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"The challenge here is to think the concept of the solution beyond pragmatism and instrumentalism."

Defining a 'Pataphysical Stance for Arts-Based Research

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This article proposes a 'pataphysical turn for arts-based research through the work of Alfred Jarry. Jarry outlined a unique research program that falls neatly neither into scientific inquiry nor artistic creation. Rather, this type of research can be defined in terms of three interconnected themes: (1) a postmetaphysical examination of the laws of particularities, (2) an investigation of extreme cases, and (3) the constitution of imaginary solutions. In this article, I attempt to give a brief analysis of these themes with reference to contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben (who translated Jarry's work into Italian) and Gilles Deleuze (who was inspired by 'pataphysics). The conclusion offers a tentative example of what 'pataphysical arts-based research might look like and identifies parodic criteria for evaluating "patadata" production.

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Arts-based research (ABR) is a diverse field, consisting of many different theoretical, practical, and aesthetic traditions (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018; Leavy, 2019). Nevertheless, one consistent concern that traverses this diverse field is the nature of the relationship between science and art (Finley, 2003; Garoian & Mathews, 1996; Sullivan, 2010). Various ABR practitioners have attempted to overcome dichotomous thinking that exists in the academy, promoting some kind of reconciliation between art and science. One path is to opt for a rather instrumentalized view of the arts in relation to science (Leavy, 2019). Here, science might benefit from art in terms of visualizing data sets or disseminating scientific insights to a broad audience, yet art never seems to be an *equal* participant in the process of research. Read pessimistically, this approach reduces art to a servant of the sciences, fulfilling whatever function science dictates. On the other hand, James Rolling, Jr. (2010) argued that certain forms of ABR can yield results that trouble sciences with poststructural, prestructural, performative, pluralistic, proliferative, and post-paradigmatic paradigms and practices. Here, art is not a resource for furthering science's agenda, but rather, art plays a more formative role in the research process as a whole. This perspective is more attractive for those interested in overturning implicit and explicit hierarchies of value between art and science. Yet there is a danger here as well. As David Rousell (2019) has pointed out in relation to recent attempts to forge new configurations or alliances between ABR and postqualitative research, "It potentially leads to blended and diluted hybridizations that are not quite art, not quite philosophy, and not quite social science" (p. 888). The worry expressed by Rousell is that calls for hybridization might avoid the limitation of the instrumental approach to art, but doing so might yield certain, unintended costs that sacrifice more on both sides than it is worth.

In this article, I will attempt to find inspiration for entering into these debates through the paradoxical formulation of 'pataphysics offered by the French playwright, critic, and author Alfred Jarry (1873–1907). While Gilles Deleuze is often cited in the secondary literature on ABR as a theorist whose work lives between the science/art bifurcation (Irwin, 2013; jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Springgay, 2008), it is my contention that this theoretical framework can be extended and enriched through 'pataphysical engagements. Indeed, Deleuze (1997, 2004) himself was a keen reader of Jarry's texts and was influenced by 'pataphysics both stylistically and conceptually. For my purposes, Deleuzian strands of ABR can be placed on a broader 'pataphysical plane that includes but is not reducible to Deleuzian (dis)orientations.

As such, it is my contention that certain forms of ABR can carve out a terrain that does not merely play by the rules or conventions of art or science (or some hybridized version), but rather explores an anomalous interzone between the two and the internal paradoxes produced therein. Far stranger than expected, 'pataphysical research into this interzone embraces three themes: (1) a post-metaphysical examination of the laws of particularities, (2) an investigation of extreme cases, and (3) the constitution of imaginary solutions. Through an analysis of these themes, I will develop notions of research-esqueness and patadata to account for the familiar yet weird processes and products emitted from the interzone wherein art and science suddenly and unpredictably collide to produce scholarly mutations. Instead of an ontological turn (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013), I am calling for a 'pataphysical turn in research that adopts the *pata* prefix to fully embrace a taste for paradoxical play through a rigorous inquiry into interzonal thematics.

