2023

Biting Range

effie bowen
Virginia Commonwealth University

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by effie Bowen
Masters in Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, Hollins University, 2011

Director:
Kendall Buster, Professor and Graduate Director, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media

Thesis reader:
Corin Hewitt, Professor, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media

Committee advisors:
Cara Benedetto, Associate Professor, Department of Painting and Printmaking
Kendall Buster, Professor and Graduate Director, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media
Corin Hewitt, Professor, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media
Michael Jones McKean, Associate Professor, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media

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to my real ones, lexi and tess

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Abstract
Biting Range is an essayic text about dogs, process, order, and memory. Structured as a conceptual material list, the writing addresses experiential textures and tensions gleaned from observation. Writing within and against the margins, I address the performativity of the page as its own form to be agitated.
BITING RANGE

by effie bowen
If there is a rule, try betraying it
I use the word score with my students but I suspect they don’t understand. To know the score is to use it, to be taught by scores, with scores, through scoring. A life of scores, an intimacy with the score.

When baking bread you must score the loaf for air to escape. You do this with a very sharp blade.
To score is to slice something razor thin.

The kind of artist I am is one who wants the score. I want the sharp structure of language to press against with my own rebellion. I want to dissect words and make them my own. I want to meet something outside me.

Noticing how much I loved to dance as a child, my mother asked if I wanted to take ballet class. “No,” I would retort, “I don’t want someone telling me what to do.” What I liked about dance was not the system or the steps, but the feel.

Ishmael Houston Jones was my first improvisation teacher, a mainstay of New York’s experimental and improvisation scene from the 1970s to 1990s. He has danced with dead goats, made work about Black cowboys and collaborated with Dennis Cooper, Arthur Jafa and Julie Dash and has been an instrumental educator in the field of dance and improvisation.
His class was scored by scores. We practiced Ishmael’s scores like

take turns slapping a partner
with mounting intensity
while maintaining eye contact
the entire time

It was in this class where I made my first performances, where I felt the pull to craft my own ideas and to rebel against what I have previously thought dance or theater to be.
It was in this class I realized I was gay.

We played with language and contact and theater. We made dances that could exist in the world, dances which didn’t rely solely on a stage. We touched the grotesque urgency of our bodies as expressive vehicles: we were political, we were nasty, we were freaks. We dressed in drag and lip synced to songs in French. We kissed each other in the dark.

The score is like cooking in someone else’s kitchen.
Yes, feel free to make your meal, but only with these specific tools.

Some of us find freedom like this, under the pressure of restriction.
1 drip pant
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha
ha ha ha
ha ha
ha ha
ha ha
ha ha
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
he he he he he he he he
ha he ha he ha he ha ha he ha he ha he ha he ha he ha ha he ha he ha ha he
he ha ha ha he ha ha ha he ha ha ha he ha ha ha ha he ha ha ha ha he ha ha ha ha he
he he he he he he he ha he he he ha he he he ha he he he ha he he he ha he he he ha he he he
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha
Ha Ha Ha Ha
he he
he he
he he
he he
he he
he he
Explain the use of color.
The doctor runs tests on me, says my blood is weak. The acupuncturist offers Chlorophyll, says it will build my blood. It is thick and murky, a dark, rich green. It is the opaque color of a lake, dark and oxygenated. The acupuncturist says that dark foods like kale, spinach, seaweed are good for the blood. Tells me to eat red things - beets, strawberries, and raspberries. A penetrating color rather than a surface one. To eat the color of blood.

Color is un-dissectable from time. Color is the feature hidden under layers of dust. We cleaned to refind color. The roses changed from pale pink to dusty gray. She said the color wasn’t right anymore, it had faded and thus, the title of the sculpture must change.

Three queers go to an orchid show. The blood of the botanic garden feels rich and healthy. One of the orchids is titled “Stop Lying”. Can color lie? Flowers have adapted over centuries to attract certain pollinators over others. In the Amazon, flowers benefited by attracting hummingbirds over insects due to the birds greater adaptability to temperature ranges. The flowers evolved to turn red becoming invisible to color-blind insects and hypervisible to color-sensitive birds.

I print one thousand pages of postcards on the Risograph. I cut them into eight thousand postcards. These are my blocks of color that I employ in order to paint on a thirty-six foot-long wall. I call it a painting even though there are no paints or brushes. There are no paints or brushes but there is color.

If painting is a color practice, then call me a painter.
I saw the color drain from their face. They had passed out.

