e.g., Dogtooth
e.g., *Dogtooth*

Eugenie Brinkema

An “Epigraph” /ep’i-graf/ (epigraphein [see epigram]) is a curving blue wave.

For example:

I. Variation

A “Zombie” is a small yellow flower (such as you might find in a lovely, peaceful garden); the “Sea” is a leather armchair (wooden-armed, like the one in the living room—for example: “Don’t stand on your feet. Sit on the sea [thalassa] to have a quiet chat with me”); a “Phone” is a salt-shaker you will politely ask to have passed at the table. Plus, a “Motorway” is a strong wind; an “Excursion,” resistant flooring material; and “Carbine,” a beautiful white bird.

A “Cunt” (mouni) is a large overhead lamp. Not, however, because the female intercrrual foramen, what 18th century writers referred to as “the indecent monosyllable,” is unthinkable or unnameable—to the contrary, a “Keyboard,” after all, is a cunt.

So go the tormented and tormenting language variations that constitute one of the most striking aspects of Yorgos Lanthimos’ 2010 *Kynodontas (Dogtooth)*. The film is either a careful study of the insularity and paternalism of the contemporary Greek family and nation in its focus on a household of five in which the adult children are limited to the boundaries of their house and yard, as they have been since childhood, while the minutiae of their lives, from the manner in which they will dance to how long to rinse with stinging mouthwash, is governed by the arbitrary and absolute control of their parents; Or, it is a drama about the devastating effects of the repression of sexuality in the bourgeois family, one undone by the figure of an outsider brought in to satisfy the son’s desires but who ends up, like some Pasolinian messenger of doom, fucking and ruining the daughters as well; Or, in examining the limits of perception, it is a cinematic articulation of Wittgenstein’s famous pronouncement in the *Tractatus* that “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (5.6)—indeed, for example, in making up a “game of endurance,” with finely-tuned rules, order, and protocol for submerging fingers in the hottest water, the adult children in the film are unable to create a name for this game, and thus unable to realize it at the conclusion of the opening scene; Or, it is a retelling of the history of national cinemas wherein contraband VHS copies of *Rocky 4* and *Jaws*, which ultimately upend the eldest daughter’s world, suggest that post-Classical Hollywood is no longer suited to account for this world, now better represented by Lanthimos as a figure of New Greek Cinema; Or, it is a wildly humorous satire of discourses of good intentions towards children; Or, it is about, rather, or, perhaps it is about, for example,—repeat *ad libitum.*
For each attempt to pin the film’s meaning down in criticism runs into the same problem, one that specifically hinges on the matter of How To Do Things With Wrong Words. What is the critic to do with the language games that seemingly comprise one of the principal mechanisms of control and violence in the film? Do the parental misdescriptions and redefinitions of terms offer a clue as to which precise satire the film is making, or constitute some kind of hermeneutic code waiting to be deciphered? If we deduce the errors in language correctly, goes this analytical wonderment, can we find our way back to the non-arbitrary meaning of the dark film as a whole?

Accordingly, the body of critical work on Dogtooth to date comprises a reading of the definitions of terms in the strange familial lexicon: to consider the “proper” naming of things in the world and attempt to find a recognizable logic of substitution that might make sense of the new language of the family. And more often than not, criticism has tended towards an introjective spatial reading. The argument goes thusly: Every word that might name something previously unseen by the restricted children (the sea, the motorway), or would name something fantastical (a zombie), or that would name something forbidden because communicative with the outside world (a phone) is redescribed by the parents in relation to the intimacy of the domestic sphere. Each unsomething thus becomes a something: the flowers one has already picked from the garden; the well-worn seating in the living room; the large overhead light above the dining room table. In other words, these critical efforts to read the new language argue for a parental strategy of bridging, or a collapsing of the distance between, the known and unknown world, a coming-closer of language—its literal domestication—and one that suggests a sufficiency to language: it names what the children already know, names what they have already seen.

But the problem with any critical strategy that reads the new words as a translation of distance to nearness, unfamiliarity to the already familiar, is that the “words in error” are in essence turned into symbols. The chair, the flooring material, the overhead light all function, in their newly defined forms, as signs—for criticism—of the claustrophobia and insularity of the imprisoned children. Like all symbols, they are therefore taken as expressing an organic, essential unity between signs and meaning; thus, in a pre-Saussurian gesture, this critical trope suggests that words are the innocent, neutral names of things so long as they are the names of our things in our familiar extra-diegetic analytical world. Critical language, in this mode of reading Lanthimos’ lexicon, attempts to replace the relational with the referential. But the words in Dogtooth are not symbols. The signified of a small yellow flower for which the signifier “zombie” is said to stand does not retroactively make non-arbitrary the relation between “flower” and its signified. Which is all to say, this mode of reading retroactively insists on the stability of language, forgets its own arbitrariness, and mourns nostalgically what it falsely imagines to be some “proper” external language now irretrievably lost in the film, imagines these “wrong” words are in fact materially different from the right “true” words. Paradoxically, criticism that attempts to read the significance of the seemingly mis-defined words to suggest an organic unity between object and its representation finds itself following the lead of the figures of violence and repression in the film: the stern parents. For it suggests that with precise-enough naming, the world can be conscripted to an ordered plan, contingency can be eliminated, and bodies or texts can be brought under full and calm control.

Like all signifying systems, the one in the family works precisely because as a system it operates on distinction and difference. If the new words are not symbols, what they do strikingly resemble is something more akin to allegory. As Benjamin writes in Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels [The Origin of German Tragic Drama], in allegory “Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. […] [A]ll of the things which are used to signify derive, from the very fact of their
pointing to something else.” (This is a fundamentally dialectical relation for Benjamin: anything can mean anything else, which figures a world “in which the detail is of no great importance,” while at the same time, those things that signify are clearly possessed of a power “which makes them appear no longer commensurable with profane things”—the consequence being that “the profane world is both elevated and devalued.”) *Dogtooth* constitutes itself around this primary allegorical disjunction: any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. Any sister can become a lover; any lick can be redirected from its initial target of a keyboard to different sites on the body; any word can be deployed to mean any other word. This fecund allegorical “any” becomes the principle of formal possibility of the film, and becomes its logic of violence as well. Violence is not in the entrapment of a constricted world to suffocating borders; violence is not legible through a reading of newly or seemingly errantly defined words. Violence, rather, is in the gesture of disjunction itself. Or, put another way, violence takes the form of a logic of distance. For as de Man reminds us in “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” allegory designates “a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this difference.” The allegorical “any”—that designation of a structuring distance—is the cinematic meta-form that governs everything in Lanthimos’ film from the separation of signs from their conventional meanings to the discordant logic of framing. Word, Image, Violence—Each primarily ends up articulating this primary gesture of *distance* from X.