'Pataphysical Themes

While it is difficult if not impossible to define 'pataphysics (Hugill, 2015; Shattuck, 1960), I will attempt to outline its general set of paradoxical themes. Through these themes, 'pataphysics constitutes itself as a particular terrain of inquiry that rests in the gap that separates and conjoins science and art, taste and knowledge, comedy and seriousness, laxness and rigor without collapsing one into or privileging one over the other.

Jarry (1996) provided a tentative definition of 'pataphysics in Book Two of *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*. There, he wrote that 'pataphysics is "the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general" (p. 21). A science of the particular, as Jarry rightly pointed out, stands in stark contrast with the modern conception of empirical science described by Francis Bacon (1620/2000) in his book titled *The New Organon*. In this text, Bacon champions inductive reasoning as a method for constructing a pyramid of knowledge or system of sciences that would rest on firm foundations in observing the natural world. At the summit of his pyramid would reside the laws of nature as the set of maximally generalizable principles. These would be derived from observations of invariant relations in the physical sciences, which would slowly erase accidental qualities and individual experiences.

If science is always a quest for the general—as Bacon (1620/2000) described—then what is a science of the particular? Jarry (1996) pointed out that 'pataphysics rejects induction (general inferences based on particular observations). At the same time, Jarry's (1996) notion of 'pataphysical knowledge seems to trouble deductive reasoning, which moves from the general to the particular. In both cases, the problem is that science concerns itself with a dialectical, vertical oscillation between concrete observations and more general principles (culminating in universal and necessary laws). Jarry (1996) argued for a science that could somehow escape this dialectical pull, and he insisted that 'pataphysics is concerned with *particulars* as such.

There are many ways to further develop this science of particulars, not the least of which would be Deleuze's (1997) fascination with combinatorials. But we can also turn to Giorgio Agamben (2017)—himself a careful reader and translator of Jarry—for his theory of paradigms as yet another mode of 'pataphysical inquiry into particulars.[1] For Agamben (2009), a science of paradigms or paradigmology does not proceed by way of induction or deduction; rather, science proceeds by a lateral movement from one particular to another. Such a science moves according to analogies, enabling the researcher to discover previously unseen affinities between particulars without transforming these particulars into cases of yet more general phenomena. These analogies transgress typical classification

systems, suspending their tendencies to either negate particulars or somehow force them to conform to certain, preexisting taxonomies. When classification is rendered inoperative, new and sometimes surreal or disturbing patterns and connections can emerge through 'pataphysical analogy. One example of this from Agamben's (1999) work is the way in which he creates analogous relationships between concentration camps during World War II, contemporary overcoma patients, and the designation of the *homo sacer* in ancient Roman law. Each is a singularity whose intelligibility lights up when placed in relation to the other singularities within the analogous chain. This is a practice of constructing horizontal rather than vertical movements, opening up the world to a host of unanticipated encounters that spill over with suggestive resonances and echoes. In short, 'pataphysics is a science that makes intelligible (knowable) relations among singularities that have been freed up from their proper locations and functions with certain discourses. Perhaps 'pataphysics is an *analogous empiricism*.

Such empiricism would necessarily generate an *immanent* form of knowledge, or a knowledge that cannot be abstracted from its concrete singularities. There is no transcendent generalization (on a species level, for instance) that can be made over and against a set of singularities as if standing outside on a separate ontological plane. There can be no hierarchy of value on this plane—all singularities are equally important within the chain of analogies, which would, in turn, be completely decentralized. This commitment to the relations between singularities and a rejection of general types and their discipline-specific functionality makes 'pataphysics a hinge between Spinozian notions of creative univocity and what would later be called "flat ontology" (DeLanda, 2013) or a science of individuation.

