"That Was Mean, Motari": Spectatorship, Sympathy, and Animal Suffering in Wartime

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In March 2008, a cell-phone video depicting a U.S. Marine cooing over a stray puppy and then throwing it off a cliff surfaced on YouTube and promptly went viral. The video, viewed hundreds of thousands of times, seemed an astonishing spectacle of cruelty. For many viewers, it raised urgent questions about the character of American military personnel, what circumstances might inspire a human being to such depravity, and how the culprit and his cameraman ought to be punished. These practical matters were vexing enough, but the video also raised profound questions about violence, sympathy, and militarized American identity. The video itself provides no answers, but despite this—or perhaps because of this—it became the object of a vigorous discursive proliferation. There were angry, often inarticulate reaction videos posted back to YouTube; rejoinders from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and other anti-cruelty organizations; news stories about the perpetrators or the video itself; and apologies, disavowals, and disciplinary action from the Marine Corps. There was something about the video that I, too, found haunting, as it provoked in me a choking kind of sadness and anger that did not seem to

ABSTRACT: In March 2008, a cell-phone video depicting a U.S. Marine cooing over a stray puppy and then throwing it off a cliff surfaced on YouTube and promptly went viral. The video, viewed hundreds of thousands of times, seemed an astonishing spectacle of cruelty. The befuddlement it provoked about the character of American military personnel, what circumstances might inspire a human being to such depravity, and how the culprit and his cameraman ought to be punished begot even more vexing questions about violence, sympathy, and militarized American identity. The video itself provides no answers, but despite this—or perhaps because of this—it became the object of vigorous discursive proliferation, and in this paper, I use it to refract a broader inquiry about suffering, sympathy, and citizenship in wartime. Among the most remarkable aspects of the video is the way the puppy grimly featured in it seemed to reconfigure the relationships between these terms, transcending the banality of mediated violence to inspire spectators to powerful feeling at the sight of another being's suffering, a phenomenon notoriously uncommon during wartime. At the same time, I suggest that this upwelling of emotion was not only, or even primarily, compassion for the dog or rage at the perpetrators, but was instead anger at the crisis of sympathies that it provoked as it compelled spectators to choose between loyalty to military personnel or a moral opposition to animal cruelty. By revealing an incommensurability between these affiliations, the video forced spectators into a wild, unregulated space adjacent to but still separated from the discourses that otherwise function to regulate our affective investments.

diminish appreciably over the course of multiple viewings or be defused by critical theorizing. It was from a place of curiosity about my own feelings, their intensity and durability, that I began this inquiry. I wondered not only at how overwhelming those feelings were, but also how untamable, how impervious they were to the passage of time or the application of reason; I wanted to understand their persistent and discomfiting wildness despite the forces that might otherwise prevail against them. As I studied the individual and institutional responses to the video, I found echoes of my own upset and perplexity. The goal of this paper is to historicize and interpret these reactions, and also to consider, cautiously, their potential.

The video is simultaneously garish in its clarity and stultifying in its incomprehensibility; from the snare of this contradiction, I use it to refract a broader inquiry about suffering, sympathy, and citizenship in wartime. More specifically, I am interested in how the hapless, yowling puppy managed to reconfigure, albeit briefly, some of the usual relationships between those phenomena. Ultimately, the puppy entreats spectators to consider what kind of justice might be possible in cases of animal cruelty, given the affective residues that such events leave behind, unsettled, to set forth the possibility of a reaction to suffering outside of or beyond the apparently civilized discourses that constrain its expression and its signification.

"SO CUTE, SO CUTE LITTLE PUPPY": THE VIDEO AND THE RESPONSE

At first, the video looks unremarkable. The image bears the grainy texture and mediocre resolution of a cell-phone camera, which also endows the scene with a hauntingly quotidian character (Gye 283-284). The panorama is desolate: a cloudless pale blue sky and a rocky brown landscape, with some scrubby green vegetation visible in the background. The forbidding environment offers a stark contrast, however, to the smiling Marines and the charm of the puppy, which is black and white, captured in a brief close-up. With the exception of the few seconds where the cameraman positions himself in front of the phone, awkwardly inserting himself into the frame, the film basically follows the gaze of the man holding the small dog: at his fellow Marine, toward the puppy, along the terrible arc of its flight, and then back to the man who threw it.