**For example:** If we return to the beginning of the film, it appears to open with a close-up of a finger inserting a tape and pressing Play on a portable Panasonic cassette player; the disembodied female voice of the mother instructs the three ageless and nearly naked children in the new words of the day. It appears to begin, then, as does this essay, with the family’s idiosyncratic vocabularium. However, the film does not, in fact, originate with new language per se; there is something before the word in the film. What presents itself prior to the first redefinition of the first word is a pale yellow screen that displays a certain arrangement of the image. That arrangement is—Line, Icon, Sine.
world picture 7
A line, what Euclid called “breadthless length,” establishes extension between two points as the founding visual principle of the film; it is a form of the discarding of complexity in favor of a bare graphic principle: here is something, instead of nothing. From that line is generated an icon, what looks like a representation of the field of the title: the upward downward curves of canine teeth, those ones used for ripping and tearing, the ones the father says must fall out before a child is ready to leave home, the ones violently pounded out of the eldest daughter’s own body as a gesture of liberation at the end of the film. (The cuspids, in fact, the model for numerous visual patterns; for example, “dogtooth” is the name of an architectural ornament for medieval moldings in which the petals take the form of the pointed canine projections.) The icon’s visual similarity to these titular and magical teeth would seem to suggest a legibility announcing (—and in a bloody red no less)—the ineluctable violence that will be done to the body.

But there is a third figure here—again: Line, Icon, Sine.

Out of the pure form of the line, and the iconic topological resonance of the red gummy teeth, the film formalizes itself into a blue sine wave. What a sine wave is is a formalized map of variation; it describes oscillation and displays repetitive deviation. The sine wave here marks itself, announces itself, as a graph of variation and differentiation. Appearing before the film, the sine wave here is before the film in the double sense that Derrida among others have read into the notion of being “before the law”: the sine wave is before the film (conceived as a singularity) in the sense of space and appearance, and prior to the film in the sense of time. But the sine wave is also before the film, precedes it, as its formal condition of possibility. (And like Kafka’s “before the law,” the sine wave is the film’s gatekeeper, and made for it alone.) Lanthimos’ entire film could be redescribed as a pure form of this graph of relation and variation, the formalizing of oscillation and repetitive deviation: the putting on display of variation in language, variation in framing, and variation in violence.

After all, the adult children in Dogtooth are nameless, referred to solely as their variations in relative position: the daughters are identified as Elder and Younger; likewise, in a cinematization of Lacan’s famous bathroom door anecdote, the pure variation of sexual difference in the marker of Daughters versus Son is sufficient for naming. The funny language games that have overdetermined readings of the film to date thus do not reveal some code to be unlocked for criticism; what the redefined words in the opening of the film put on display is yet another form of variation. What any word whatsoever indicates in the film is any possible logic of discordance. To read the definitions as providing a code that will return us to unity and stability is to occupy a critical position that attempts to fix a meaning that the film perpetually defers: this attempt at a disavowal of discordant form forms a supplementary accord between the new definitions and what they are taken to stand for as critique.

Visual language in the film likewise constitutes forms of variation. The entire text, in essence, is a study of the permutations of a body after the devastation of integrity, a quarrel with the harmonious unity of the unbroken body. The signature look of the film is a frame containing partial bodies: these are not the truncated or decapitated figures of, say, the bodies in a film like Haneke’s Funny Games (all hands and voices, but without a face). Rather, the bodies are composed as forms of deviation from a unified corpus: here, they are two thick torsos, flat expanses of flesh; here, though, they are the bent angles of feet and knees; the human form may recompose itself as two outward-facing palms, or those knees may return, but from another point of view, here, now, split apart and thrown to opposite sides of the frame through a diegetic mirror. The privileged shot of the film frames a set of indeterminate limbs (for example, three calves and a wrist) while voices speak off-screen. The
body as a unity is not merely fragmented, but fragmentation is put on display in the multiple forms of variation it might take. Variation itself ends up subject to permutation.
For example:
Limbs, throughout the film, are little more than extensions in space—and this framing that decapitates each figure constitutes a formal destruction of the body that mirrors other forms of corporeal devastation: whether a doll’s, whose feet are cut off, each time to the younger daughter’s shrill scream; a cat who is cut through with scissors—(“cat” being the most dangerous meat-eating animal); or a sibling’s slicing knife to another’s arm, the extensive limb extending further in a spray of blood. Each of these modes of bodily violence is yet another opportunity to create a form of variation in relation to those extensions. In the empty world of the film, the body becomes the limit of that world: the children, throughout the film, play with pain, feign death in games of thanatosis and resurrection, wound and cure. Even, then, the body’s vitality and integrity becomes yet another site for material variation. Thus, on the level of word, framing, and form, what constitutes Dogtooth is the pure form of deviation as a governing principle, a formal devotion to deviation.

Thus, this is not a film about signs; it is, rather, a film about sines.

And, really, this is not a film about sines; Dogtooth is, rather, a sine-film.

II. Distance

Another word for this form of deviation is distance, but a particular tonality of distance. Distance suggests a standing apart—a separation, an opening or difference, a gap in space. And mirroring broader swaps of categories of time for categories of space, “distance” can also stand for remoteness on the level of time: James Phillips, for example, neatly summarizes this shift as “Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time.” But neither this sense of a spatial gap or a temporal remove is precisely the sense in which distance is taken seriously in Dogtooth. For that, we require an older sense of the word.

“Distance” derives in part from Old French destance, which means discord or quarrel: the condition of being at variance, dissention, dispute, such that one can find 15th century references to “making war and great distance.” This notion of distance as a spatial gap or length of space that also simultaneously suggests discord and quarrel is the sense in which Macbeth spits in Act III, for example: “Banquo was your enemy. [. . .] So is he mine; and in such a bloody distance / That every minute of his being thrusts / Against my near’st of life” (3.1.113-17). This remoteness is also a kind of forced intimacy; a “bloody distance” both suggests a remove and a corporeal closeness, distance as violent cuddle, one that marks the precise gap that is apart but nevertheless simultaneously allows for blood-letting. “Bloody distance” is a form of distance and discord that also suggests the possibilities for a transgressing of spatial distance for maximum bodily and intimate discord. Put yet another way, the notion of “bloody distance” marks not a remove, but a relation: the taut pressure of the specific relation between distance-from at a gap, but also distance-to for a violence that has yet to arrive. This discordant distance, the distance that is close enough to enable quarrel, preserves intimacy at a remove, and removes intimacy at the same time: “distance” thus is a word that contains a kind of quarrel or discord, or a set of variations of distance, within itself. Distance marks its own spacing at a remove from its multiple senses: there is a disagreement between the two senses of the term, a discord in the very nature of what spaces, but also thrusts against in the specific lack of harmony that requires things rub against each other in the first place in order to do each other harm.

This notion of distance not as interval but as discord despatializes distance sufficiently to let destance stand for the multiplicity of forms of variation in the film: the discord in relation of objects to things, the quarrel that animates critical language as it grapples with Kynodontas’ language. If we take distance
as discord, we return to forms of relation and variation that announce themselves as purely discordant, without having to concern ourselves with the specific articulation of this form in relation to particular objects, bodies, or definitions.