But this raises another interesting question for the 'pataphysician: How can one spot a singularity? How can we make something *stick out* as particular? Here we have to connect Jarry's interest in singularities with his equally emphatic interest in exceptions. 'Pataphysics, Jarry (1996) wrote, "will examine the laws governing exceptions" (p. 21). The challenge here is threefold. First, what is the relationship between singularities and exceptions? For something to appear in its particularity, it must exhibit its features *in an exceptional, meaning nontransferable, singular way*. It must stand out *as* particular in itself, or as Deleuze (1995) might say, as different in itself (instead of relatively different). On my reading, exceptions are the radicalization of a particular to a point where something in its particularity becomes intelligible as nontransferable to other particularities. But this leads to the second challenge. When a particular exhibits its particularity—and thus becomes exceptional—it is simultaneously maximally itself while also passing beyond itself into otherness. It is a set of one that exceeds itself in being itself to its fullest capacity. To be exceptional means that something emerges in its particularity at the precise moment it dissolves into otherness. Here, what appears fixed and stable in its particularity tips over into a process of self-transformation, or autogenous change, or becoming different from itself. When pushed to an extreme, the particular becomes itself only insofar as it leaves itself behind or is *indifferent* to itself. Underlying this paradox is the 'pataphysical embrace of the *coexistence of opposites*: stability and change, sameness and difference.

The third challenge concerns the laws of exceptions. Exceptions, of course, are beyond or outside the law, and thus cannot be held to the letter of the law. In a rather 'pataphysical formulation, Agamben (1999) wrote of exceptions as "excluded from the general rule" (p. 18). Exceptions are precisely what are banned (or abandoned) by the general rule of the law. Jarry's formulation is therefore paradoxical. How can there be a *law* of the exception when exceptions are only included as an

exclusion within the law? Such a law would be an outlaw law, or a law that is in power only insofar as it is deactivated. As Agamben (1999) argued, this is a law that is in effect precisely by being suspended. Such suspension can come from above—as in Jarry's (1961) obscene, authoritarian character Ubu, who abolishes the law to ensure he is obeyed—or below—as in Dr. Faustroll's strange experiments in alternative realities. To study inoperative laws, the 'pataphysician must dispense with the scientific desire to discover maximally universal and necessary laws and how they operate. Instead, they must turn toward exceptional states wherein the status of the law is paradoxically in power only insofar as it is deactivated. Or, perhaps even better, the 'pataphysician must *induce* moments of breakage with the operativity of the law to produce exceptions that make their particularity intelligible.

How does one induce such breakdowns of the law? Jarry (1996) embraced the strange force of the "clinamen" (p. 88), or the random chance swerve of atoms crashing into one another. Whereas science for Bacon (1620/2000) concerned *regularities* and *continuities*, Jarry's 'pataphysical empiricism concerns *irregularities* and *discontinuities* that arise through the unanticipated, tiny variations in atomic composition that nevertheless produce analogies. 'Pataphysical experiments set these chain reactions into motion through various procedures and protocols that act as catalysts. For instance, Jarry equally used mathematics and wordplay to induce swerves in meaning. Jarry's (1996) syzygy words are a case in point. Syzygy was originally an astrological term indicating the alignment or conjunction of different celestial bodies. Jarry appropriated the concept of syzygy and applied it to language. The resulting syzygetic words were born from the collision of seemingly unrelated grammatical or phonic elements and often resulted in humorous puns or strange meanings. Take for instance the name Faustroll, which is a combination of *Faust* and *troll*. Syzygy words hinder common sense by disrupting any sense of a fixed, stable identity or meaning or assigning things, words, or ideas to specific categories. They also obstruct good sense by generating words that lack clear directionality away from disorder toward order. In short, various operations on and through visual and verbal languages rupture the image of thought informing science. At the same time, neither are they reducible to mere aesthetic or poetic play, as they are serious attempts to research the lawless law of exceptions (from below).

Furthermore, the clinamen might be contingent, but 'pataphysics is far from a precursor to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. While quantum physics might emphasize the contingency that the clinamen produces, Agamben (2018) shifted focus toward the *necessary* and somewhat *inescapable* lure of the clinamen to interrupt and render inoperative a certain normative trajectory (of atoms). In this sense, the clinamen's chaotic jumble does not erase necessity and opt for contingency so much as it forces a return to the question of their paradoxical relationship. 'Pataphysics prefers not to opt for one or the other, but rather lives within the paradoxical formulation of necessarily contingent events that are contingently necessary.

