us to consider the broader political implications of the pataphysics of studious drift. In the short story titled “The New Advocate,” Kafka tells of Bucephalus, who is a retired war horse that has taken up the study of the law. The last line of the story reads, “So perhaps it is really best to do as Bucephalus has done and absorb oneself in law books. In the quiet lamplight, his flanks unhampered by the thighs of a rider, free and far from the clamor of battle, he reads and turns the pages of our ancient tomes” (1971, 415). Drawing inspiration from Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of this scene, Agamben argues that the gate to justice rests in the activity of deactivation (of the law). Summarizing this point, Agamben writes, “In the Kafka essay, the enigmatic image of a law that is studied but no longer practiced corresponds, as a sort of remnant, to the unmasking of mythico-juridical violence affected by pure violence. There is, therefore, still a possible figure of law after its nexus with violence and power has been deposed, but it is a law that no longer has force or application, like the one in which the ‘new attorney,’ leafing through ‘our old books,’ buries himself in study.” (2005, 63).

Whereas learning (in schools and universities) takes place during the day, studying often takes place predominately at night (precisely when we should be sleeping, preparing for the next day’s lessons). It is therefore illicit and fugitive, happening where and when it
should not. The studious practice of Bucephalus is displaced from any form of work or communication; he sits silent, free, and far from his function as a war machine, ritualistically flipping pages in a law that is no longer in force. This studier, in the suspended space-time of the studio, is an anarchic figure, somehow beyond the law yet without destroying the law. Indifferent to ends, he continues to ritualistically flip pages back and forth, searching through the law for secrets, finding harmonious discords.

On our reading, studioing is the temporalization and spatialization of the anarchy of study—the home to that which has no home within the metaphysics of learning that has come to define the university. By anarchy we do not mean chaos. Instead, as Bucephalus’s example indicates, we mean a suspension of the law in order to experiment with forms of educational life that are ritualistic and unpractical. Bucephalus does not produce works that communicate. Instead, his life is defined by a fugitive practice with its own internal rules (secret recipes, protocols) for study. In this anarchic practice, the law is transformed into an object that Bucephalus plays with like an artistic test-object. The law has no active, living authority over Bucephalus. He lives a life that is ungovernable (by and through the enactment of law). It no longer gives commands, and in this sense can be read and interpreted by anyone at any time.

For Heidegger, as discussed in the introduction to this book, research in the university has become a form of technological enframing. To design an experiment is to set up a series of constraints, including a law (or laws) that hold over a certain set of objects. This law enables the researcher to stay on a path, evaluate outcomes, and (hopefully) predict future results. Embedded in this research model is the metaphysics of learning. Yet for Bucephalus, the law is no longer in force, it no longer controls what objects ought to be privileged, how they ought to be evaluated, and its attempt to control contingency through predictive modeling no longer operates. And for this reason, Bucephalus is able to study the law without a path, and thus take real risks that are unsupported by the law’s authority.
Bucephalus is therefore not so much a researcher as an anarchic scyborg (both human and inhuman, both inside and outside the academic traditions of scholarship) recklessly playing with what makes itself possible in the wake of the law. Reckless, in this case, has two meanings. First, Bucephalus is not concerned with living up to the expectations of the law, nor is he interested in learning anything from the law (how to live an operative, effective, productive life according to its metaphysical principles, or how to predict the future according to calculated probabilities). He plays with the law in a generative way, opening it up for new, unknown, and as-of-yet undetermined uses that only emerge when the power of the law to regulate, define, and capture is neutralized. Second, he is reckless in the sense that study does not wreck anything. It does not destroy that which it takes up. Instead, the protocols that the studier follows and lives by are rendered inoperative through unpractical and noncommunicative ritual. This unpractical practice is reckless, meaning it is without violence, without damage. It is as anarchic as it is pacifistic.

In his book *The Art of Recklessness*, the poet Dean Young offers a useful analogy, “The poet is like one of those cartoon characters who has stepped off the cliff only to remain suspended. But while the cartoon character’s realization of his irrational predicament brings about its fall, for the poet imagination sustains this reckless position over the abyss; it is what extends the view” (2010, 147–48). The studier is much like Young’s poet hovering over the abyss, waiting to be set aloft/adrift by strange currents of ethernity. In this sense, the abyss is not empty, but rather full with a pataphysical overflow of ether that supports the poet’s imagination to create impossible solutions (to the problem of “falling off a cliff”). In this example, the summiting learner is the one who falls, because she does not embrace imagination to abandon the laws of learnification. The imagination is also anarchic in so far as it is indifferent to realities and laws and provides access to ethernity. Imagination is a prerequisite for the practice of recklessness and studious drift. It negates laws without destroying them, opening up the parallel space of the
Studio, which can be conjured up at any place at any time. Thus the studier’s reckless yet ritualistic study is not because she lacks imagination to escape. Rather, the anarchic dimension of the imagination is unleashed from functionality, diving into the drift of eternity.

The risk of the studioing is an imaginative leap off the cliff that tethers education to the metaphysics of learning. In suspending the law, Bucephalus abandons himself to an educational life without measure. Thus the drift of studioing is not merely the endless circulation of learning and laboring found within the learning society. Nor is it the repetitive deconstruction of such circulation without escape, wherein the promise of education is always to come. Rather the ritualistic and unproductive drift found in the space and time of the studio is first and foremost a rift in the fabric of education and its economization under learning. (D)rifting sets up a parallel, pataphysical dimension within yet beyond what is presently possible, occupying the infrastructure of learning so as to neutralize its powers. An educational alchemy is possible here that produces a different, posthuman and postdigital body. When this esoteric (secret) practice becomes exoteric, when Bucephalus multiplies and spreads, then the anarchy of (d)rifting reveals its political possibilities as a collective concern. It has been our wager throughout this book that digital (d)rift is one way in which studioing can be made common, and in so doing, open up a new contact point between education and politics.

Let’s then join Bucephalus to create a situation of e-studioing for a postpandemic world in which the space-time machine of the studio, the impractical practice of study, and reckless protocol-writing combine to intensify and extend common secrets by taking advantage of the pataphysics of postdigital (d)rift. In an imagined pataphysical university, the secret recipes for study written down by horses (and poets) would be made common through the dissemination of protocols. In this way, the studio as a virtual space-time machine fueled by ether would be encountered by a swarm of drifters (rather than occupied by lone studiers). Now is a time when the potentiality for such extension and intensification are palpable
and can be pirated from the first-world colonialist university by scyborgs in order to make e-studioing possible. The anarchy of the studio and its pataphysics of study can be set adrift, and through the rift that is created, the educational use of eternity can finally be explored by the multitude.
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