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Independent Scholar

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Unleashed: My life as a dog

Abstract:

“Unleashed” is a creativecritical piece which focuses on my relationship with Artaud, a rescue Kelpie I taught to bark, and in particular on transference love which, for Jacques Lacan, is predicated upon knowledge. “Unleashed” questions The Law, and therefore language as communication, entering as it does into perpetual forms of dialogue and questioning through queer(y)ing the notion of interspecies kinship: Who is training whom in this story? Who is rescuing whom? What is knowledge? What is love? It crosses boundaries between autobiography, poetry and theory, with forays into psychoanalysis, philosophy and behavioural psychology because Antonin Artaud, after whom I named my dog, was a writer *of* and *at* the limit. Limit of aesthetic form. Limit of language. Limit of subjectivity. His philosophy is best described as an anti-philosophy. “Unleashed” displays epistemological solidarity with Antonin Artaud at the level of stylistics and performance across divergent discourses, testifying to a poetics of openness and excursiveness in the making. It highlights the shifting, indeed interrupted and illusory, temporal nature of subjectivity, dispelling any sense of certainty utterance such as *I Am*.

Biographical note:

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives on unceded sovereign Wurundjeri land. Hecq writes across genres and disciplines – and sometimes across tongues. Her creative works include a novel, six collections of short stories and seventeen books of poetry of which *Endgame with no ending* (2023, SurVision, UK), winner of the James Tate Prize for poetry; the bilingual artist book *Pistes de rêve; Songlines*, with photographer Natia Zhvania (2024, Transignum, France); *Volte Face* (2024, Liquid Amber Press) and *Otopos* (2024, Beltway Press, US) are the latest. *Journal off beat*, a bilingual creativecritical text co-written with Chantal Danjou is slated for publication with Spineless Wonders later this year.

Keywords:

Interspecies bond, language, communication, power, creativecritical practice

Unleashed: My life as a dog

I tried to make the face that spoke to me tell / the secret
(Antonin Artaud, 1987, p. 146) [1]

I'm three. Little monkey jumping on my bed. Home alone. I'm getting a dog with goldilocks fur and floppy ears and no tail. *Boucles d'or*. High high high I jump. Oh, so high.

Car doors clang shut. Here they come, now. Papa et maman. With Peggy! *C'est maman qui a choisi le nom*, says papa. *Oh non! Boucles d'or*.

That's all there is: all of Peggy Lee traded for Goldilocks on my birthday. And Peggy for mummie. *C'est trop injuste*. Such dejection unleashed.

At the RSPCA we wait for RG, a Kelpie. He's got scruffy black hair, golden coins for eyebrows, a deep frown. RG scampers over to me like he knows me. A lick, tentative. I walk him out into the paddock on a slip-on leash. He darts hither thither, hither thither. Sniff sniff sniff. We sit in the visitors' enclosure. He wags his tail close to the ground. He's all bristles when other dogs bark in their cages.

Congratulations, says Hetty at the desk. *RG's from a farm. He worked sheep. He's very timid*. I try a pat. RG cowers. *Only a scratch under the chin*, says Hetty, *like this*. Hetty demonstrates. *This will require a lot of patience*.

Can I change RG's name? I ask timidly.

But of course, it's part of the fun of rescuing a dog. What will you call him?

Artaud. ARR-TOH.

Hetty updates RG's details on his file. I'm surprised to see my father's name next to Artaud. Ponder the word *rescue*.

I purchase a harness and a long leash. Orange. It looks good on Artaud's coat. To the car. Luke's our chauffeur, now. Artaud hops in the boot, unprompted. I sit in the back, dangle my hand across the seat to reassure him. He soon falls asleep.

Spring feels like fall. I drop baby potatoes in holes my father digs. Plop plop plop. I'm bored. I know Peggy's waiting for me in the laundry. I sneak in. We roll on the tiles. It's cold. Peggy's eyes are sad. I totter to the sink. Reach for my mother's make-up case. Grab her coral lipstick. *Viens, Peggy* I say, luring the dog into the toilet. I lock the door. Paint a smile on her lips. She's all smile now!

Footsteps. Heartbeat a stampede: I can't unlock the door.

Dominiiiique?

Ouiii?

I do as instructed. Slip the key under the door. Free!

Ma fiille, says maman – *My girrrrl*, as she furiously pats Peggy. Not a glance at her real daughter. I feel abandoned, again. Replaced by a bitch.

Qui est-ce qui a fait ça? Roars Papa. *Who did this?*

Un p'tit peu moi-a, un p'tit peu Peggy. A little bit me, little bit Peggy.

Au coin, says father. I am banished, again. Corner time out.

I see pink. The walls are *papier rota*, freshly painted. I'm dizzy. Something breaks. Love is scary. I hate *aller au coin*. It feels like a million years. *Au coin* I practice unfeeling. I renunciate love.

It all comes back to me *à soixante piges* – yes, sixty! The baby pink. The mixture of guilt and shame. The sense of abandonment and banishment.

Strictly speaking I was not abandoned. One is abandoned where there is a relationship based on a recognition of difference. There was no such recognition. I was just an extension of my mother. *J'étais sa perruque*, I was her wig, her hair extensions. Later I will realise that she resents me. Envy me. I became the coral absorbing her envy.

It all comes back to me *à soixante piges*. The mixture of guilt and shame. The little white socks scampering to school past farmhouses and barns, *le petit magasin du coin*, the little corner shop where I'd buy cherry lollipops that made my tongue red-quiet, the hairdressing salon releasing beehive coiffes and the tall trees with yellowing leaves and the suppressed feeling of being banished. Love is scary. My academic success is contaminated by guilt and shame and envy

and my father's impossible demand. In my head he commands me to jump higher and higher. I'm a monkey doomed to fail. At school I say that I have no father, knowing full well he's doing his delayed military service. I sense that he has to pay for my insolent arrival into the world. I banish my father.