Lift their legs higher than their head to move the blood. To move the color.
Color is a code.
He says he is trying to live without color, I ask why would you do that.
Touching you me touching me you
I lead my students through a somatic experience encouraging them to pay attention to contact points as they slump against the wall, or stand up straight or let their back rest upon the tall work tables, while their knees and feet dangling off the edge. “Imagine your body is covered in paint,” I prompt, “What marks are you making? What traces are you leaving?”
In *Cameo*, I paint my body and leave traces of acts. Movement and body—otherwise known as dancing—except no subject, just remainder.
After a studio visit that made me feel like my art works had no expressive content beyond their forms, I wanted to better articulate what they did, and how their forms were and are urgent, political, devious, and energized beyond only their forms.

Maybe my sculptures are about desire, I think to myself.
   (I'm outside, by the dumpster.)
     -Maybe they're about meeting in unusual ways.-
       (I'm mellowly stoned)
Maybe all of this is finally becoming clear to me (eureka) because of the group dinner where I furiously flirted across the table. When they shook my hand goodnight, a finger lingered and fantasy flooded in through my palm. I wanted to meet, remeet later—a bathroom, a public place, quickly find more contact points. In less than five seconds I'm imagining unzipping their jeans while we stand close and in the dark.

Instead of having sex, my torso softens against the edge of the dumpster as my eyes scan for a discard, a good one that I want to meet. I feel lucky at the dumpster, like exactly what I wanted is waiting for me there.
The dumpster often has legs, therefore, legs must often break.

In sub4dom: choreography position_2 I aimed to choreograph this pair of legs in time and space without changing the integrity of their formal structure. What do these legs need physically in order to move or to change positions? I hang them from the ceiling on a fishing line, let them turn in subtle circles, so slowly as to be almost imperceptible.

In position_1, I propped them on a brick, their red rubber foot pads precariously balancing the weight.
Today when I dumpster dive a beautiful pair of legs is there, the same faded pink of the Williamsburg Bridge.

I move the pink tripod from the dumpster to the studio and start rotating it in different orientations, different relationships to gravity and ground. The legs cannot stand on their own.

When I turn it upside down and use the two clean bricks as a post, it stays. It is expressive and strange and confident. This is speedy and satisfying.
If my work only stands through the graceful phenomenon of balance, maybe it means that things will not always be exactly like this,

that in this world, things fall.
start stop  
yes no  
come  
stay  
go
"A dog without a master is the poorest creature in the world." ¹

¹ Haushofer, Maren, The Wall, 1963
According to the Tavistock Institute's practice on group dynamics, there are three basic types of unconscious assumptions that groups of people tend to adopt (and that group dynamic conferences specifically try to uncover)

Dependency
Pairing
Fight/flight

By dependency they mean to say passivity, that participants place themselves at lower levels than the ‘consultants’ who are Tavistock trained psychologists who oversee the conferences and sit in on all the group meetings.

By pairing they mean to say that pairs of people (either member-consultant, heterosexual or homosexual member groups) are recognized and projected upon as a solution to the group’s problems.

By Fight/flight they mean that the participants only see fighting with the conditions or fleeing them are the only outcomes to escape the discomfort, tension, or otherwise negative dynamics.

As the conference unfolds over a series of three days, it reveals–in the most uncomfortable way–these fundamental truths of the group. Through a system that steers towards tension (thanks in huge part to the provocative and terse commentary made by the consultants), the group fails.

They fail to decide anything, fail to process, fail to connect, fail to come together, fail at consensus, fail at unity, fail as productive differentiation, fail to disagree, fail at agreement, fail at leadership, fail at passivity.

The failure is baked into the system.

The failure is for free.

---

But in the moment, this felt like the toxic plume from centuries of white supremacy passing uneasily over our room. In 2023, to love rules and to hate rules are both expressions of white power and these rules are rebelled against or followed only as much as they effectively suppress and overrule Black experience and subjectivities.

When I participated in a three day Tavistock group dynamics conference in 2017, there was one black participant and when Barry spoke about the double consciousness he was experiencing within this space and practice, the three consultants silently stood up and left the room. The strict adherence to time is integral to the Tavistock pedagogy. Without “holding and containment” the structure loses its power, it may yield too much to the whims, egos, or concerns of individuals rather than the group in its entirety.
In the 1971 Chomsky-Foucault debate on power versus justice, the camera pans from the speakers to the crowd.
Everyone's a white guy.
We’re playing a game and I prompt her to say where the power is. She is supposed to locate it in one of four identical objects based on their position and relationship to one another. Instead, she points to the light switch.
do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it again do it
There are two types of repetition: mechanical or porous.