There is a line of thought in Dogtooth that seems to suggest that its “bloody distance,” its intimate quarrels and formal discords, derive primarily from our conventional sense of distance: from spacing, gaps, things at a remove. One reading that the film enables, even lures criticism to make, focuses on figures outside the closed system of the family, and they way in which their coming-too-close from a place of structural distance brings about violence. Specifically, to support this reading, one would focus on how, throughout the film, Elder engages in a series of complex barters with the outsider brought in to satisfy the son’s sexual proclivities, a young woman, Christina, who realizes in the autarky of the family that there are deals to be made with the desperate and oppressed. Christina is the security guard at the Panoptic factory at which the father occupies the surveillant center. She is, in other words, the one who polices an arbitrary boundary, delimiting what comes in and what stays out, and she is also the most overtly exploitative character in the film through her indifference to the state of the family. The pure figure of the outside is the source of both the greatest exploitation and the grounds for the ultimate rebellion. In a trade with Elder Daughter, Christina demands licks for things. This transactive structure remains illegible on multiple levels to the daughter, largely indifferent to whether those licks are directed between Christina’s legs or, later, in displaced mimicry, on her sister’s shoulder. In one of these trades, what Elder demands from Christina is the contraband videotapes in her bag. The videos made available earlier in the film mirror back to the children what they already know: they are only permitted to watch home movies of themselves (each Video, I see, therefore, is converted to the reflexive Me video: I see myself). It is these contraband videos acquired through the contraband contract with Christina that introduces another possible mode of seeing—ultimately, it will be the outside media that disturbs the medium of the family.

The film continually taunts with these notions of the outside, flirts with a model of distance as an exterior force that eventually comes too close to the family, bearing out a violence that crosses distance. But this reading, which relies on a model of structural or spatial distance, I am claiming, is a red herring. And the reddest of all is the structuring absence of the film, a never-seen brother whose negative ontology is the core around which power in the family consolidates. The missing brother serves as a position of warning that produces self-surveillance for the other children—this generative void is vocally addressed through one of the hedges that surrounds the family compound, and he functions as the structural prohibition that preserves law and conformity in the family. The film begins to unravel when the father, for various reasons, must kill off the brother who never existed in the first place, killing that which was never alive—in other words, reducing violence to its essentially symbolic dimension. This display of pure power takes the literal form of display: the open-palmed presentational (albeit artificially staged) redness that symbolizes the brother’s vulnerability to the outside world. Film and Father mutually evoke and invoke the tradition of the “Blazon of the Wounds,” the disembodied showing of Christ’s abstracted and terrible damages on palms and feet. These exemplary wounds show themselves and show themselves showing—the father’s monstrative gesture cites, in other words, the very form of what presents and proclaims itself as manifestly apparent—as in, for example, John 20:29: Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.
The reading that I have just ventriloquized suggests that it is the threat of distance from the outside (the other side of the wall, the dangerous cat who preys, the woman not from within the family) that bears violence into the film. This is a seductive and easy-to-support argument, but it is also precisely the definition of distance that enables parental surveillance and discipline to function so exquisitely and successfully within the film. For this argument to hold water, each figure of the outside must, once closer, retain that dimension of distance that was their initial mark of difference; in other words, what is at a distance must hold fast to, even when close, a mark of what is not near (or familiar, or familial). Consider, for example, Jean-Luc Nancy’s account of the intruder in “L’intrus,” which recalls how:

The intruder introduces himself forcefully, by surprise or by ruse, not, in any case, by right or by being admitted beforehand. Something of the stranger has to intrude, or else he loses his strangeness. […] If, once he is there, he remains a stranger, then for as long as this remains so—and does not simply become “naturalized”—his coming does not stop: he continues to come, and his coming does not stop intruding in some way: in other words, without right or familiarity, not according to custom, being, on the contrary, a disturbance, a trouble in the midst of intimacy. 8

For distance from the family to be the site and origin of discord, the primary distance of the distant (or the strangeness of the stranger) has to remain, and endlessly be renewed, as the source of violence in the film. This would suggest that discord (in the sense of quarrel) and distance do not in fact conflict, but in fact constitute the very same thing.

However, to the contrary of the reading I have just advanced, my argument is (and this is what I take to be the central paradox of Dogtooth): the moments of the greatest discord and quarrel in the film are also the ones marked by a collapse of spatial distance, the closing of a gap and bridging of intervals on the level of the singular body, where a stranger has been obliterated of its strangeness on the plane of a singular figure. In other words, in Dogtooth, it is primarily through modes of accordance that discordance takes place. Discord as quarrel does not, then, involve the retention of a mark of exteriority at a spatial remove. Discord involves becoming ever intimate; discord folds. The key performances of this paradox hinge on the body of Elder Daughter: in violence, dance, and violence again. Each time, the moments of the greatest discord and quarrel in the film, the crises of the bloodiest of distances, requires the closing of gaps and the coming-too-close of skin to skin, touch on touch of self on self.
III. Violence
A successful barter of licks for videos: between the legs for one, two films for the other.

In the wake of the acquisition of the unauthorized video texts from the outsider Christina, the elder daughter stands in front of a backlit window, at first subsumed into the metonymy of the long pale stems of the back of her legs, over which her voice quickly speaks: “Dad, I want to learn how to fight. What was that? I can’t hear you. When will I learn how to fight? Can you turn your robot off. I fight so you don’t have to,” et cetera. These lines from Rocky 4, a dialogue between Rocky Jr. and his titular father (one, we might imagine, that could take place between the children and their diegetically protective father, as well), are flatly given voice in the monological young woman’s recitation from memory. As she slinks into the frame, her back to the light, she continues to struggle to remember and voice the entire scene; when the film then violently cuts to a close-up of her face playing both parts of a boxing fight, it is only a visceralization of the doubled language she spoke minutes prior. In the close-up, her distended face twists, jerks violently toward and away from a diagonal line to the camera, each time bearing out the pressure of invisible forces, self-inflicted in performative citational grunts and spit up blood-mimicking red-tinted water. In the next scene, legs dangling vulnerably in a pool, her lines bring Jaws to the stilled shores of the house, while a frenzied kinetic dance in a later scene intimates other contraband videos in its imitation of the choreography of one of the more iconic dances from Flashdance. In that case, the specific athletic ballistics quote the routine iconically performed to the song “Maniac,” which, and especially to a Greek audience, must evoke not coincidentally the Dionysian history of manias and panic that send shrieking (female) bodies into tremors wild.

Jaws, 1975; Flashdance, 1983; Rocky IV, 1985—What do these films have in common, for example, on the level of a timeline, with the Panasonic cassette player, or with the VHS recorder? Dogtooth, for all its gauzy white nondescript clothing and timelessness within the cloister of the family compound, is squarely bound to the late 1970s and early 1980s in the objectal media environment with which the children interact. Thus, just as there are two models of distance (spatial and quarrelsome), and at least two languages (familial and critical), there are two modes of time in the film: (a) the historical, grounded, specific culture-time, bound to media products from the external world, and (b) the timeless non-specified time of the undifferentiated intra-familial spans, in which children defer adulthood until or unless violence disrupts that free-floating suspension of escape and change. Just as we should not read the substance of the newly defined words as meaning in themselves, but rather as forms of variation in this sene-film, what the temporal discordance offers is a sense of Dogtooth at odds, or at variance, with lines of time. What the “1980s” as a signifier does for Dogtooth, then, is just what the word “zombie” or “keyboard” does: it establishes a discordance, creates a sense of a incongruity or remove. That is, in fact, all that these two temporalities establish: it is enough that a gap is set on. The film we are watching was made after, comes after, a fixed moment in recognizable cultural history; however, in lieu of that history itself signifying anything, it is merely the noise that establishes a discordance or variation on the level of time: one specified and completed—what has already happened—and one open and all possible—what, in fact, within the boundary of the film will never happen or will always not have happened yet.