Twenty years later, I flee. Banish myself from family, church, country. A rolling stone gathers no moss.

Banishment: an attempt at separating oneself from the august and placid expanses where the father's sublime Death, and thus *Meaning*, merges with the son's "self", writes Julia Kristeva, (but where a daughter can very easily become trapped), mummified, petrified, exhausted, "more dead than alive" ... So flee this permanence of meaning. Live somewhere else, but in the company of paternal Death. (Kristeva, 1980, pp. 149–50)

Artaud runs in his sleep. His little feet make darting motions. He coos and whines and whimpers. He dreams of sheep. Of fleeing, maybe.

At break of day, I glide downstairs to check on him. He's vomited his dinner. Chewed his harness. He looks mortified. Recoils and trembles as though he thinks I'm going to hit him. *Artaud le Momo, come outside*, I say. *No one likes being sick*. He follows me. Stops in the doorway. *Come, boy, come*.

Artaud is an anxious dog. He is scared of Luke, the man I mistook for a suitable husband. He is scared of all blokey blokes. Heavy steps. Loud noises. Sudden movements. Brooms, towels, the washing basket and Mr Hoover.

I pet him on the head, now. Tell him I love him.

To love is to survive paternal meaning. It demands that one travel far to discover the futile but exciting presence of a waste-object: a man or woman fallen off the father, taking the place of his protection (Kristeva, 1980, p. 150).

I don't like Julia's suggestion, though I suspect I did just that, fleeing from one hemisphere to the other. Away from the primal father and his woman, maybe ... Self-banishment?

Artaud as father substitute. My totem, as Sigmund Freud reminds me (Freud, 1922, p. 87). I don't like the idea either.

Let's go for a walk, Artaud. I'm a trainer now.

Sparkle in the air. After recent rains, oxalis is out of control, spreading from the front garden to the rockery. The impatiens I planted last Christmas have self-seeded along the border of our 49 steps. They are tall and gangly and mildewy: impatiens downy mildew. Leaves and flowers have already dropped. Dusty webbing of mites, too. We head east, towards Turner Reserve.

Hither. Thither. Hither. Thither. Is it Artaud or me pulling on the leash? Hither. Thither. Sniff sniff sniff. *Il était une maitresse qui promenait son chien. Elle avait dans sa tête de vraiment drôles d'idées. Sa tête faisait roulis roula. Sa tête faisait roulis roula. Deux pas en avant. Deux pas en arrière. Deux pas d'un côté. Deux pas de l'autre côté. Artaud, Momo, we're not moving. Backtrack. Walk with me.* Artaud sniffs the air now. He smells tons of things I can't smell. Sees so much more, too. He's on high alert. God, I love him. At the playground a woman barks: *Are you walking your dog or is he walking you?* The latter, I answer. God I'm hopeless.

This will require a lot of patience ...

Keep up, Artaud.

Now, that is strange: RG, my analyst's initials. Artaud is my analyst now.

The term "transference" first appeared in Freud's dream book with reference to the displacement of affect from one idea to another (Freud, 1982, p. 562). Later, it came to refer to the patient's love/hate relationship with the analyst as it develops in the course of the treatment. Jacques Lacan argues that though transference often manifests itself in the guise of strong affects such as love and hate, it does not consist of emotions as such, but of the structure of an intersubjective relationship (Lacan, 2006). In *The Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Jacques articulates the transference with the Subject Supposed to Know, which I'd rather translate as Supposed Subject of Knowledge. According to this model, transference is the attribution of knowledge to the Other, the supposition that the Other is a subject who knows: "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere ... there is transference" (Lacan, 1971, p. 232).

For Jackass Lacan, however, this Supposed Subject of Knowledge need not be a physical person. This subject may indeed be a body of work – like this text. This implies that transference can manifest itself with reference to three instances of the Supposed Subject of Knowledge in "Unleashed": the author, the work and the reader. Or the author, the work and Artaud.

Oh, you may object, dear reader, but Artaud is not part of the Symbolic. Artaud is a dog.

Yes, but he communicates other-wise. Besides, he knows things I don't. Here comes the rain ...

Jackass says that many animals speak in a sense when they are in pain or in need: “You have only to observe a pet to see that a being deprived of language is quite capable of making calls on you, calls to draw your attention to something which, in some sense or other, it lacks” (Lacan 1975, p. 84).

So, animals can articulate a demand. But they lack access to the dimension of the signifier. If I say *sit*, Artaud sits. If I say *spit*. Ditto. If I say *Sss* he now sits. Does that mean Artaud lacks access to the symbolic means through which my reality is constructed?

Let's go for a walk.

Our impatient feet take us east, then north, to what my last born calls *the quiet corner* adjacent to A H Capp Reserve, on the Merri Creek. There, we practise hopping over limbs of gum trees. But today we'll have to share.

Hi! Do you mind if we ...

Not at all. This is Ella, says Byron, nodding to a nimble collie.

After Ella Fitzgerald?

Uh Uh.

This is Artaud.

After?

The French poet. Antonin Artaud. Genius ... and very mad.

Is that why you called your dog ARR-TOH?

No. Because Artaud put language on trial.

The man's eyes widen. Those two seem to be getting along. *What was his philosophy?*

*Anti-philosophy. Artaud felt **tethered** by language. French, specifically.*

You French?

Belgian.

Sorry.

*That's okay. You're obviously Australian, but remind me of an English poet. Anyway, Artaud's story is complicated. He generated a lot of ink among thinkers when for him thinking and suffering were intimately bound. You could say he also put **being** on trial. But I'm getting ahead of myself and I smell rain.*

Yep, time to go pack. We're off to Tassie this arvo. Nice meeting you.