Mechanical repetition is strict, tedious and determined.

Porous repetition is susceptible, gestural, and expressive.
I have the memory of dancing the same gesture until it shifts out from under me. I don’t mean for the motions to change, but I allow it.
Porous practice.
I transcribe the sounds of the metal worker in the studio above me. It is a bevy of slashes and ones, my whole body becomes a clicker counter as I trace out the rhythms of another’s work. I piggy back on this mechanical repetition.
My repetition is compulsive.
The double take is repetition in fast forward. A speedy repetition, a repetition that is in disbelief.
I was walking down the street in Chelsea one day in late November. I was wearing a look and passed a gorgeous fag also in a look—slicked back curls, periwinkle suit. Unable to fully see each other in time before our bodies passed on the sidewalk, we turned around, in total, rhythmic sync, and spewed our excitement about the other’s dress. We double took and forged a meeting point, a spark of rare, shared public excitement.
The double take as a choreography of attraction rather than one of disdain.
Let us look closer. Let us stretch this passing moment. Let us luxuriate on the public street corner. Let us be gay and fashionable. Let us be double taken.
Language Problems
Language problem 1

Early in grad school, a few days or a week in, I decide I need to hang status updates on my curtain. They are notes scrawled on ripped out sketchbook pages. Every day or week or so they change. They are a device of protection and processing.

The signs become my favorite kind of archive, one that is self-fulfilling, independent, and accumulative. In my second year, there is gossip about my signs. They are found to be contentious, disruptive, the cause or scapegoat of tension.

I feel defensive. A sign has no power until it is met, it can’t express itself without interpretation.
I wrote it down and made the scene thick and silent, a constant storm.

Language has done this, language has brought us apart.
Language problem 2

The committee meets with me and we communicate using only words.

People ask how it was and I tell them only with my eyes.
Language Problem 3

I am told that I was rude and that I have to take responsibility for it and apologize.

If someone tells me what to do, then that is the thing I don’t want to do.
Faster Daddy Faster
I once watched a recording of myself dancing and thought it was playing in fast forward.

My speed is fast.

I told my friend I was going to grad school to slow down.

My studio is constantly changing. Removal, refinement, revisiting. “Speed is a material in here,” he tells me. The ideas churn fast. Some of them take form. Some of them stay in the notebook as ideas for future shows. We laugh that the plan I have for the show may change again. How do I stand on top of speed, directing it where to take me next?
From ages sixteen till eighteen I was locked up in a treatment center in rural Tennessee.

I’ve been trying to catch up ever since.

No, I didn’t learn basic high school subjects, yes, I did have to do cavity checks and write in crayon and take my shoelaces out. Yes I did ‘earn’ the chance to take walks by myself and chopped firewood to stay warm. Yes I did have to cut my nails and deposit the clippings into the hand of a counselor. Yes I was given Ensure to drink until my body got bigger. Yes I was forced to take birth control to induce my period yes I was scared.

On the way to the train station they told me when you’re different it takes longer but once you’re there, you have the privilege of being utterly unique, not the product of a lifetime dedicated to a certain kind of speech and position.

Catching up is about speed. Its logic is that if you move fast enough, you gain an advantage. Maybe you can make up for lost time.
He asks why my pants are picking a fight with him.
This means I have good style. I love having good style because I remember not having good style. I remember having awkward style, having no style, and this felt related to my gayness. I remember being very gay but awkwardly so. I wasn’t coolly gay, I wasn’t trendily gay. I was the gay who was intense and urgent but unfocused, had not yet found their specificities. I was the gay trying things out, trying things on, buying a sequined white tank top from Beacons Closet and selling it back to them the same year.

When I was born 82,764 cases of AIDS had been reported. When I grew up gay was a slur. When I grew up there was one boy in my class who played with girls and he was bullied until he left school. When I grew up there was one tomboy and she was dangerous with her body. When I grew up there were rumors two teachers were fired for being gay. Where I grew up, no gay people ever came into my home. When I grew up I wasn’t allowed to go to a boy’s house. When I grew up there were two genders and they were assigned at birth.

Where I grew up there was a picture of my straight cis parents both “with child,” their twin pregnant bellies facing each other, making the slightest contact.

Where I grew up my parents had separate bedrooms.
She asked if it was sometimes just about style. Of course, I laugh. I’m wearing balencies¹ at the install.

Claw and ball furniture feet originated in China and circulated throughout Europe in the 1700s.