In the end, what good is this kind of practice? What does it achieve, if anything? Jarry (1996) wrote that 'pataphysics is the "science of imaginary solutions" (p. 22). On my reading, this formulation should not be read as a joke or as a mere provocation (although it is certainly a joke and a provocation)! Rather, we should take Jarry absolutely seriously. 'Pataphysical solutions are imaginary but nevertheless *real* solutions. The challenge here is to think the concept of the solution beyond pragmatism and instrumentalism. This is a difficult task as solutions often are thought of as "useful" in some way. Yet, as Roger Shattuck (1960) explained, "the science of 'pataphysics attempts no cures, envisages no progress, distrusts all claims of 'improvement' in the state of things" (p. 28). One possible way of

squaring this circle is to see imaginary solutions as solutions to problems we have not yet formulated—ones that remain virtual. The proposed "solutions" would thus be *useless* within the confines of common sense and good sense as they exist today (and therefore of no pragmatic or instrumental value). While their imaginary status would estrange these solutions from the world, their status as solutions might very well prompt us to view the world as full of as-of-yet unforeseen problems bursting forth through a virtual surplus. If this were the case, then in a 'pataphysical reversal, solutions would come before problems; problems would be the outcome of 'pataphysical investigations; the solution to the solution's imaginary status would be the solution's problem. For instance, a syzygy word might very well be a solution, but it is a solution to that which has yet to be comprehended as a problem within the current order of things. Indeed, we cannot fathom the problem that the creation of the grotesque term *Faustroll* solves. But insofar as such formulations are apprehended as solutions at all, then the word begs a question as to the nature of the problem it addresses. The result is a newfound perplexity in the face of a world populated by solutions that do not solve problems so much as they provoke them. This paradox flies in the face of positivist science, which always assumes the existence of problems as the driving motor for scientific discovery.

Up to this point, my analysis has placed emphasis on the "scientific" dimensions of 'pataphysics. Now we can finally turn to Jarry's aesthetics in particular and the formal qualities of 'pataphysical writing in general. First and foremost, Jarry lived a 'pataphysical life. After the controversial staging of *Ubu Roi* in 1896, Jarry took it on himself to adopt what has become known as an "ubuesque" existence, essentially depersonalizing himself to the point of transforming into an "avant-garde Donald Duck" (Wright, 1961, p. vii) or inhuman marionette. As Brian Massumi (2014) argued, -esqueness indicates an enacted and embodied play of paradox. It is a style that performs a specific kind of inoperative excess over and above any form of functionality that might tie behavior, identity, and comportment to identifiable social, political, and economic roles. By becoming ubuesque, Jarry made his life into a singularity—a singularity that was performed only insofar as his self-creation paradoxically corresponded with his total indifference to the self. Stated differently, intensifying and amplifying ubuesque features of his life made Jarry appear as a singularity at the precise moment he became an exception to the law binding himself to himself (as a specific type of person). As Gabriel Brunet once wrote of Jarry's 'pataphysical life, "Jarry's teaching could be summarized thus: every man is capable of showing his contempt for the cruelty and stupidity of the universe by making his own life a poem of incoherence and absurdity" (as cited in Wright, 1961, p. ix). To become -esque is to experiment with a form of life that is an imaginary solution to a problem that cannot be fully articulated.

Jarry's writings are not a report on his experiments in self-indifferentiation so much as they are a continuance of them. They are a working-out of the problem that his life, strangely, provided a solution to. In Jarry's work, there is a penchant for grotesque extremes and parodic playfulness that cannot be reduced to his own, idiosyncratic taste. These are *methodological choices* just as much as they are aesthetic choices. For his indescribable book *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, Jarry (1996) moves among classic travel novel, surrealist poetry, mathematical proof, and scientific treatise. The composition of the book as a whole consists of a series of episodes (so many atoms) that suddenly swerve into one another to generate a surreal form of science fiction full of 'pataphysical machines that challenge the imagination precisely because the text appears to be

completely parodic yet also resolutely serious and rigorous. It therefore rides the razor's edge, estranging science from itself while not completely negating or destroying its conventions. Instead, aesthetic displacements make new kinds of statements possible, changing the landscape of what can and cannot be considered as scientific or artistic.