Ditto. C'mon Artaud. Sorry. I didn't ask your name.

Ed.

See you! Bye, Ella.

Hither, thither. Artaud's on a smell track. Hither, thither. Nothing is more repressive than the repression of smell. It connects us to the world. It's part of our precarious love for the impossible planet we inhabit.

Artaud's found a comfy shrub wit light green, toothed leaves on prostrate stems to defecate onto. Antonin's laughing somewhere. Antonin of the scatological language, excremental symbolism, poetic glossolalia whose phonetic structure is borrowed from Greek and Turkish, hi mother's mother tongue. How far to *lalangue*, I ask myself as I pick up three perfectly rounded turds? How far to the language anterior to language? Artaud?

Come on Artaud le génie.

Ropes of rain. Artaud likes rain. We slip onto slippery suburban streets that smell of fuel, gas, curry and sewerage. The litter of capitalism. Garbage day. This is real, imaginary and symbolic energy. Stretching the symbolic, naturally.

I'm rephrasing in my head what I didn't tell Ed: Antonin Artaud was one of the most beguiling, brilliant and baffling voices of the twentieth century. Performing writing across multiple disciplines, bending genres and forms. Best known for his concept of a "theatre of cruelty", his legacy is one to re-think the materiality, physicality, animality of language. The possibilities of performance in and beyond language. At the limits of the sayable, intelligible, representable. Now I'm really getting away... But I make a mental note to myself to track Foucault's statement that Artaud restored to language its *being*, by which he meant "that formless mute unsignifying region where language finds its freedom" (1966, p. 395).

My Artaud saunters all over the place. Sniffs all over the place. Pisses all over the place. Now he lunges at a fluffy designer dog. Now I pull the leash. He pulls and I pull now. I am frustrated with Artaud, the wandering analyst who does not look at me.

Sorry, Artaud, I say when we get home. *I need some time out.* I release him in the backyard. Artaud snorts.

It suddenly occurs to me that Artaud doesn't bark. None of Antonin's *mots-souffles* / breath-words or *mots-cris* / howl-words. It suddenly occurs to me that this language obsession of mine is a pathetic fantasy. The fantasy of a dog named after a poet who understands human language is nothing else than the fundamental fantasy: the unchecked connection with the Other.

Sit Artaud.

Shit Antonin.

I resolve that Artaud will never attain the status of parlêtre. Nonetheless ...

Nonetheless, Artaud dreams. Nonetheless, Artaud doesn't bark. If I analyse these two statements, deep down I ask whether a dog has an unconscious and whether there is something wrong with an Artaud who doesn't seem able to articulate a demand.

This will require a lot of patience.

Jackass stresses that all speech is a form of demand – specifically a demand for love. And yet Jackass also notes that despite the universality of language, or the dimension of the symbolic, human beings are prone to *méconnaissance*, by which he means, to misunderstand each other. So, it seems that I mistake a bark for a word. *Ah, l'Amur!*

Let's go for a walk.

Robinson Reserve. Fun. Scary: Artaud doesn't know what to do with other dogs, except other so-called working dogs. He nips a designer dog. It's getting complicated. I step onto unbeaten tracks when I say *yes, I'm the dog's owner*. I enter ontological pathways that conceptually and socially and legally construct the person I am when I say the word *owner*.

This f...ing dog is f...ing dangerous. You should never take him off the leash yells the other owner who has kicked Artaud. Hard. And who now pursues us: *if your dog attacks my dog again I'll f...ing kill him*. I keep up, shaking. *Good boy*. After all Artaud only defended himself. Or warned the designer bitch that bit his ear first.

High five, Artaud!

My nights fill with violence. Kick. Kick. Kick. I yell back at the man. Want to retaliate. Not a word. I feel totally impotent. Discouraged. Until that magical day we dare going back to the scene of trauma. We meet Tessa, another Kelpie. Artaud and Tessa have a ball running around clockwise. Then come Saffron and Sammie, Marion's two Border Collies. Doggy heaven. I lose track of time as I speak with (unnamed) Tessa's dad and Marion. Here comes the man who threatened us the other day. I call it quits.

Artaud, come! Mechanically, almost distractedly, I hook the leash on his collar. *Let's go*.

Leash: physical restraint, mental frustration, confusion, anxiety, but also safety and guidance. Keep that in mind.

It is shame I feel, not guilt. *At soixante piges* I'm learning the difference. At last. Keep moving. Life is movement. And moving away from guilt is life.

I want to say: *Artaud, high five!* But don't. He trots away towards Strettles Street, too exhausted to pull, his tongue lolling.

Tongues are for speaking, kissing, eating, licking, drinking, singing, spitting and praying. Tongues slither, laze, loll, fall off. Tongues tell stories, spit out truths; they lie and sin. Tongues connect human beings with their own bodies, other human beings, souls, pets, animals they eat, plants and objects. When it comes to tongues, human beings dread the knife, which makes them aware that other body parts of their bodies can be cut off. As speaking beings, they lash at others with their tongues, speak in tongues and talk about tongues of flames. That is violence.

Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge (Morrison, 1993, p. 6).

Artaud needs a break. I give him space. As I do Toni.

Artaud has a limp. When he's fast asleep, I examine his feet. A torn pad on his right hind foot. He wakes. Withdraws his paw. Nuzzles into my lap.

Jackass says that many animals "speak" when they are in pain, or at least call for help when they are in need: "You have only to observe a pet to see that a being deprived of language is quite capable of making calls on you, calls to draw your attention to something which, in some sense or other, it lacks" (Lacan, 1975, p. 16).