The animal to whom the claw belonged was originally a dragon and then European furniture makers transitioned it to the talon of a bird, and then the paw of a lion.¹

I was born in a Dragon year.
The four patina-ed bronzes that screw into the metal stands were my most enduring idea. Early on in graduate school I knew I wanted to cast my hand holding a ball. It took a year for me to do it. I had to warm up to mold making, get titillated by the precision of it and learn how to focus.

With one hand in a bucket and the other on the mixer, I held my hand in alginate until I could feel it harden around my hand. I pulled my hand out from the alginate, leaving the ball inside and mixed red resin and poured it in to set in the shape of my hand. I made a 1 piece silicone mold of my cast and let it sit in my studio for months. I didn’t feel like asking for help to cut it out. One day, I conjured the courage to ask for a hand and had the delightful feeling of possibility that accompanies an empty mold. Then, over days spent in the foundry, I poured wax into the mold, four times, and attached casts with wax sprues to paper cups. Melting and cooling. Waiting.

MAKE SURE TO CLOSE LID ALL THE WAY
IF THERE IS FILM, THEN STIR
REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR GLOVES

2 dips in ceramic shell
Wait to dry
1 dip in ceramic shell, 1 coat fine sand
Wait to dry
Repeat step 3 & 4
1 dip in ceramic shell, 1 coat medium sand
Wait to dry
Repeat step 6 & 7
1 dip in ceramic shell, 1 coat coarse sand
Wait to dry
Repeat step 9 & 10
1 dip in ceramic shell
Wait to dry

Then burnout.
Then pour bronze.
Then wait to cool.
Then warm up wrists and grind and clean and hammer and sandblast.
Jesse teaches me how to tap and suggests I practice. In a piece of spare bronze I start tapping, get excited about pressure and instantly the die breaks. Metal humbles me.
Performativity

or

how to learn

look

at sculpture like a

sculptor
At the party she said she would not crawl on the floor to see a detail of the sculpture but her MFA cohort tends to be more fancily dressed. I laughed and said all the sculptors at my school get low, yes, even crawl if necessary-- that this is sometimes the only way to find out the full secret of the work. At the same party I told him I found it performative how sculptors looked at work, like, how, perhaps, some of us circumnavigate, or covertly touch, how we might kneel beside a work while inquiring about the material list. “Performative?!” My fellow sculptor seemed appalled. “Yes, performative,” I said with the spacious curiosity I have when language attempts to bridge but instead creates a chasm.

What is performativity if not the specific textures and histories and experiences our bodies carry from our so-called private worlds into public ones? What is performative if not the way we shift registers with our closest confidants versus strangers? What is performative if not the choreographies we choose to adhere to, to reperform in certain settings but not others?

For some, the performative is a realm relegated to the theater, it means things are fake, put on, inauthentic. But for those of us who are dedicated and insistent on recognizing how performativity stitches together our public lives and bodies, performance offers form and a name to our agentic acts as human subjects in a social world.

When I first arrived at school in order to study the discipline of sculpture (a form I had no technical or scholarly training in), I cross viewed critique, I watched how sculptors looked at sculpture, how they walked around, wanted to see the attachment styles, wanted to know material lists. Cross viewing is a strategy Susan Leigh Foster theorizes about in terms of live performance. For dance or theater or other forms of live art in front of an audience, there is the possibility to look not just at the action happening onstage but to look at the audience, the ushers, to pay attention to how a room full of watchers are engaging the work.
This is what is exciting and urgent about changing positions, you learn the secrets which invisibly shape and structure the logic of disciplines. You see what has been rendered invisible. This is what happens in difference.
10/11/22

STOP PROJECTING ALL OVER MY PRACTICE
The five partitions that comprise Biting Range are paintings and proposals. They demonstrate, invite, guard, separate, and stand in as adhoc walls, scrims, and scenes. They choreograph the viewer’s movement through the room and their attention towards minute details. The partitions create ways to be or not to be seen.
Everyone asks if I will do a performance and I can’t decide how best to reply/rebel. What is not already performative around walking around this scene, where the viewer constantly has the choice about their own visibility, their own ethics around interaction.

Sara giggled and told me she moved a dog bowl. Lindsay shook the rubber partition till the sculptures wildly bounced. Michael told Esme not to touch. I told Esme he could touch. Jeff said he wanted to yank the beads. Lexi and Tess walked around the partitions, pointing and hiding. Joan disclosed that she was disturbed. Mike got excited. He got very very excited. Ahmed asked if there was going to be a performance.

