

The Dogs Who Outlived Philosophy: On Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook's 'Some Unexpected Events Sometimes Bring Momentary Happiness' (2005)

Echoes of whispers of her art being obsessed with liminality. Beings enmeshed in categories, thresholds where the breathing brush against the stiff, the *mortals* against *beasts*. Critics tabulate this with phrasey hast. Sophisticated terms are conjured up, relational ontology and collapse of binaries. I don't disagree, but those words sound like cages. Her work is not paper. It's the soft architecture of mercy disguised as form.

I make a habit of lingering in the artwork's silence. However, with Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, encountering the idea before the art, the idea itself was sublime. It wasn't an idea. It was a rending. Something that split the silence and rearranged the room.

To imbue dignity, poise, status to what civil society calls abject. To behold, to consider, to acknowledge, to witness a corpse. To offer sanctuary, safety and refuge to a stray. To vehemently reject our human instinct and impulse to turn our heads and force a feeling of estrangement.

Philosophers in disguise, her dogs are not just pets. They are existential philosophers. Not in the way of books, classrooms or seminars. But living, breathing bodies that refuse commentary, explanation and interpretation. Humans theorize and speculate, dogs embody and manifest. An ideology is not needed to justify and rationalize a limp. It's a life simply and honourably lived. And in that living, the question is staged "What does it mean to endure without an answer?" A question philosophers have dreaded to ask plainly.

Stare long enough and the truth tires of hiding, not in words but in gestures: philosophy performed without speech. A limp that becomes resilience and persistence, joy that insists on itself amidst fracture, allegiance without condition, mortality without despair.

They're a reflection of us, but deprived of the mask of culture. Raw, present, unpretentious. Scholars speak of relational ontology. I see something simpler,

harsher, truer: dogs staging the questions we spend our lives avoiding, and answering them without ceremony, without recognition, without witness.

They live the contradiction we footnote and fear. Embodying what we spend lifetimes trying to phrase. Camus spoke of an invincible summer inside despair; Araya films a dog stumbling in agony, then suddenly ebbing and flowing with delight, amusement and charm. That is not sentiment. That is existential resilience incarnate. Kierkegaard grappled with the leap of faith; her dogs enact it every time they trust again what once betrayed. Proof that mercy has no memory for blame.

Their loyalty is not calculated and plotted. Not bargained. Devotion offered without clause or contract, a fidelity that philosophers have only ever imagined in theory. And their mortality is carried without dread and melancholy. Humans rehearse rituals, cling to afterlives, hide death behind ceremony. Dogs do not. They live toward it without dread. Their ease with finitude is its own philosophy. A life measured not by avoiding death, but by inhabiting every breath before it.

And so, Araya does not cast them as pets, but as relatives. Philosophers in fur. She names them for what they are: kin and minds in motion. They are not adornments to human life, but equals in thought, family with a different tongue. By permitting us to witness as silent observers, by archiving their hair like relics, by building them palatial shelters, she crowns them as philosophers whose medium is not words, but being. They answer the questions humans turn into volumes:

- What is freedom? To play, even while limping.
- What is meaning? To remain loyal, even in abandonment.
- What is mortality? To live without fear of its shadow.
- What is recognition? To be seen as whole, even when society calls you lesser.

So when I call them philosophers, I am not indulging in metaphor. I mean it in the oldest sense: minds that move without needing to speak. I am naming

what she has already revealed: that existence itself can be philosophy, if only someone has the mercy to witness it.

In 'Some Unexpected Events Sometimes Bring Momentary Happiness', a limping dog frolics. Society would have filed him beneath his dignity. She does not. She holds the lens steady enough until even doubt must concede its joy. For truth to outrun its disguise. Critics call this “resistance to human exceptionalism.” I call it recognition — the moment where happiness, even if brief, dissolves every hierarchy that tried to name him unworthy and undeserving.

Her jars of dog hair, sealed like reliquaries, are not aesthetics but memorials, elegies in glass. What the rest see as oddity, she enshrines as memory. Each jar a soft tomb. Scholars might call it “the archiving of the abject.” But I see altars — each strand insisting that life mattered, that no creature is waste. And in Thailand, where hma (dog) is hurled as shame, she reclaims it as a lineage. Reconstructing insult into ancestry.

She grants dogs the same metaphysics of death. Fur beside flesh, loyalty beside rot. And here the liminality becomes even sharper. They don't sit below the dead. They sit beside them, and the border between grief and devotion vanishes.

A corpse is a body between life and death, a reminder of what was. A dog is a being between human and animal, but in her vision, also between death and life: strays and wounded creatures who live so close to mortality that they occupy the same borderland as the dead. By putting them side by side, she forces us to see that what society tries to look away from — the dying, the unwanted — is not a void, but a threshold. A place where meaning waits.

No record of a marriage. No whisper of a spouse. Marriage, if it happened, left no trace. The archive chose its ghost. And it wasn't him. Her biography is not padded with the usual footnotes of romance and lineage. Instead, it is pared down to mourning, morality, and marginal life. Corpses and dogs fill the space where convention expects a partner's name.

This absence is not lack. It is declaration. Refusing the sentimental scaffolding most artists are draped in. Keeping her private life unwritten. It's already written into the work. To look for a husband in her story is to miss what she has chosen instead: a covenant with the dead, the stray, the unwanted.