Artaud doesn't speak up, even though he's in pain. Does not bark. Why? All those weeks stuck in a cage, dogs barking their heads off, no doubt. But I fail Artaud at every turn. Nonetheless ... Nonetheless Artaud nuzzles into my lap. I wonder who is rescuing whom now.

Waiting at the vet, I Google *rescue*:

rescue (v.)

c. 1300, *rescouen*: deliver (someone) from an enemy's attack or restraint; deliver or save (someone) from evil or harm, from Anglo-French *rescu-*, Old French *rescou-*, stem of Old French *rescorre*, *rescoure*, *rescure*: protect, keep safe; free, deliver (Modern French *recourre*), from re-, here perhaps an intensive prefix + *escourre*: to cast off, discharge, from Latin *excutere*: 'to shake off, drive away,' from ex- + *-cutere*, combining form of *quater*: "to shake".

Also, sometimes (17–18 century): to liberate by unlawful force from legal custody. Related: *Rescued*; *rescuing*; *rescuable*. *Rescuer* is from 1530s; Ogden Nash has *rescuee* (1950) for the sake of a rhyme. The legal language, based on Anglo-French, tended toward *rescusser* and *rescussee*.

The vet says it's not my fault as though he smells my self-reproach. He asks the dog's name. When I add *after the mad poet*, he grins. Says: *Not to worry. Artaud has good genes. He means well.*

So, it boils down to genes whether a dog is rescued, tossed onto the street, or put to sleep.

Artaud's progenitors are British dogs known as collies (sometimes spelled colleys). These were mostly black, or very dark brown, dogs – hence the name collie, which has the same root as coal. The first recognised Border Collie was not brought to Australia until after Federation.

Some collies were imported to Australia for stock work in the early 19th century and were bred with other types of dogs with the aim of working sheep without direct supervision. A widespread theory which is still being disputed is that the Kelpie is also descended from dingoes because of the shape of their ears and cream colour of their coat as was the case with the first Australian Kelpie: a black and tan female pup, with floppy ears, from a litter born on Warrock Station near Casterton, owned by George Robertson, a Scot. The dog was named after the kelpie, a mythological shapeshifting water spirit of Celtic folklore.

Oh, Artaud loves a swim!

It would seem that to this day the Kelpie is the *subject* of the anthropomorphic imagination.

I hear you, dear reader: *perhaps all dogs are. They are pets.*

Artaud, come. Time for your medicine. Artaud takes the antibiotic and anti-inflammatory I hid in a chunker. I pet him. *Good dog.*

To pet is to be touched.

This will require a lot of patience.

We are making progress. I sit with Artaud. Hold him. He wedges his nose between my hand and my notebook. I put the notebook down. Pet Artaud's head. Run my fingers through his fur. It is smooth and shiny.

We start training with THE GOOD DOG. Tim comes to our house. Takes in the topos. Sits. Allows Artaud to get used to his presence. Pets. Asks open questions. Listens. Watches. Then asks if I want to go for a walk. I'm taken aback.

Hither thither, hither thither. Sniff sniff sniff. Tim follows at a distance, observing our progress. I feel hopeless. At the park Tim shows me how to *walk* (!) with the leash. Properly. We practise. Totter home. It strikes me that THE GOOD DOG's job is not to train Artaud, but me.

This will require a lot of patience ... My patience is a torrent.

Tim sends me a clipped email advising I read *Bones would rain from the sky: Deepening our relationships with dogs* (Clothier, 2020). Attached are *Some notes on canine behaviour relative to Artaud* and a set of instructions to incite behavioural changes in Artaud. The subtext suggests that this may also entail psychological and physiological changes – viz *the stress escalation ladder* and *layers of stress* sections complete with diagrams. My homework also comprises two

paragraphs on *Looking after yourself*, which I mostly disregard except for the good luck tip: *Until then ... fake it 'til you make it*. Laugh. A sign of ambivalence.

The term “ambivalence” says Julia “implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and this text into history; for the writer, they are one and the same” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 150).

Guilt and shame. Anxiety as *plaque tournante*. I want to be a good trainer. I’ll jump as high I can. First, *aim to stay calm and controlled in conditions of danger or conflict*. *Until then ... fake it 'til you make it*.

Actually, Artaud’s been training me, too. His first days in our house were challenging. His presence changed the way I planned my every day. He taught me not to run away. Now I figure I have to work on establishing boundaries and “deepening our relationship”.

A chill. Stars splinter. The dog wedges his nose between my hand and my writing. I resist the urge to pet him. *No, Artaud. On your mat*.

In the morning, there is Artaud now. Let’s talk about his tongue – the broad pink tongue which is his language. Two things at the same time that are only one. Isn’t language called *tongue*, because like a tongue in the mouth language licks, slides, moves, is impossible to hold still? He talks to me. Says: I call you my language. He would like to name my whole face with his tongue. Chin, nose, cheek, mouth. But I say: Artaud, no. That’s enough. Maybe he feels that my mouth shelters my own tongue, the other tongue, so to speak tongue in cheek, the tongue which is safely tucked under its roof ... *Dans son Palais* – its Palace. Inside speech. Has Artaud guessed that my function is to write?

Yes. Writing is my dog’s rival. He watches my hand jerking across the page, the ruthless striking out of words, the paroxysmal bursts of ink. He wedges his nose under my hand as if to say: Enough. Pay attention to me. Sometimes he eats my scribbly mess or takes a draft to his mat. Dribbles on it.

I forgive him: “For me true writing is that: not an elegant, studied gesture but a convulsive act” (Ferrante, 2022, p. 35). It is a coming to chaos.