The performance happened. Is happening.

“You’re already in something. You’re already in it.”
“I have an idea for a performance,” I admit on opening night. “It’s a three way kiss.” and all three of us, in the center of the room, wrap our arms around each other, pulling lips, cheeks, heads, skin, and body close and tight.

Scene.
May I have your attention, please? May I have your attention, please?¹

In Biting Range, the viewer’s position necessarily changes and with it, material also shifts, reflecting or relating differently to its surroundings. This isn’t a new world, I explain, it’s just a new way to see.
In Germany, there are red, yellow and green traffic lights with the same signifiers as in the United States. But in Germany, the yellow light is employed not only to warn drivers and bikers that a red light is imminently approaching, but also to alert them that a green light is on its way. For a country with predominantly manual transmission vehicles as well as obedient bikers, this yellow light respectively tells the drivers to get into gear and for the bikers to place their resting foot back upon the pedal. It’s the “get set” stage of a marathon. Ready, get set….GREEN!

I love the order of German traffic. All parties, despite their different roles and responsibilities as commuters, obey the infrastructure that is designed and implemented in order to make everyone safer. Especially compared to New York, the traffic infrastructure in Germany feels like a peacefully boring video game. People blandly mobilize themselves according to larger rhythms and patterns. When I spent a summer in Berlin, I was a NYC biker who had been hit by cars, run into by pedestrians, got broken fingers, ripped jeans, got a black eye, a busted lip. I knew that biking in the city came with its deliberate and random risks and aggressively accepted the constant threats and events of violence.

By contrast, the choice to bike in Germany was not fraught with unnecessary violence. It was utopic the way all the pedestrians, bikers, and drivers followed the rules of the infrastructure. There were no pedestrians darting out unexpectedly in traffic, no cars screeching past red lights, no incompetent bikers swerving out of line. I loved this order and I was frightened by my love of it. It is its own form of violence to love these systems of order, especially ones that are haunted by brutal, authoritarian pasts. Is 2013 Berlin’s traffic system related to 1988 Berlin’s traffic system related to 1940 Berlin’s traffic system? Is this a spectrum or a revision? Has this been razed or revitalized? To love this order, is this a betrayal?

---

1 beware everything, everything
“We do not just live with contingency but desire its inconvenience.”¹


The pages of this text become partitions. The partitions of the show become essays.

They are modular thoughts temporarily housed in this form. They are statements punctuated by motion and time.

In their incompleteness, they are inconvenient. In their inconvenience, they are never complete.
I was picking up that being called a formalist was an insult…
“All forms do share one affordance. Precisely because they are abstract organizing principles, shapes and patterns are iterable–portable. They can be picked up and moved to new contexts.”¹

¹ Levine, Caroline, Forms, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015
I was babysitting my friend’s dogs and was shown which feeding bowl was for which dog. The older dog got a smooth silver bowl which could be placed outside on the brick patio. The younger dog got a plastic bowl, which instead of being concave, in classic bowl fashion, was full of smooth interruptions, sloping shapes which, I was told, slow the dog down from eating too fast. The inner architecture of the bowl was divided into four sections. The dog’s tongue could chase the dry pellets of food from one quadrant to another or could leverage them against the large tapered cylinder in the center of the form.
The bowl is not a punishment, it is a form of care. A controlling care.

The bowl dictates time by creating obstacles. Take longer, go slower. It reminds me of bureaucracy, the arbitrary forms we headbutt in order to try to get anything done.

The bowl doesn’t make the fast dog slow. It just elongates the headbutting process.
I multiply the dog bowl to render it visible and in this process I transform a store bought, machine-manufactured, light, plastic, durable object into a cumbersome replica: fragile and heavy.

These bowls retain the form while betraying the function. Like a stack of cafeteria trays, their potential for use is sandwiched between the unrefined quantity they can serve and the grotesque imaginary surrounding such large amounts of simultaneous consumption.
“Form has never belonged only to the discourse of aesthetics. It does not originate in the aesthetic, and the arts cannot lay claim to whether the longest or the most far-reaching history of the term.”¹

¹ Levine, Caroline, Forms, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, p.2
“Form always indicates an arrangement of elements- an ordering, patterning or shaping. If the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experiences, then there is no politics without form.”

Dogs and humans have in common their susceptibility to be trained and through these particular training regimes, provide assurances of their obedience. When a creature is trained into submission, it lubricates the smooth functioning of systems; any potential towards disruption is nullified and replaced with docility.