What is most striking about the reperformed fight from Rocky 4 is that the eldest daughter’s performance takes a specific form of anti-distance, more than proximity or contiguity, or convergence, even. The violent restaging of violence against the self (against the face; against the mouth and teeth) takes the form of a kind of harmony: her strange awkward body is the totality of
the violently staged scene. This scene is the literal quarrel that stands in for missing rebellions against the parents; it remains, until the moment the daughter rips out her canine teeth, the most discordant moment of the film. But it accomplishes the performance of discord through a form of **accord**: the daughter plays both parts of the fight. She is both cause and effect of violence; its subject and object; the inscribing and inscribed sites of violence are a unity.

It is thus through structural accordance that violent discordance takes place.

At the moment of maximum closeness, maximum distance in the form of discord is achieved. If distance via **destance** means discord or quarrel, but if discord takes its form in the film through moments of proximity or accordance, then distance in *Dogtooth* comes to function like Freud’s account of the self-annihilating word **heimlich**; there, of course, Freud famously considers how **heimlich** means both not strange and familiar and the strange and unfamiliar, concluding that “**heimlich** is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, **unheimlich**.” We see the same structure here: **destance** stands for a form of strife, disagreement, dissonance, anger, contention, and nowhere is the film more interested in strife and contention than through formal mechanisms of reconciliation and agreement—it is where there is the greatest agreement that there is the greatest distance. When Elder Daughter takes metal and weight to smash in her own face and tooth, to produce the necessary condition for leaving the parent’s house, which is the elimination of the canine tooth, she likewise enacts this accordance of the relations of violence.

One of the most productive definitions of violence I know is Nancy’s account of it in *Image et violence* as “the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes.” But the force that denatures the system here (by which I mean the body) is not foreign or external to that system: it intervenes as the familiar, which is to say it intervenes by right. If the force of violence in the film does the things we expect violence to—denatures, wrecks, destroys “form and meaning,” as Nancy puts it—it does so from itself, by itself, on itself. The film’s account of violence is self-positing, already inscribed in the system it will wreck. Violence is thus **auto-affective** in *Dogtooth*. It requires no other; it takes no other. And it is worth pointing out that the new figuration of force here further distances it from (which is to say, places it in **quarrel** with) the history of ethics as an ethics of alterity; the auto-ethical becomes posed as a new problem of the definition of the word “ethical” in the film once this new account of force is elaborated (“ethics” thus becomes structurally equivalent to other new terms, such as, **for example**: zombie, cunt, sea). If the line of violence in the film associated with alterity—violence from any outside threat—constrains, limits, and imprisons, this auto-affective violence unleashes and liberates, is a form of a new kind of something that is not unlike freedom.

We see this especially in the film’s climax, the moment in which the title of the film is given its full reckoning: standing in front of a mirror, Elder grabs a barbell and suddenly, so suddenly, smashes in the side of her face, once, twice, loosening into the porcelain bowl of the sink the tooth, her childhood, conforming to the letter of the father’s primal law. Blood splattering the mirror, she smiles, neatens her hair, finds herself light and beautiful.

When the daughter ravages her mouth, meat-making her face, she is also, in a logic of incorporation, producing herself as violated and liberated in the same gesture. Like the Heideggerian avowal that we do not speak language, language speaks us, we might say that the eldest daughter does not lose her tooth, her tooth loses and also looses her. What it looses her into is possibility. Yet the final
image of the car trunk in which the daughter waits, hides, resides is not quite freedom but a place of expectation, a waiting place where something may or may not happen—the space either a womb or a tomb, what precedes freedom or starvation—and it is on this open but not determined image that the film ends. Failing to resolve that question is also a failure to resolve the temporal tension of what has definitively taken place and what has yet to take place, but might, or might not. All that is left resolutely open.

That violence takes place through *accordance* means that “Violence” thus takes on the status of a new word in this film. Discord and accord end up co-present, folding onto and into each other and creating a meta-accord: their difference from each other is also savaged. So, like “motorway,” “excursion,” or “cunt,” the very notion of “violence” is redefined in the film as a form of discord through accordance. But if *accord* and *discord* converge, if language bears out that convergence, then the related terms in the film—violence and anti-violence, freedom and fascism, escape and entrapment—risk full and complicated convergence as well.

A “violence” is a joyful freedom.

**For example:**

In *Difference and Repetition*, in an account of the unities on which metaphysical language relies—*I think; I speak; I remember; I perceive*; but also *I know; I will; I choose*—Deleuze calls the Kantian account of the faculties “the discord that produces an accord” and suggests that, there, “difference is crucified.” In other words, in the forced harmony of accordance is the most terrible kind of violence: it is discordance, difference, the failure of accord that is ultimately crucified. So it is not that *discord* or quarrel as such leads to violence, but that violence best, which is to say most destructively, takes place, through accord. Violence thus requires order, but also harmoniousness, the elimination of all difference. Accord is thus no longer available to disturb or interrupt or counterbalance discord: accordance is already marked by a violence that is its alone. Accord is a meta-figure of the integration of difference, the harmonizing of the antagonistic, the bringing to order of disputations, the stabilizing of instability.

The maternal voice in the opening scene of *Dogtooth*, in instructing in relation to each new word, offers a formula for new imaginings: each statement of a term’s general definition is followed by a
specific non-totalized case introduced by the word “Paradeigma,” “For example”. Each time, and mother says, Paradeigma. For every word, mother says: Paradeigma. My contention is that Lanthimos’ Kynodontas is itself the paradeigma, the example or sample case, of what this newly defined form of violence looks like. Dogtooth does not symbolize or represent this new, freeing, auto-affective violence in relation to accord; it exhibits, it unconceals this revised violence through the wet dark blood that accord each time produces. This unconcealment or revelation of revised violence suggests as its cinematically-specific analogue the dimension of too-much light that is one of the most striking formal characteristics of the film, a bleached-out look that creates constant vaguely gauzy images and strange moments of glare and brilliance. This metaphysically resonant, visually exhausting radiance exposes too much of the photographic image. If this aesthetic strategy is a radical form of revelation—everything is visible and the conditions of visibility are too-much put on display—it is simultaneously a form of concealment through lumen, bleaching out the very world it would expose. Too much light constitutes a collapse of the difference on which structures of visibility otherwise rely: in a world of no shadows, revelation and concealment constitute the very same thing. Likewise, the newly articulated account of a violence-through-accord, such that violence against the self destroys the self in order to reconstitute the liberated self, both conceals other modes of violence and makes manifest this new, oddly over-exposed one.