My mouth is the first thing that excites Artaud in the morning. He quivers. He wants to enter the Humanist Palace. I say no. Hands will do. He licks them clean. Everyone their own way of loving. But loving too, is paroxysmal ...

I bestow too many roles on this poor creature: he’s my companion, confessor, trainer, analyst. It is “as though those most able to pose the questions central to our humanity are those outside humanity” (McIlwain, 2004, p. 30). But all said and done Artaud is only a dog who doesn’t bark. And now he’s a caged animal.

Walk? Artaud's at the door like a shot.

Sit. Through. With me, Artaud. Yes!

Everywhere blossom trees burst into bloom. White and pink petals unfurl: plums, peaches, cherries, apricots, both ornamental and fruiting. Kanzan flowers carpet the footpath. We head to the creek where domes of yellow surge through canopies of glaucous foliage.

Back home, I repeat what I call my little experiment at the front door:

Artaud, sit. Woof! The dog cocks an ear. *Woof.* Quizzical stare. I kneel: *Woof!* Artaud utters a timid bark.

Mum, you're bats, says Xavier who opens the door for us.

But it works!

Through, you two. Artaud flops onto his back. He loves a scratch, and Xavier is the best scratcher. I suspect the man-child is Artaud's favourite human.

Langue, lengua, lingua, lingua. How convenient are Romance languages? And Finnish: *kieli*. And English: tongue, from Proto-Germanic **tungō*. However, except for English, all Germanic languages clearly separate organ and mode of communication: *die Zunge / die Sprache, tong / taal, tunga / tungomål*. Arabic and Russian too. Hindi?

So, there goes my theory. Besides, French has two words corresponding to the English word language: *langue*, which is primarily used to refer to individual languages such as French and English; and *langage*, which primarily refers to language as a general phenomenon, or to the human ability to acquire language.

"L'inconscient est structuré comme un langage" said Jackass throughout his teaching. Would he have said: "the unconscious is structured like a tongue" after his seminar on Joyce, when he identified with a poem in the making? For a poem is an author's doing ... and I wonder who that author might have been in Jackass's fantasy. James Joyce? Louis Aragon? He loved them both. All the poets he quotes from or alludes to are men. All but Marguerite Duras and Marguerite Pantaine, whom he called Aimée, allegedly to protect her identity. Aimée, or loved one, who fuelled Lacan's dissertation on paranoid psychosis and whose work he pilfered. As far as I know, Jackass had no interest in Antonin Artaud whom he dismissed as chronically and incurably insane. But I err.

Let's get back to my topic, the relationship between a dog and his human *in* language, for as Jackass argues in his seminar on identification, domestic animals also live in language except that their relationship towards language is different: they do not relate to the chain of signifiers, i.e., the Other.

Artaud: rescue Kelpie, unbarking watchdog who only relates to the little other – me, whom he sometimes mistakes for a sheep. If I dawdle too much for his liking, he sometimes comes up from behind and nips my ankle just above the boot, taking it in his mouth like the leg of a sheep to lead me where? Outside. He likes and dislikes it when I go wild. We are all made of contradictions and there is a raging animal in me too ... a black sheep? This, he feels. I'm sure of it. His mother was an Eve. He understands the ambivalence at the heart of the word *Domus* ... *Domine? Dominique?*

I remember my mother kissing Peggy. The desire to puke. And at the thought of the pong of vomit, the shame. The bracketing off. I didn't know then that Georges Bataille thought of a kiss as the beginning of cannibalism (Bataille, 1962, p. 35). Another human fantasy? Taboo? Or both?

The scent of a dog is magnanimous. Not the right word. Full of leniency. That's not it. Of responsibility. Oh no! Of foreboding. Yes, but something's missing. Of irremediability. Yes, that's it. It is a scent that has been held long and hard. That approaches you like a disaster. That whispers to you let yourself go. Drop everything. And there is no object.

This dog knows more about life than I do. That's all there is to it.

Let's go for a walk.

Emboldened by our weekend fun at Robinson Reserve with Saffron and Sammi, we go back to the cricket ground. I hope Artaud only remembers the good times, and not the attack upon his person. Practice recall with the horse lead as someone called it. I unleash Artaud as an experiment. Wonderful!

Violence smells. It does not lie. Here he comes, stomping, the man's man, brandishing his tennis racket. Artaud, ears flapped shut, bounces towards the three designer dogs. Breath trapped, limbs tensed, I suck in my fear. Words flare in the air: *Artaud, come!* My arms break open. He turns. Gallops. Surrenders. I want to weep. I don't surrender to anyone. I reward Artaud. Smooth out my shame. Trace furrows over his fur. Like satin, now.

To look beyond the horizon is perilous. I swap leads. *Artaud, walk with me.*

The crone that I am is determined to teach Artaud how to bark. Properly, not timidly. Because I want him to be able to defend himself – at least to signal danger or abandonment.

This will require a lot of patience.

Again and again, before letting him through the door I ask him to sit. Say *woof*. I notice he always cocks his left ear, raises his right eyebrow. Repress the need to laugh. *Artaud, through.*

In the backyard we play hurdles. *Artaud, ready? Hop. Good dog. Hop. Good dog.* At the door, Artaud sits. *Woof*. Yes, he deed! *Good dog!* I reward him with a treat. *Through.*

His tail is not wagging, but spinning.

Heart thrums. How long does a dog remember trauma? Abandonment?

Good dog! Receding tide of embarrassment: “all his animal instincts ... thwarted and contradicted” (Woolf, 1981, p. 25). My barking is an ideological statement, since this improvised training or teaching confirms the status of the signifier and does not, as I mistakenly thought, say anything about how dogs communicate. Might this not be an instance of anthropological egocentrism?