Accompanying the images, there is the constant, muffling ambient noise of the wind, and a similarly pneumatic sound that might be their breathing.

There are also subtle acoustic details like the sound of boots crunching the gravel, the material of the perpetrator's uniform rubbing against itself, and another dog barking in the distance. At times, their dialogue is hard to hear, though their laughter comes through clearly. The most distinctive sonic element of the video, however, is the yelping of the puppy as it flies through the air, which ends abruptly with the sound of it hitting the dusty ground below.

At just under 17 seconds long, the video has a very compressed plot. It begins with the perpetrator posing for the camera, holding the dog by the scruff of its neck. He then turns to face the dog, and turns the dog to face him, and they regard each other for a brief moment, as he asks, rhetorically, "Cute little puppy, huh?" Then there is a brief shot of the empty horizon before the cameraman ducks into the frame, smiling, and echoes the other man with a falsetto, "Ohhh, so cute, so cute little puppy." He then moves back behind the camera and follows his comrade with it, lingering on the dog for a split-second while the other man cocks his arm back. And then, as he is preparing to throw, he lamely offers a disingenuous excuse for what comes next: "Oh, oh, oh – I tripped" as he launches the puppy over the cliff. The camera follows the animal on its parabolic flight toward the ground, where it lands and bounces and finally comes to rest. Almost immediately thereafter, and this time in a normal voice but with an inscrutable affect, he narrates a drawn-out "That's mean" and "That was mean, Motari," during which he pans the camera back rapidly to him. Motari shrugs, briefly tilts his head toward the camera, and smiles. Somebody laughs mirthfully (probably the cameraman), as Motari offers a fatalist assessment of his actions, "I do what I do." The last frame as the video ends abruptly is him in quarter-profile. In her discussion of the distinguishing features of contemporary violence, Adriana Cavarero argues that the 'casualness' of casualties, especially collateral damage, is precisely the root of their horror (76); the flat affect exchanged between Motari and Encarnacion reveals that this casualness can stretch beyond the boundaries of species.

Initially, much about the video was unknown, including whether it was real, where it was shot and what became of the puppy (CNN.com); most of the details have since been confirmed. These include authenticity, location (Haditha, Iraq), and the identities of both the culprit, Lance Corporal David Motari, and the cameraman, Sergeant Crismarvin Banez Encarnacion. As for the fate of the puppy, it seems fairly obvious. These matters were settled

readily, but other questions remained unanswered, unanswerable: about what it meant, how to react, how to respond. The video seemed unbelievable not only because of what it showed, but also because of the discursive crisis it provoked when it revealed the incommensurability of two cherished ideals of American identity: the valor and nobility of American military personnel and the American commitment to the humane treatment of companion animals like dogs.

Even after YouTube (futilely) pulled the video down, it continued to circulate widely, provocatively. It prompted video responses: angry, often inarticulate monologues posted back to YouTube as well as 'reaction videos' of unsuspecting witnesses watching the original for the first time.[2] It elicited rejoinders from the ASPCA and other anti-cruelty organizations. It generated news stories about the perpetrators of the video itself. It triggered apologies, disavowals, and disciplinary action from the United States Marine Corps (USMC). Three months after the video first appeared, Motari was 'separated' from the Marine Corps and Encarnacion disciplined by it. Even prior to this verdict, however, the Corps distanced itself from Motari and his actions, publicly describing the video as "shocking and deplorable" and inconsistent with the "high standards" of behavior for Marines (qtd. in CNN.com).