Dogtooth then poses at least one further question: what does it mean for a film to constitute a paradeigma of a redefined form of a signifier (here: “violence”)? Paradeigma, after all, refers to an example, but an example itself constitutes a particular list made available in support of generalizations. Paradeigma is a model or a pattern, a sample, itself from paradeiknumi, to exhibit, represent, expose. In other words, the film shows, exhibits, exposes this new mode of violence, thus constituting not only a paradeigma of a new mode of “violence” but also better showing, more ably constituting any example as such, than the spoken word within the film. What kind of generalizations are we meant to draw from the film’s performance of the structure by which: At the moment of the greatest unity and harmony between subject and object of violence, the moment of strongest fidelity, in best agreement, the face will be demolished, and the body will surely, ineluctably, be ripped apart? What kind of dark world model makes manifest the rule that the bloodying of the body signals that a pattern of accord has finally taken place—that destance and discord have been happily overcome? And if the film is itself a (mere) example, do any generalizations about violence, discord, or accord need to be drawn at all? Ab uno discere omnes?

There is a great and fundamental tension in the notion of the paradeigma, dating back to Plato and running through the history of philosophy: paradeigma stands both for a specific example or case (the particular that bears out the general form of something from within a given structure such that its utility is precisely correlated to its lack of exceptionalism, even its banality), while in other cases, the paradeigma stands for the very form of something, such that it is, as we say, exemplary, the very model after which all subsequent iterations of a system might pattern themselves; here, its utility is precisely correlated to its exceptionalism. Plato plays it both ways. Mary Louise Gill notes that, while in Phaedo, Parmenides, and Timaeus, the paradeigma “is a separate Form, an abstract perfect particular, whose nature is exhausted by its own character. Its participants are conceived as likenesses or images of it: they share with the Form the same character, but they also fall short of it because they exemplify not only that character but also its opposite,” in other dialogues, such as Statesman, “a model involves a mundane example whose definition is relevant to the definition of some more difficult concept under investigation.” Here, the example is something more akin to a method than a content, and that method involves moving from the specific to the general, or, put another way, from the
mundane to the exceptional; the example here becomes something like a medium for philosophical reasoning as such. (Gill wonderfully phrases this as a “model of a model to show what it is to be a model.”) In Oedipus Tyrannus, when the chorus calls the titular figure our word under consideration, and in its final reckoning, as its evaluative judgment of him—“Taking your fortune as my example [paradigma] I call no mortal happy”—O. constitutes both figurations at once: the rule (albeit a negative rule, the rule for the tragic unhappiness of all mortal men), but also himself, uniquely, the singular and particular one to whom “your fortune” applies. Agamben, in a lecture on the notion of the paradeigma, likewise notes that the paradeigma in Plato both moves from sensible things to forms, and sometimes from forms to things—the point is, it moves. It transmits. The paradeigma goes. Does. Flows; it folds. Aristotle, for his part, will likewise note that the form of the paradeigma is a kind of induction, or proof from example; in the Rhetoric, he will state that an example (paradigma) is a rhetorical counterpart of dialectic induction. And induction, of course, means a form of reasoning, and what is like, hence every form of continuity and similarity, but also the effects of tissue on tissue, and also a building up of heat—which seems apt here as well.

The paradeigma is both the utterly specific, and the valuably general. It is within a system or can stand outside it. Samuel Weber, writing on Kierkegaard’s Repetition, figures this as the “inherent tension” in the concept of paradeigma: “What is exemplary is taken out of its initial context, and this in a double sense. It is taken to an extreme and yet, at the same time in so being transported, it appears to be more itself than ever before.” What this tension suggests, in other words, is that there is a discordance in the very term paradeigma, not unlike the discordance in the term distance: it refers both to the universal and to the particular, the form and the case, an instance of X or a model for X. In some ways, this definitional both-and dimension returns us to one of the fundamental questions criticism must grapple with in reading Lanthimos’ film: is Dogtooth meant to be read on the level of its specificity of this family, these repressions, the particular oddities in their language games; or, rather, is the film to be read as suggesting universal forms of familial confinement and bourgeois violence, even models for how language itself works, or how redefinitions of notions take place at all? Paradeigma is used in the Timaeus as the model or pattern that god used to create the cosmos (and its use in ancient philosophy often turns on notions of blueprints: for cities, the world, souls of men); but in Dogtooth, each one of mother’s paradeigma constitutes the contingent performance of what undoes the world. The licks between the legs, the contraband videos, each functions as an example of mimicable behavior that is then repeated, modified, invoked, learned from. These are themselves examples of how examples function within the film—they instruct and generate imitation; every example begets more. But every example in thus so begetting leads to the certain terrible moment in which generation is stilled, violence is done, waiting begins. So is the film deploying examples (playing with all those uttered paradeigma) or is the film itself constituting an example (or an exemplary case of a certain logic of historical or familial or national repressions)? If the example is both the specific case within the form and the form itself, then what kind of example is the formal language of the film, and are the examples in the narrative (the mother’s spoken paradeigma) self-same as the form of the film? If the film, as I proposed above, itself constitutes the paradeigma of a new form of violence, have I just reestablished a metaphysical solidity to this new violence in place of the folding, shifting flows of example-forming itself? Is one way out of that bind of newly thickened words (what comes after each “paradigma”) to insist that the film is only an example—that there could be other examples, that other newly defined, differently defined violences are virtual and possible and might, contingently, have also, or instead, been provided? How we read the film depends entirely on what kind of paradeigma it either constitutes or presents or might have otherwise been, well above and
beyond the local \textit{paradeigma} that it articulates within itself in order to formulate the new tricky language of the strange family.

One might also consider, \textit{for example}: the status of the example in Kant, in which exemplarity is “the general rule that cannot be stated,” or “merely ideal norm,” thus bridging subjective judgment with objective standard: “Taste, because its judgment is not determinable by concepts and precepts, is just that one which most needs examples of what has in the progress of culture received the longest approval.”\textsuperscript{17} In Kant, the example is the very structure of \textit{Following}. And the aesthetic judgment is “only exemplary” in so far as it involves “a necessity of the agreement of \textit{all} in a judgment that can be considered as an example for a general rule that cannot be stated.”\textsuperscript{18} [Cf. sec. 14, \textit{Critique of Judgment}; cf. Derrida on the absence of examples in Kant—the mere example, which is to say external to the argument, is shown to be exemplary, which is to say necessary to, or interior to, the argument.\textsuperscript{19}] Or, rather, one might consider Foucault’s use of examples: \textit{for example}, the Panopticon, his greatest example—and a representative example, but not just any example, because it was both a specific historical case and a broad general form for all surveillant disciplinary institutions [cf. the Panopticon in Bentham, also given specific instantiations [but also, as per the title page, the general form, i.e. the example as model or blueprint, i.e. “The Idea of a New Principle of Construction Applicable to any Sort of Establishment, in which Persons of any Description are to be Kept under Inspection.” [Followed, immediately, by the specific examples of, “in particular to penitentiary-houses, prisons, houses of industry, work-houses, poor-houses, manufactories, mad-houses, lazarettos, hospitals, and schools.” [Followed, immediately, with a return to the general form of the thing “With A Plan of Management Adapted to the Principle.”]]].