At night Artaud gets away from me. Galloping, galloping, galloping. I wake in fright. Go check on him. He’s curled up, his tail snug under his bum. He twitches. I creep back to bed, soaked in sweat. Assess pulse, blood pressure, location of pain: heart.

There is no drumbeat in this heart drowned in silence, yearning for quiet. It didn't resist the divide between politics and psychoanalysis, you might say. I laugh out loud ... Always a sign of ambivalence. The hardest thing to understand in the chambers of this organ cold and hard as stone is that repetition blinds you to its patterns. Give them a good shake.

To turn a blind eye is denial, resistance, repression or foreclosure. Ambivalence is at the root of language. You knew that before you understood that *no* meant *NO*. When everything was quiet and silence was to come. I’m reminded of this as if death prowls around the room. Ambivalence is that which is silenced in so-called communication. In all politics embedded in its own disappearance. I wish I’d read Gerald Durrell more carefully that year in Edinburgh when a lover compared me to a wild goose. Or was it a wild goat? The dog licks my writing hand. He knows I’ll say no if he pushes his nose under it. At least, with dogs, there is freshness, even on what's expected of patterns.

Artaud believes in hands. The hand that pets, pats, scratches, soothes. The hand that feeds. The hand that throws a ball, a stick, a frisbee. He doesn't believe in the hand that strikes, though. Today at herding he refused to sit for Luke, so the man struck Artaud. *Don't hit my dog*, I snapped with a violence that surprised the man ... and me.

In the car, I said: *we need to talk*.

I'm driving, he said.

Back home, I said again: *we need to talk*. Alas, doors are convenient word stoppers. *Exeunt*.

Artaud follows you upstairs. You turn a blind eye, perversely enjoying the transgression of your own rule. Sit at your table. The dog flops at your feet. Sighs.

As Anne Carson remarks, the historical muffling of female articulation is a misogynistic tactic of control, "as if the entire female gender were a kind of collective bad memory of unspeakable things" (1995, p. 134). Anne again: "putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day" (1995, p. 121).

Annoyance towards the man took up residence in your thoughts, I write. *You* as rescuer. The power of pronouns. Michel Houellebecq's *Serotonin* catches your eye. You open the book where you left a pencil:

It is bad for those who love each other to speak the same language, it is bad for them to truly understand one another, to be able to communicate through words, because the vocation of the word is not to create love but to engender division and hatred, the word separates as it produces, while a formless, semi-linguistic babble – talking to your lover as you might talk to your dog – creates the basis for unconditional and enduring love. (Houellebecq, 2019, p. 82)

Well, I failed at that, didn't I, Artaud?

Sigh.

Let's go to bed.

Sleep is a chopper, eggbeater, whirl bird. It's a turbine engine hacking at memory and anguish. It's your new white linen shirt egged out before a reading. Its rotor blades faring nowhere but

to sea. Sleep is no rescue helicopter with an amphibious hull. You wake up soaked, bones broken swirling in smog and crows already pecking at your egg-eyes. Time? Night knows no time.

Time erases everything it touches.

People refuse to grow old while their dogs stay young, as if years don't pass, but simply run from one into another, you write. There's the boy dog apace with the play of balls and sticks who dreams of a Pitbull's vicious jaws, a Rottweiler's blasting snarl, a Chihuahua's bared fangs. Whelps. Teeth gnash the air.

You wobble your way to the boy-dog. You pet him back to sleep, whispering sweet nothings. Break of day tomorrow, he'll wait for you on the landing, flouting the language of sniff and lick.

You creep back to your table. Flick on the light. Write on the night.

A note: "In Lacanian pseudo-interventions into the field of dog psychology", Arya Banana (*nom de plume?*) writes:

As far as I can tell, a dog cannot have an unconscious. A dog will always remain at the level of the psychopath: The world remains at the Imaginary level, with occasional bouts of the Real, but the animal is never embedded in the Symbolic like human subjects. (Banana, 2017, para. 2)

A second note: Artaud's Ur-progenitors are wolves (*Canis lupus*). The wolf is a conventional symbol of marginality in many literatures. The wolf is an outlaw. They live beyond the usefully cultivated and inhabited space, in that no-man's land the Greek called *apeiron*. The goat sometimes shares this affinity, though the no-man's land she inhabits is located within an inhabited space.

Women, in the ancient and industrialised worlds, share this territory spiritually and metaphorically in virtue of the now much disputed "natural" female affinity for all that is raw, formless and in need of the civilising hand of man, witness the Pythagorean Table of Opposites where we find the attributes curving, dark, secret, evil, ever-moving, not self-contained and lacking its own boundaries aligned with Female and set over against straight, light, honest, good, stable, self-contained and firmly bounded on the Male side, or so said Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*.

Neither these polarities nor their hierarchisation are new, of course. But when a woman babbles on and on, and she seldom does, it is usually the voice of hush and hurt, urgent and often beyond help. While female restraint may be linked to patriarchal ideologies that situate womanhood behind closed doors I'm reminded of Virginia Woolf, whose writing cries out for creative freedom, and *naturally*, critiques classic literature as a male-dominated domain that excludes

women's self-driven narratives. Reiterating the significance of women accessing private domains, she writes:

Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. (Woolf, 1998, p. 141)

Dawn. Not quite daybreak. You dismiss Bataille's belief that a kiss is the beginning of cannibalism.

Retreating of sound. Crackling energy. A whimper, almost a moan. You scurry to the landing. The dog's asleep. You hallucinate now! You inhale Artaud's smell. Are releasing the animal in yourself.

Mais enfin, Dominique, resaisis-toi, says my master the *super ego*. Come on pull yourself together. Compose yourself. You don't make sense.