As methodological choices, Jarry's stylizations of 'pataphysics affect the nature of the senses, effectively turning his audience into participants in his aesthetic experiments with and through -esqueness. For instance, one can acquire knowledge of the laws of exceptions only via a transformation in the sensorial apparatus beyond good sense and common sense. Without such sensorial alteration, good and common senses would merely subsume particulars under general laws, exceptions would be canceled out or reconciled with existing taxonomies, and clinamen-induced events would be subjected to laws of probabilities. Jarry managed to subvert this process of classification and calculation by living a 'pataphysical life radically indifferent to social conventions. His writings are a continuation of the very same experiment in miniature, exposing his readers to 'pataphysical forces that seem to come from an alternative reality that is immanent to yet beyond this reality. Jarry's writing is an experimental protocol that subjects the reader's senses to signs of an as-of-yet invisible 'pataphysical dimension of existence where particulars emerge in free play with one another, where phenomena are included only as exclusions within an inoperative law, and where imaginary solutions can suddenly appear *as* solutions even if they remain useless. For Deleuze (1995), signs rupture the smooth functioning of the faculties by pushing them to the absolute limits of common and good sense. Signs force the faculties to either explode or evolve by subjecting them to forms of ungraspable precepts and affects. "Each faculty is unhinged" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141) by the violence of a sign, but this unhinged state might cause "new faculties to arise, faculties which were repressed by that form of common sense" (p. 144). By putting the faculties under pressure, Jarry *produces* a 'pataphysical spin on the perceptual–cognitive balance of his readers-as-participants. Jarry's 'pataphysical aesthetic is therefore an *internal* and *necessary* component of the 'pataphysical process through which he experiments on the faculties, producing conditions for new possible tastes for ubuesque grotesquery. In response to a critique of his lecture by a confounded audience member, Jarry responded, "That's exactly what I wanted. Talking about things that are understandable only weighs down the mind and falsifies the memory, but the absurd exercises the mind and makes the memory work" (as cited in Wright, 1961, p. viii). 'Pataphysical paradox extends the faculties to the point of their singularization but also their immanent explosion into something different, nonfunctional, and perceptually inoperative. But this experience is a kind of "exercise" in that a body and its perceptual–cognitive structures can finally become problems!

In sum, I conclude that a 'pataphysical stance in ABR would embrace the following paradoxes as generative of a unique field of knowledge:

(1) Particulars as exceptions to themselves
(2) Laws of lawless exceptions
(3) The reality of imaginary solutions
(4) Necessary contingencies and contingent necessities
(5) An aesthetic experiment in taste that tastes what is beyond taste.

Drawing on Andrew Hugill's (2015) work, I argue that these paradoxes are generative, producing *patadata*. Whereas science produces metadata, a 'pataphysical stance for ABR can produce patadata, or data of the particular, the exceptional, and the analogous. In relation to art education, patadata would offer imaginary solutions to nonexistent problems in schooling and as such would be useless to educational reform initiatives. Instead, they would play with the very parameters of what can be perceived as data in

the first place, interjecting clinamen-like swerves and aesthetically serendipitous elements into regular patterns, objective quantifications, and established generalities. Patadata findings would offer a taste for education that is precisely an exception to any operative and functional law of education.

The production of educational patadata could take many forms; nevertheless, results would resolutely resist the ever-present danger of ABR merely turning into a servant of science or, perhaps even more painfully, becoming a rather ineffective hybridization of science and art that does not, in the end, meet the criteria of one or the other. Instead, 'pataphysics ought to insist that its domain exists prior to any split between science and art, and therefore, 'pataphysics returns us to the paradoxical potentiality that emerges when we suspend these divisions. This would mean preferring not to abide by the law of noncontradiction, or current calls for validity testing according to positivist measures, or aesthetic criteria for judging the quality of a given artistic creation. Instead, if there are any criteria for judging the quality of patadata (and this would itself be a stretch given 'pataphysics's love of parody), they should be found in the following:

- What particulars are produced?
- Do analogous series multiply and diversify?
- What are the "laws" of these series?
- How do the laws of exceptions disturb current forms of common and good sense informing educational metadata?
- How do the imaginary solutions proposed retroactively discharge problems?

These criteria are *research-esque*. They are not research, nor are they something else. They are indifferent to rather than different from research.