So the Panopticon is \textit{an} example, but is not \textit{any} example, because it exemplifies itself but also more than itself [this is also, it should be noted, the status of its fraught relation in feminist film theory: the entire [and now this example is of particular interest only to those narrowly invested in a very specific theoretical dogfight in the history of feminist film theory; it is a highly specific, circumscribed example [but of course most examples are just this kind of specialized narrow sort] Joan Copjec vs. \textit{Re-}vision \textit{debate} [which itself hinges on the question of whether the editors of \textit{Re-}vision were employing Foucault himself as, rather, “Foucault,” which is to say of an example of a certain overly-Panopticizing logic within critical theory itself] in which Copjec claimed, “the central misconception of film theory: believing itself to be following Lacan, it conceives the screen as a mirror; in doing so, however, it operates in ignorance of, and at the expense of, Lacan’s more radical insight, whereby the mirror is conceived as a screen” [which, of course, employs two examples: of the screen as mirror, and the mirror as screen—but the question is, of course, \textit{which} example of what the screen \textit{is} one adheres to] against her target, an anthology edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams [who argue, almost as an afterthought in their “Introduction,” that “Foucault has not only consistently attempted to conceptualize the relation between discourse and power (and, most recently, sexuality), he has also forged a link between a certain kind of discourse theory and an analysis of the collaboration between power and the gaze.” Citing his “terms borrowed from optics: dispersion, diffusion, diffraction,” the editors argue that “an ever-present Gaze, regulating all images and self-images, is crucial to […] an understanding of discursive networks of power.”\textsuperscript{20} The editors conclude that the figure of woman “carries her own Panopticon with her,” and that Panopticism accounts perfectly for her (in [Laura Mulvey’s language] “to-be-looked-at-ness” in cinema and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{19}] Thus, the question is whether the Panopticon—which is, as Agamben phrases it, “a particular historical phenomenon,” but at the same time (and this is Foucault’s language) is a “a generalizable model of functioning” called Panopticism—as it is theorized \textit{in Foucault}, whether it is also (and thereby, or also, or in addition) a concrete, singular
phenomenon in the case of cinema, or whether it is a model which can be generalized for cinema—and whether, in fact, Foucault or Foucauldianism or Panopticism is itself a singular phenomena in the case of women in cinema, or whether it is a model more generalizable about how power and vision work as such. Is the Panopticon, as employed by Foucault as example or exemplary, like as it is subsequently, as employed by feminist film theory, as example or exemplary, in common with as it is subsequently, as argued against by Copjec on behalf of Lacan, as example or exemplary? As Doane later writes, directly responding to Copjec’s argument, “The reference [to Foucault] in Re-vision is quite brief and not at all fully developed and I believe that Copjec’s criticism is at some level quite justified. However, the paragraph she cites does not claim that the panopticon [and note, Doane does not capitalize “panopticon,” as does, say, Foucault, always, which seems to suggest the translation of the historically specific to precisely that which is a generalizable example of a structure—and yet, at the same time this happens—not yet, in about eight words—Doane suggest it is not the exemplary example but a quasi-example, what hinges on what seems like, or masquerades, even deceives as, a perfect example, but is not perfectly describes the woman’s condition, but, instead, seems to perfectly describe it.” What seems to perfectly describe something is the instance that functions as an illustration—which is to say Doane’s argument would seem to rest here, and again, this is a trivial point, on claiming that one ought not take the Panopticon too seriously precisely because it is the very essence of a mere example, perhaps not even the best example. It merely demonstrates the character of something else. What merely demonstrates the character of something else surely can only be trivial…]. Or, one might consider also, for example, the status of the camps in Agamben’s work: is the camp the “biopolitical paradigm of the modern age”—this makes it an example, which is to say, not exemplary, but the pattern or guide. For example: “a paradigm is something like an example [ein Beispiel], an exemplum [ein Exempel], a unique historical phenomenon”; and also: “every example is treated in effect as a real particular cause, but on the other, it remains understood that it cannot serve in its particularity.” The example escapes, breaks free, of all general versus particular discussions, for “it is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all.” This notion of example’s escapism should be taken seriously: its force, the pressure it brings to bear on philosophical categories, is an evasion of settling in, of remaining on the side of category-distinction, which is to say: identity, property, designation, even definition. For Agamben, the example is the negative of exception: “If we define the exception as an inclusive exclusion, in which something is included by means of its exclusion, the example functions as an exclusive inclusion.” This then poses a series of questions: What precisely has the right to take on exemplary power? What should be allowed to be representative? What does it mean to forbid the taking of something as an example? For example, the camps, those deaths, calamity? If the example as a form begets instruction, induction, imitation, what kind of a begetting example could radical devastation ever constitute?

But if the example is fundamentally a gesture of comparison (a model, framework, sample; paradeiknynai “exhibit, represent,” to “show side by side,” from para- “beside” + deiknyai “to show”)—then to think through paradeigma, might one, for example, just compare or exhibit alongside two related examples of a general phenomenon—even if that general phenomenon were the example of what may be an example, as such, itself?

Would this, for example, suffice? Does the showing side by side show itself as exemplary? Does this following exhibit the example? Does it exhibit enough about the example? What is it about the example that makes us demand it be enough, that it be sufficient?
Wallace Stevens, “Description Without Place”

It is possible that to seem—it is to be,
As the sun is something seeming and it is.

The sun is an example. What it seems
It is and in such seeming all things are.

Thus things are like a seeming of the sun
Or like a seeming of the moon or night
Or sleep. It was a queen that made it seem
By the illustrious nothing of her name.

[...]

Wittgenstein, On Certainty 65: “When language-games change, then there is a change of concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change.” [Wenn sich die Sprachspiele ändern, ändern sich die Begriffe, und mit den Begriffen die Bedeutungen der Wörter]

IV. Two Brief Examples of Dogs

Empty stage.

BAKER: (Off-stage) Brick! [“Here!”]

(A football is thrown from off-stage left to off-stage right.
BAKER receiving ball) Cube. [“Thanks”]
ABEL: (Into the microphone) Breakfast, breakfast...sun—dock—trog... ["Testing, testing...one—two—three..."
(He realizes the microphone is dead. He tries the switch a couple of times and then speaks again into the microphone.)
Sun—dock—trog—pan—slack... ["One—two—three—four—five..."]

A "Pelican crash" is some cream cheese (such as you might smear in a lovely, little sandwich); a "squire" is a rotten bastard (for example: "Daisy squire!" ["Mean bastard], "Vanilla squire!" ["Rotten bastard]); "Cube" is an expression of gratitude to another; "hardly" directs one right, and "Cretinous pig-faced, git" begs the time, please, sir. Plus, "Mousehold" is an egg; "Cauliflower" directs one left; and "Plank" means ready.

So go the tormented and tormenting language variations that constitute one of the most striking aspects of Tom Stoppard’s Dogg’s Hamlet. The 1979 text is either a careful study of—or, no matter, it is just an example.