I'm losing the thread. Roland would have said *don't worry, you are just unthreading*. He used the metaphor of unthreading to describe material translated into language: *parfiler* (Barthes 2005, p. 11), meaning to unpick thread by thread not my "self", but an event. I hesitate to write an experience of the *bodythought*.

Let's thread oneself, then, as one loosely threads a coat – *faufiler* in my mother tongue whose m'Other was a seamstress.

Violence smells, I wrote above. What I meant was not violence, but aggression.

Violence is in language and language is violence. Language does violence to voices by distinguishing those that matter from those that don't, by ranking, appropriating, structuring and prescribing a so-called correct mode of address. Where registers intersect, hierarchies of language become means for power that *naturally* leads to othering, negating, denying, suppressing. Here are the seeds of domination, colonisation, obliteration. The narrative of history is a narrative of violence. Critical-creative discourse refuses this narrative. It seeks to explode this violence through a performance that destabilises categories such as reading and writing. It unleashes the power of refusal and rupture. Like poetry.

"The violence of language", wrote Judith, "consists in its effort to capture the ineffable and, hence, to destroy it, to seize hold of that which must remain elusive for language to operate as a living thing" (Butler, 2021, p. 7). And thinking, too, is violence. As Gilles put it: "Thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it" (Deleuze, 2000, p. 7).

You are releasing the animal in you with wolf and Woolf.

Walk with me, would Jeanette Winterson say, when I really mean Sharon Kivland:

Jacques L. said that knowledge of existence is mediated through the imaginary psychic and social relation that structure a sense of self in the first place. He thought about Anna F.'s work on the ego. He thought *Verneinung*, that is, negation or denial, was the fundamental to the misrecognitions that structure the experience of reality and self. He might have put it like this: you are an animal subject to death, to violent instinctual drives, you disavow this dimension so you may function as a "normal" human being, but the reality of your aggression, sexuality, and mortality does not disappear. No, it does not. In fact, the distressing truth about your nature forms the id, which puts a constant pressure on your consciousness, and actually it erupts in your dreams, your neuroses, and your psychotic episodes. Oh, what an unhappy animal you are, an animal that dreams, twitching in your sleep, a prey to language, even in repose, and that is where your domestication led you. (Kivland, 2023, p. 253)

I suddenly feel exhausted. Mithered. Skin itches all over.

Mirror, mirror, let me come to thee, I squeal, throwing my arms in the air.

The Horror! The Horror!

Teeth saffron. Tongue black. Furry!

No, you bark. *I am a werewolf re-finding freedom. Stop!* Suppress this hidden interior presence of the animal in you. *Artaud, where are you when I need you?*

It seems your body is howling. You slip out of the bathroom. Gambol downstairs, repeating LEUKOPLAKIA like a mantra. Slip. You pick yourself up. Swoon.

Oh, Herr Professor. Zeer geehrte Herr Professor. Quick. Please, you plead.

In your fiction room, you fire up the laptop. Seek reassurance, which your favourite search engine bestows upon you: "Black hairy tongue is a temporary, harmless oral condition that gives the tongue a dark hairy appearance". And further, "It is caused by an overgrowth of dead skin cells, causing lengthening of the papillae, and staining from bacteria, yeast, food, tobacco or other substances in the mouth".

Gross! You brush, brush, brush. Floss. Wish this event of the body away. Later, your GP will prescribe an anti-fungal solution. *Gross.*

You forget all about the hives and they do, finally, go away, as does the benign oral condition.

You've never been able to raise your voice, neither in pain, nor in fright. In dreams of agony and flight, you were and remain utterly voiceless, which always brings about crashing demise. In *Inhibits A to Z*, a collection currently in press at SubVision with an introduction by Xeno Punctum on the art of unspeaking, you write ...

Mais enfin, Dominique. Resaisis-toi.

The problem of non-communication. Or the incongruity of communication. In the context of your body event, verbal nonsense also signals some "Other jouissance" (Lacan, 1998, p. 69), i.e. some non-phallic enjoyment that might entail "the relief of escaping from the false dominion of words which have acquired an absolute value" and that are perceived as "no longer functioning as a bridge between internal and external reality" (Milner, 1987, p. 30). In this dream, you inhabit language as much as you are inhabited by it – indeed, to the point of subjective invasion and ... suspension.

You pick up *Encore* where you left it. You underlined the phrase: "there is a hole there and that hole is called the Other" (Lacan, 1998, p. 113). Penned in the margin: *later on, Jackass will declare that like Woman, the Other doesn't exist.*

Were you hystericizing as you read along, asks Antonin?

Artaud?

See, you are hyperventilating now. A far cry from the book cover which reproduces Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* as it stands in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. What is your speaking body saying? It is saying this: jouissance is what is useless, so, enjoy! The superego, the concept of Freud's second topography to which Jackass gave a repressive meaning, is not only brutal, but also obscene: it enjoins you to enjoy with no end. No limit (Lacan, 1998, p. 23).

This doesn't mean that the signifier is bogus. Not at all: "the unconscious is structured like a language", repeats Jackass (Lacan, 1998, p. 138), and therefore articulated by signifying chains. But the signifier is here enmeshed with jouissance: the signifier is situated at the level of *substance jouissante*. It is "the material cause of jouissance" (Lacan, 1998, p. 23). Without it, there is no way of dealing with jouissance that is not physiological or biological. And without it, no way of addressing reality (Lacan, 1998, p. 55). Lucky Artaud!

In *Encore*, the gap between signifier and signified widens: "the signified is not what you hear. What you hear is the signifier" (Lacan, 1998, p. 32). Here, the letter is the effect of discourse,

which means it works only according to pre-structuring. However, the *écrit* differs from the signifier more markedly than previously, for example in a text such as “The instance of the letter, or reason since Freud” (Lacan, 2006).