As an example, I can briefly cite an arts-based performance that I cofacilitated at a recent meeting of the National Art Education Association. For this performance, my colleague and I introduced a set of metadata generated by the New York public school system for the 2015–2016 academic year. We then asked the question, What can we do with this data pool? Taking *pool* as a 'pataphor rather than a metaphor, we then cut the data into strips and dunked them into a tiny pool to see how they would "react." Pataphors do not merely add a layer of meaning to reality (as with metaphors); they actually create a new reality by bringing a metaphor to life (Lopez, n.d.). Can these data swim? What data would sink to the bottom of the pool? The data—once representative of a certain kind of measurement used to rank, reward, and penalize schools—were transformed into a cluster of material particulates open to new kinds of unpredictable encounters with elements of water and other "pool toys" we threw into the mix. Our operation consisted of suspending the law of big data in the realm of educational research. We neither negated nor critiqued the remaining, inoperative data sets; rather, we unleashed them in their particularity to other 'pataphysical existences, building chains of analogies through material couplings of pool objects. The experiment was precisely to singularize data to make it into an imaginary solution to a problem yet to be identified.

The effects on the audience were interesting to observe. Most felt weirdly liberated by the playful nature of the experiment, but when asked to perform similar 'pataphysical operations on their own data sets, one group was absolutely paralyzed. They could not understand how we could abuse the data in this way without first understanding how it was generated or what purposes it might serve in the future. They were reluctant to see our experiment as producing *imaginary* solutions that are of no use within current data-driven common and good sense. In the end, they failed to generate a 'pataphysical disruption in the metadata, creating a pretty pie chart visually representing the breakdown of reading scores in the given school district. Art became a mere representational tool for pedagogically disseminating useful information.

But what is the status of this strange little story I have just told? This brief description ought not to be thought of as a mere "representation" or "report" from the field. Even less appropriate would be its replication in an attempt to verify some kind of "finding." Instead, it ought to be read as a singularity that can provide insight for other singular yet analogous experiments. My story can be read as a provocation for further suspension of the laws of metadata through 'pataphysical disruption.

Research-Esque Activities for Arts-Based 'Pataphysicians

Returning to my opening comments, perhaps arts-based 'pataphysics is an imaginary solution to the relation between art and science. If it succeeds, it does so in relation to the questions these solutions invoke/provoke/evoke. As such, it cannot conform to common or good sense. Doing so would mean that the status of this article itself would have to be accounted for as something that is research-esque and should be handled as such. Here are some suggestions for guidelines:

(1) Do not cite this article. Or, if anyone cites it, cite it obliquely, with a wink, or a subtle gesture that does not abide by American Psychological Association (APA) style guides. Or, perhaps only cite the article according to the A'PA (the American 'Pataphysical Association's nonexistent handbook), which might enable the article to exist both inside and outside the discourse of ABR without foreclosing on its paradoxical location somewhere betwixt and between legit and illegit scholarship.

(2) Instead of assimilating it into a body of literature through citational practices, studiously play with it to produce patadata. Here are some ideas:
   a. Fold it; put it in the pocket of a stranger.
   b. Turn it into a petri dish and grow something on it.
   c. Make a drinking game out of it (take a shot of absinthe every time you see "pata" in the text; I think Jarry would approve).
   d. Measure it precisely using (in this order) a protractor, an anemometer, a hygrometer, an accelerometer, and finally, a clap-o-meter; then turn the data into graphs.
   e. Memorize it like a script, then recite it backwards.
   f. Rewrite this article, word for word, and cite your version. In other words, plagiarize as a new practice of 'pataphysical scholarship.

(3) Proliferate 'pataphysical centers and institutes in your universities that study singularities and laws of exceptions. These should not be officially sanctioned, and should actively occupy hallways, basements, storage rooms, and empty corners in invisible buildings on campus or in the surrounding environs.

And the stakes could not be lower for such experimentation as we are now more than ever in need for useless patadata to finally launch its impotent battle against the titanic, ideological force of metadata. Let the games begin (but I would not bet the horse, or if you are like Jarry, the bicycle).

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ENDNOTE

[1] For a more extensive analysis of Jarry in relation to Agamben, see Lewis (in press).