The play, which opens a double book that is followed by Cahoot’s Macbeth (and which builds the literal and linguistic platform for the latter), derives from the elaborate thought experiment that opens Philosophical Investigations, in which Wittgenstein proposes a language that follows a words-name-objects communicative model he associates with Augustine. Builder A “is building with building stones [the lovely, insular “A führt einen Bau auf aus Bausteinen”]—there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams.” Builder B has to pass along these materials and in a specific order as A requires them. They make use of a language consisting of the key words: “A calls them out; B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such—and-such a call.” Simple enough, this “builder’s language.” Later, he adds deictic expressions (there, this) and other qualifiers—numeric, chromatic—to his account of Sprachspiele. But, for example, “we could also imagine a convention whereby B has to shake his head in reply if A gives him the sign belonging to a tool that is broken,” and we could also imagine a series of alternatives in which an observer would fail to understand the grounds of convention by which communication is possible between the two builders—each of the key words, “block,” “pillar,” might have any number of possible used, lived meanings. His famous conclusion: Language is a form of lived interaction, and acquires meaning from its use—“the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form.” Stoppard takes this premise and puts these forms and games to the service of imagining possible worlds:

Consider the following scene. A man is building a platform using pieces of wood of different shapes and sizes. These are thrown to him by a second man, one at a time, as they are called for. An observer notes that each time the first man shouts ‘Plank!’ he is thrown a long flat piece. Then he calls ‘Slab!’ and is thrown a piece of a different shape. This happens a few times. There is a call for ‘Block!’ and a third shape is thrown. Finally a call for ‘Cube!’ produces a fourth type of piece. An observer would probably conclude that the different words described different shapes and sizes of the material. But this is not the only explanation. Suppose, for example, the thrower knows in advance which pieces the builder needs, and in what order. In such a case there would be no need for the builder to name the pieces he requires but only to indicate when he is ready for the next one. So the calls might translate thus:

Plank = Ready      Block = Next      Slab = Okay      Cube = Thank you

In such a case, the observer would have made a false assumption, but the fact that he on the
one hand and the builders on the other are using two different languages need not be apparent to either party.

In a curious contingency, both *Dogtooth* and *Dogg’s Hamlet* invoke translations of Frank Sinatra, as though language swaying required the intimacies and clarities of nostalgic American pop. In Lanthimos’ film, to the Father’s question, “Do you want to hear your grandfather sing?” and the children’s enthusiastic affirmation, a record is played: over the smooth crooning of “Fly me to the Moon” (“Fly me to the moon / Let me play among the stars / […] In other words, hold my hand / In other words, baby, kiss me.”), the father translates the lyrics in real time as a proudly spoken: “Dad loves us. Mom loves us. Do we love them? Yes, we do. I love my brothers and sisters...because they love me as well. The spring is flooding my house... the spring is flooding... my little heart. My parents are proud of me... because I’m doing just fine.” And so forth. While in *Dogg*, the crucial declaration involves a working-over of “And now, the end is here / And so I face the final curtain”:

**BAKER:** *(Shakes head).* Nit! *[No!]*

**CHARLIE,** for no reason, is singing to the tune of ‘My Way’.
He doesn’t know all the words in the third line. BAKER joins in on the fourth line in close harmony.

**CHARLIE:** *(Sings)* Engage congratulate moreover state abysmal fairground.
Begat perambulate this aerodrome chocolate éclair found.
Maureen again dedum-de-da- ultimately cried egg.

---


Diogenes the cynic *(cynic from kynikos, dog-like, from kyon, dog)* thought one would do well to mimic the simple exuberant shamelessness of the indifferent canine *(see, for example, Jean-Léon Gérôme’s 1860 painting of the cynic alone and separate from the world save for his four-legged followers, or any number of the erected statues of the philosopher with his pet/avatar). Perhaps best known for his confrontational encounter with Alexander, or the fantastic epithet “Socrates out of his senses,” bestowed by Plato, the cynic is most dog-like in his various survived aphorisms on the arbitrariness of rules and related polemics for their inversion—the in-praise-of “scandalous behavior” for which the cynics generally were known—“their preaching was against all social institutions,” summarizes Foucault. The most dogged one, for example, defaced coinage, ate raw octopus, spat; embraced statues in the winter; or, perhaps a better example of his *anaideia* would be the whole urination on enemies matter—.

In *Fearless Speech*, his meditation on *parrhesia*, Foucault considers the figure of the example in the free or fearless or fully liberated speech of Diogenes and the cynics, writing that the cynical philosopher’s way was to lead by example instead of by texts or theory’s abstractions. “The Cynics thus taught by way of examples and the explanations associated with them,” Foucault argues, “They wanted their own lives to be a *blazon* of essential truths which would then serve as a guidelines, or as an example for others to follow.” In this, their way of life modeled examples of and exemplary freedom, self-
sufficiency and performance of the arbitrariness of rules for behavior, every lived gesture that “example for others to follow.” The way we are following Diogenes, even now.

Diogenes, of course, is—or, rather, “Diogenes” is himself an example: in Aristotle; in Rabelais’ Prologue to the *Tiers Livre*, in the enormous body of work on Diogenes as symbolic liberatory hero during Revolutionary France. In Michael Serres’ thought, he figures as the renouncing of illusory things, the pure and total form of seeking reality in the real, in his relation to snow, water, light: “He is there, among the rubbish, crouched in his barrel, naked, dirty, silent. [. . .] Dog. He lives like a dog. He barks at those who go by, the strong as well as the weak, the rich and the poor—dignitaries or effigies. Dog. His barrel is his dog-house.” The story Serres tells of Dog hinges on another figure: “During a harsh, grey winter night, when some boys made a snowman on the public square, Diogenes rises, ghostlike, out of his barrel. He drops his cloak to the ground and naked advances on the esplanade to face the statue of snow. He stands there. Waits. Naked, he embraces the naked statue. Is he cold now? He drinks the bare water in his bare hand. Was he even thirsty? He forsakes the things which screen the things of the world.” But then the question should be posed: Is Diogenes the example here, or is it the snowman? Or is the example really of the statue? Is the example always the thing that is most frozen and still? (Dis- apart, off, separate; stare to stand, be stiff, be rigid, hard). What does it take to make examples pulse, become unfixed, lose their hardness?

And at least one other question demands itself be posed: Is Elder becoming more dog-like, and ironically, at the loosening of her *kynodontas*, throughout the film? Is her violence against her face her freeing of speech, her embracing of the cold wet hard statue in the night?