What draws you to this seminar like a bone buried deep in a hole?

I think how it performs, quite violently, a theory of *jouissance* in a complex relationship with love, where Freud’s emphasis on narcissism remains evident, and where the opposition between desire and love’s demand, which dominated Jackass’s theory up to Seminar XVI is being rearticulated in terms of the opposition between phallic *jouissance* and the other *jouissance*, or “supplementary *jouissance*” (Lacan, 1998, p. 72). I think how it writes the sexual relationship it negates. As a result, human beings reproduce due to a misunderstanding – something I didn’t address in my analysis. How ironic I should be quoting from Bruce Fink’s translation which, over the years – and narcissism being at the root of aggressivity, I have criticised *encore et encore*:

It is the speaking body insofar as it can only manage to reproduce thanks to a misunderstanding regarding its *jouissance*. It only reproduces thanks to a missing (ratage) what it wants to say, for what it wants to say is its effective *jouissance*. And it is by missing that *jouissance* that it reproduces – in other words – by fucking.
(Lacan, 1998, p. 120)

Let’s go for a walk.

Latitude -37.75819000

Longitude 145.00583000

AEDT Time 5.52 am

Wordless shadows on the move. With each step we take, Artaud and I, time stretches and hurries, zigzagging between listless trees. I like liking our steps disrupting time more than silence. The quiet corner. Up the path cutting a crack through Capp’s Reserve, the road. Long slow breath. We recover our tracks, every word never said, a sniff.

We shake time off our bodies. The dog flops onto the bed. Cocks an eyebrow. Closes his eyes. Adrift in sunrise, it strikes me words are not language. The dog is dreaming. What? How? I have no idea. He makes cooing sounds, sighs. His paws usher him where? A paddock full of sheep? I resist the urge to run my fingers through his coat. Touch his marks and markings. Finger the tattoo inside his ear.

This will require a lot of patience ...

A note: There is more to it than that. Like politics, for it takes two to tango. Nonetheless, as in walking with Artaud, one (who is not one) should read *Encore* step after step, without expecting a linear progression. Sniff here. Sniff there. *Un pas en avant. Deux pas en arrière ...*

Hold all the threads together: love, communication, writing, sexual difference, phallic jouissance and the other jouissance, knowledge ... and its limits.

... *It will take time.*

Is time a big bang blast, a lightning bolt, a metaphysical conceit, a rhetoric of emptiness, a hybrid tongue? It's not an arrow, a wheel, a cocked pistol, a heavy metal coil, a fugal metronome, a discoloured hallucination. Not even a one-way mirror, a vacant field, an abandoned ship or an anonymous grave. Perhaps it looks like the curvature of the earth or the shape of a dream stirring the heart. Time is not a stent. It's an open vein.

There is a softening at the edge of thought. Something like feeling. I open the doors.

Let's dance, Artaud!

The house rocks like a boat tugging at its moorings. Inner weather, gusty. We're playing dead fish. Mike Parr's *Head on a Plate* regards me. I stare back. I'm gone with the wind, gills and fins fluttering. Disappear the golden orb spinning its silk threads in cirrus clouds branching against the sky. Unstick myself from the idea of arachnophobia and away from the viscid spiral of sticky thread joining windowpane to Parr's etching. The head is distorted. I disappear the shadowed eye sockets. Squint. With a slight adjustment of perspective, I catch sight of an anamorphic skull: punKtime. Death brushes past. We are *The Ambassadors* now, waiting for Godot. Maestro strides in through the lounge's butter doors. Opens the baby grand's lid. Fingers scurry on the keyboard. Hammers hammer strings. The floorboards shake. Walls are reefs. I'm a jellyfish. Starfish. Rock fish. A rolling stone that doesn't know what it sways. *Artaud, ready?* Nose aloft, the dog holds my gaze. *Roll. Left. Right. Left. Right. Turn and toss.* Fur and silk ripple. Passage of blazing light as backdrop. Melting butter. We are *The Doors* now [2]. Heterodogsia, unsinging the dance. Körperbild. *People are Strange, my dog. Rock!*

At night, when silence trembles with echoes, and moonshine bobs on the floorboards casting shards of shadows on the walls, we leave them open to the dark, the doors. To terrorise the Architect who looks down upon this phantom world *in ille tempore*. Because all life holds its own destruction and God is nothing but the arbitrary distinction between heaven and earth, left and right, margin and immagination. Cut, not suture. Kinetic poesis. No beginning, but

rhythm, repetition, spacing, caesura: difference from self. Dog centre. Repercussion, resonance, reverberation, resounding, revenance, reflection, return from within difference. Humans or otherwise, we are constituted by rhythm. This caesura sentence which gathers and segments and which means that every single thing can be danced like a prose poem unleashing the rules of lexis, grammar, syntax. In ruffle reef light, fur and silk ripple and brush. *Time is paradoxical ... it folds or twists; it is as various as the dance of flames in a brazier, here interrupted, there vertical, mobile and unexpected* [3]. Because we are truly fickle matter existing. Already exiting. Rocking the boat to the breath of time.

Reluctantly, dear reader, I turn my back on you. I love my dog because he doesn't ask me to be more than who I am.

Notes

- [1] The epigraph is my translation of “j’ai cherché à faire dire au visage qui me parlait / le secret ...” in Antonin Artaud, *Le théâtre et son double*, *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol 4, p. 146.
- [2] The prose poem titled “The Doors” references the album *Strange Days* by The Doors, 1967.
- [3] “Time is paradoxical ... it folds or twists; it is as various as the dance of flames in a brazier, here interrupted, there vertical, mobile and unexpected” is taken from Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* translated by Richard Howard. (New York: Hill & Wang).

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