And therein lies the paradox: a life stitched from grief, ethics, and the discarded dead, yet every seam gleams with beauty. Wrapping mourning in elegance. Framing the marginal as sacred. And Beauty dared to follow. To watch the videos is to weep. To read about the work is to weep. Not from horror, but from recognition. From mercy. From respect so profound it dissolves the very idea of higher and lower.

To read the articles about Araya is to watch mercy be mistranslated into morbidity. They catalogue her as though she were a dealer in taboos, a trafficker of shock. "*Singing to dead bodies.*" "*Dressing up a suicide victim's corpse.*" "*Filming the insane.*" They list these acts as curiosities in a carnival of the grotesque. They speak of death, ritual and art, but never the world her work refuses to abandon: dignity.

It is more effortless, after all, to name it morbidity rather than mourning. Easier to say she is *provocative* than to confess she is reminding us of the bodies we abandoned and discarded. Critics flatten her into a spectacle because to admit otherwise would demand something of themselves. To call her work "controversial" is a way of shielding one's own cowardice.

They ask, *Where does all this morbidity come from?* as though grief and mourning were a perversion and deviance, as though the desire and eagerness to sing to the dead must be diagnosed rather than understood. Framing her teaching corpses as absurd whimsy, "humorous pieces tinged with haunts." But a true teacher knows: no class is ever repeated. To the critic, this is eccentricity. To the witness, it is reverence.

Nevertheless, Araya does not confront taboos; she confronts abandonment. It is not a rebellion against taboo, it's a reckoning with what's left behind. This is no theatre to taboos. It's an archive of abandonment. She stands where

society has turned its face away. Beside corpses denied their names, beside the mad denied their voices, beside the slaughtered denied their silence. The critics cannot write the word *mercy* without soiling it with irony, so they write *morbidity* instead. Their language protects them. Hers does not.

I feel a forboding sense of danger in how much I want to know her and understand her. Not in the way people hunger for proximity to fame and celebrity, nor the way critics comb for biographical breadcrumbs to decode application and practice. What I want is simpler—and far more perilous. To sit across from her in silence, the way Abramović sat with strangers, and see whether her eyes carry the same weight her work does. Eyes that must know mercy not as theory, but as muscle memory.

And here lies the paradox: to seek the woman too closely is to risk betraying the work. Because the work is not a mask she performs—it is the body she has become. To scroll her Instagram-if such a thing exists- is not research, but erosion. What was once demanded presence becomes scrollable noise.

Curiosity wants the woman. Reverence honours the current she carries. To study the person is appetite, to regard the vessel is restraint. What draws me is not Araya the individual, but what radiates through her: a dignity so unflinching it refuses metaphor. This is why I do not want to ask her questions or tour her home. I want only to sit in the field of her presence and observe whether the current still moves. She has become the medium. Like her dogs. Like her corpses. Like her jars. She is now the liminal being: life and practice, public and private, all collapsed into one unresolved form.

Which is why I hold a single clarity, meaning and implications are simple: I am here to witness the art, not the artist. The moment I peer into her life and translate her into moods, meals, and mornings, I'm no longer writing about mercy. I'm simply describing a life.

And yet, that very blurring is the evidence. And that collapse between art and author? That is where the truth breathes. The inability to tell whether I'm drawn to the work or to the artist reveals what a rare few ever achieve: the

collapse of that binary. She has dissolved the border between life and expression. They are not companions. They are one, not merging art and life. But removing the need for a difference.

I can trace the first moment with almost every artwork I've ever studied. The page, the gallery, the remark that opened the door. But not Araya. Her name did not appear. It arrived. And with it, her dogs—central, immovable, as if they had always been waiting for me. I do not remember crossing the threshold. I only know that I, with a daze-like determination, stepped through it.

But this was no discovery or exploration. It was acceptance. It was realizations. Dare I say it was recognition. I have never pursued art with a pen and paper in hand. It appears and compels the page. Art has always found me. It arrives unannounced, demanding witness. And when this work arrived, I did not walk toward it. I ran. Not out of urgency, but out of knowing. Some works don't call gently, they seize. And in running, I realized the peril: the risk of collapsing the idea into the body, the mercy into the maker.

I haven't even seen the full piece. Only glimpsed its outline, its timing precise. Twenty minutes and three seconds. Only shards of still photographs. But that shard was enough. Enough to compel the most expansive reflection I have ever attempted. Enough to draw me not only toward the work, but toward the life itself. I have never done this before, and having done so, I make it. Not to repeat it, but to understand the risks.

But here, mercy does not reside in a single frame. It echoes and whispers across dogs, jars, corpses, stray limbs and straying eyes. It all pulses from the same current. The art does not hang on the wall; it spills. And her life, quietly, becomes indistinguishable from it.

So no, she is not making “dog art.” Label it as such, and you reduce philosophy to pet portraiture, missing the architecture entirely. She is staging philosophy through breath, limping, and fur. She is building a grammar of loyalty from creatures the world calls vermin. She is composing ontology from

eye contact. Critics will name it practice. I call it something else: mercy turned into method.

And if what stands before us is no longer the woman, but the work she has become, then she passed through the final threshold, where art is no longer practise , but a person. Crossing a line most only trace, not the creation of art, but the erasure of the self within it.

She is not simply living through art. She is no longer separate from it. Or perhaps more dangerously: it is no longer separate from her.

And that is where the danger crystallizes. Because once the work wears her shape, it comes too easy to forget she is only human. To follow the current too far is to meet the shore. A woman, not a myth. And with her, the flaws, the faltering, and the ordinariness the work so carefully transcended.

-Dorian Vale

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