We’re crossing the street and I tell her that to join the institution is to be complicit in one’s own colonization. It’s a tangled desire, one that conditions you, chokes you, and compliments you simultaneously. It’s a double bind. It’s a pleasurable pain, it’s a training regime.

sit…sit…stay…good boy.

School is a function. Through it we are formed.

It is very easy to train a dog, every time the dog does a behavior you want to encourage, give the dog a treat. Training humans is different, if the child wants a piece of candy, you are supposed to acknowledge their feeling, help them recognize desire without giving into it.

1 Levine, Caroline, Forms, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, p.3
BAD DOG
/ GOOD
DOG / SICK PUPPY
“What ultimately lies behind the appeal of bureaucracy is fear of play.”¹

In The Utopia of Rules, Graeber argues that the phenomenon of play has no bounds, that doing something “for fun” can be as benign as skipping rope or as sadistic as torturing a found animal. This wide spectrum of play renders the unpredictable thrilling or threatening and suggests that human capacity towards random or targeted violence is innate, transitory and therefore, slippery against tactics of control.

An untrained dog induces fear around the danger of play—too rough, too fast, too far. Therefore...the leash, the muzzle, the ball.

Biting range is how close you have to get to something to be under its threat.

I was a late talker and on playdates I had the unfortunate habit of biting my companion to convey that I didn’t want to play anymore. Bearing teeth as a social necessity.

In grad school, I could sense the wide berth of my biting range. Some people were scared to come too close.

An early memory, perhaps the earliest one, is waking up before my parents and eating my dead dog’s dog biscuits while hiding in my hand-me down jungle gym.

We find that play is based on the manipulation of certain images, on a certain ‘imagination’ of reality.¹

When we went to Mr. S, the customer next to us was accompanied by a human dog in a leather face mask and erect rubber tail walking on all fours and howling for a treat.

¹ Huizinga, Johan, Homo Ludens, Boston, The Beacon Press, 1950, p. 4
Do you remember anything about a dog pound from when we were growing up?
Sure, I remember a game you used to play.
Okay, so he used to lock me in fucking cage.
Sure, the big cage in your mothers place—the laundry room in Shelton.
Shelton. Thank you. He’s trying to gaslight me.
No, you liked it. You asked to be put in that cage.
What?
Yeah, it was really weird but I think you liked it.
So I asked to eat dog food?
It was chocolate cake, I think.
Bullshit.
I don’t know.
No, Kendall locked me in a cage, I was weird, I started wetting the bed and that’s why dad sent me away to St Andrew’s.
No, Rom, dad sent you to military school because you asked to go.
Oh you’re full of shit.
Hey that’s how I remember it.

1 “Prague.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 1, Episode 8, HBO, 2018
There is only one dog¹ in Succession, but dogs are a reoccurant metaphor throughout the show. The dog is the figment stand-in for that which can be trained, controlled, abused; the dog is the scapegoat, mess maker, loyal servant. The dog proves its obedience through submission, adoration, obsession. The domesticated dog has been spoiled for the world, it can exist only under the benevolence of its owner/captor/savior/friend. The domesticated dog can never reach independence, it must seek out and receive its approval from somewhere. Roman’s memory of being forced to ‘play dog’ reveals the unrelenting power struggle that has plagued the Roy children their whole lives. Events thought of as games, as play, are actually tests, and failure of the test is accompanied by punishment.

¹ a dog named Mondale
And whenever you fucked up, I cleaned up your shit.¹

He just ate the big dog dick. He sucked that pooch bone dry. ²

Can’t keep a good dog down.³

I might need you as my attack dog.⁴

Stewey will follow the money like a dog in a cartoon.⁵

You’re one sick puppy.⁶

Truth is, I probably should never have had children, I should have had dogs.
Well, you could have had dogs.
No, not with your father. He never saw anything he loved that he didn’t want to kick it, just to see if it would still come back.⁷

¹ “Chiantishire.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 3, Episode 8, HBO, 2021.


³ “Prague.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 1, Episode 8, HBO, 2018.

⁴ “All the Bells Say.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 3, Episode 9, HBO, 2021.

⁵ “Prague.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 1, Episode 8, HBO, 2018.

⁶ “Austerlitz.” Succession created by Jesse Armstrong, Season 1, Episode 7, 2018.

In *Biting Range* every thing changes according to orientation, proximity, and attention. It is solidly unstable, activated through motion. It stages contingency.

A theater of shifting position.
A dog being made to bear its teeth.

Take a bowl and find your seat.

Smile for the camera.