One might also consider any number of other matters of dogs, for example: the family’s antipathy towards the figure of the cat; or notions of training, breeding, hunting, savagery, guarding, leashes, quadrupedicity [these might become examples that support a political reading, though perhaps not in the latter footed case]; or perhaps a series of sounds [baying, crying, growling, yipping—to read these, for example, in relation to the scene in which the family, each on all fours, snaps and snarls in time to the father’s barking [no pun [though, for example, one might play on dental/vocal notions of bark and bite and language games [Could one also create a link between criticism following the language games of the parents, deciphering backwards, problematically, to divine meaning, to the following of a trail of scent, but a false trail?] intended] demands]; or, also, the anecdote related by Fania Pascal, “I had my tonsils out and was in the Evelyn Nursing Home feeling sorry for myself. Wittgenstein called. I croaked: ‘I feel just like a dog that has been run over.’ He was disgusted: ‘You don’t know what a dog that has been run over feels like.’” One might include one of the recipes from the chapter “I Can Recommend the Poodle” from Luican and Gray’s *The Decadent Cookbook*: for example: “Manila Hot Dog. Take one 6-8 lb. dog. Chop off head, paws and tail. Paunch and skin it, then bone it.” etc. Further, there is, at minimum, of course, also Descartes’ epistemic wager that the dog is a stupid machine, lacking thought—this is the claim Voltaire will (a bit too) angrily oppose in his declaration, “Cruel persons grab this dog that shows prodigiously more affection than most human beings, pin it to a table, and dissect it alive to show you its mesaraic veins. You find in the dog the same organs of feeling as you have. So tell me, mechanist, has Nature arranged all the springs of feeling in this animal so that it will not feel anything? Has it got nerves that make it impassive?” Any of these examples of dogs might also be provided, provided more examples [of either dogs, or of examples] are deemed necessary.
V. On being *for example*

Elder: So, what does it mean to be *for example*?

Younger: Do you mean, to constitute an example, i.e., to *be for example*, or to be in favor, or pro-example, i.e. to be *for example*?

Elder: Yes, both.

Younger:

Elder:

Elder: For the film, then, to constitute an example…

Younger: We should define our terms, first, yes?

Elder: An example is a sample.

Younger: But an example is also an ideal.

Elder: Give an example of that kind of example.

Elder: Although Socrates grapples already with this curious figuration in *Statesman*: the nameless philosopher from Elea says “my ‘example’ requires the assistance of another example.”

Younger: I know this part. The Stranger continues: “Are not examples formed in this manner? We take a thing and compare it with another distinct instance of the same thing, of which we have a right conception, and out of the comparison there arises one true notion, which includes both of them.”

Younger: Isn’t that the dialogue where the Stranger describes a method of Socratic exclusion as *kata melê*, dissecting and dividing concepts *limb by limb* “like a sacrificial animal”?

Elder: Yes.

Younger: Like a dog cut in parts? Its arms broken, and teeth pulled out?
Elder: Perhaps. Irrelevant. The point is that you must furnish an example of your example as an ideal.

Younger: Which is to say my ideal example and my example of an ideal example cannot be the same kind of example.

Elder: Exactly.

Younger: I am the example Younger. Meaning: exemplary, the prototype, the model after which other Youngers could pattern themselves.

Elder: But this, what you have said, is only an example of how an example might suggest an ideal; it is not itself an ideal, but represents one of many possible examples of how that ideality might work.

Younger: True. It is, as I have used it now, a sample or instance of how this example might work. So the example is both specific and general, a sample and an ideal—

Elder: —If the example can be valuable for its unexceptionalness, a contingent choice that relates to or demonstrates some general principle, and it can be itself the model or general pattern or system that is itself the general principle, then…

Younger: …then as instance and model, it is both inside and outside any system, a member and necessarily the prototype for the set of all members.

Elder: Now, the author of this present paper has argued that, in Dogtooth, any neat division of the outside (of a set: the family, the home, the walls, the factory) from the inside is meaningful less for its essential dimension of exterior or stranger from interior or familial, and is meaningful more so as an example of the modes of formal variation that govern the word, the image, violence, and so forth, among other examples.

Younger: Yes…

Elder: What is the status of the example in relation to this argument, then? If the example is what is both within and without a system, and words, violence, image, are just modes of variation or examples of what is variable, then the film both consists of examples, and itself is an example of the redefining of at least one of those examples in the case of “violence.”

Younger: Does the film consist only of examples?

Elder: What does it mean for a film to constitute an example?

Younger: Or for it to be for example, a kind of example advocacy?

Elder: Is “violence” an example of variability in the film, or is the film’s redefinition of “violence” into freedom what makes the film itself into an example?

Younger:
Elder: What I mean is, does the film merely constitute a *paradeigma* of the redefinition of violence?

Younger: No, not at all. That would suggest that the *paradeigma* can be reduced to its content that is made visible or manifest in the film. The thing is: the film is also a *paradeigma* of the process of redefinition as a general form, a general case of metatextual violence.

Younger: This is perhaps the most fundamental deployment of violence in the text—for in overcoming the distance between spoken grammars and cinematic revelations, in making the film itself equivalent to the mother’s intoned “*paradeigma,*” it makes language and image self-same while simultaneously marking them as different. That suggests that the film is exemplary, and not merely an example. It offers a model or pattern by which the image functions as a grammar of example—showing; it instructs.

Elder: This is not any example. This is unconcealment of an abstraction.

Younger: Yes. Which means at the moment it performs being for or expounding the example, it can no longer constitute an example.

Elder: Perhaps the film cannot *be for example* and *be for example* at the same time then. One has to choose: constitute the specific case, or exhibit the affirmations of abstraction. One cannot do both at once.

Younger: Maybe. But, first, go back: we forgot something. An example is also a caution, as in *to make an example of someone,* a lesson or warning, *for example,* a spanking or a cruel humiliation, abasements and mortification, tar-and-feather mob attacks. An example is a ruining something, a something that hurts it hurts it hurts

---

**Eugenie Brinkema** is Assistant Professor of Contemporary Literature and Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Articles on violence, affect, sexuality, and ethics have appeared in the journals *differences, Camera Obscura, Criticism, The Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* and *Angelaki: A Journal of the Theoretical Humanities.* Recent work includes chapters for the Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Michael Haneke and the Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Fassbinder. Her piece “Burn. Object. If.” appeared in *World Picture 5.*

**Notes**

Goes this reasoning: “the outside (the ocean) is always converted into the inside (a leather armchair).” Fisher, “Dogtooth,” 27.


See Kant, *Critique of Judgment* section 18, section 32.

Kant, section 18.


Giorgio Agamben, Interview with Ulrich Raulff, trans. Morag Goodwin, *German Law Review* 5.5 (2004): 610; Giorgio Agamben, “Example,” in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Agamben has made several versions of this claim (and it is often his paradigmatic method, also sometimes called his formalism, that is the target for criticism of his work; see, for example, Negri’s and Laclau’s responses to *Homo Sacer*).
29 Wittgenstein, PI, 23 (10).
30 Stoppard, “Dogg’s Hamlet,” 141.
31 Ibid., 151.
32 Wittgenstein, PI, 19 (7).
33 Michel Foucault, Fearless Speech, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001) 119, 120.
34 See Foucault, Fearless, 115-133.
35 Foucault, Fearless, 117.
42 Wittgenstein, PI, 197 (68).
44 Plato, Statesman, 287c3-5.

I am indebted to my colleagues in the Literature Workshop at MIT, to whom I presented an early version of this paper and from whom I received perceptive questions and generous provocations.