But while responses came from a variety of quarters, official and otherwise, and nearly everyone who saw the video (it seemed) had something to say about it, they displayed a remarkable consonance. A minority dismissed the video as insignificant or the conduct of the Marines pictured within it as morally neutral or amusing, but they were loudly and significantly outnumbered, as were those who proffered a half-hearted exoneration of their behaviour, citing combat stress as a cause. For the most part, the response was unequivocally condemnatory and often even vengeful; after the video was posted, there were death threats against Motari, whom the USMC then took into protective custody, and his family. And compared to the mixed, ambivalent, tepidly critical popular reaction to wartime atrocities like the torture at Abu Ghraib, response to this video was almost uniformly unforgiving and condemnatory.[3] Nicholas Mirzoeff observes that the scandal provoked by the photos from Abu Ghraib was short-lived and relatively inconsequential, which he takes as evidence that "what was seen was assented

[2] One compilation can be found at http://youtubed.com/watch?v=yQ1mZBfoZXw.

[3] Boggs has argued that humans like the Abu Ghraib detainees and animals like dogs occupy structurally similar positions in American culture ("Bestiality" 120).

to" (35). By grim comparison to the Motari-Encarnacion video, Abu Ghraib seemed explicable. Whether by the commentators who sought to minimize its significance by characterizing the torture as excusable, necessary, or harmless fun, or by those critics who sought to uncover the truth of what happened or develop lengthy narratives about why and how, Abu Ghraib could be made to make sense. Even if that process entailed divesting oneself of ideals about the American military, it did not require making the kinds of sentimental discernments coerced by the Motari-Encarnacion video. Colleen Glenney Boggs, in her analysis of the use of dogs at Abu Ghraib, set forth the possibility that Marco, the large black dog pictured lunging at a detainee, might have "interpellated" by his actions that man into the U.S. "disciplinary regime" operative at the prison (*Animalia* 74). The nameless, yelping puppy in this video called spectators into an affective morass, their own human reactions only marginally more coherent than the small dog's bewildered cries.

SENTIMENT AND CRUELTY

Responding to the video required making a choice, and proving something about oneself as a citizen in the process of determining who counts as an agent, a perpetrator, and a victim. In her analysis of the phenomenon of "cruel optimism," Lauren Berlant argues that "cruelty is the 'hard' in a hard loss. It is apprehensible as an affective event in the form of a beat or a shift in the air that transmits the complexity and threat of relinquishing what is different about the world." She writes further about the need to provide an account of the "process of knotty tethering to objects, scenes, and modes of life that generate so much overwhelming yet sustaining negation" (*Cruel* 52). This suggests that naming a certain set of practices "cruel" to animals brings with it a kind of affective pleasure, an opportunity to both mark a distance from the sorts of people who would harm animals while also binding oneself to those victimized creatures.

The American anti-cruelty movement has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century and is generally, and not uncomplicatedly, coeval with various other efforts to extend rights to the previously disenfranchised: abolitionism and the post-Civil War effort to redefine formerly enslaved people as fully human citizens and the early suffrage movement, as champions of those platforms found common cause with anti-dog fighting activists and people concerned with other forms of animal maltreatment (Garber 233). In

the 1860s, the anti-cruelty movement galvanized in various public welfare organizations that were largely the purview of middle- and upper-class men and women (Grier 153). [4] As Maneesha Deckha notes, "human problematizations about nonhuman beings are rarely ever just about the nonhuman, but mediated by other circuits of difference" (515). Definitions of what constituted ethical—and lawful—treatment of animals thus coalesced in the context of other struggles about what humans qualified for membership in the nation, full citizenship in the state, and how those claims ought to be upheld.

As a discourse and a practice, 'humane' treatment of animals had emotional, legal, and ideological elements. The first American anti-cruelty statutes were passed in 1828 (Grier 117), but the idea of humane care for animals did not gain widespread traction until later in the century. Over the following decades, anti-cruelty activists would extend their critiques beyond the most obvious and egregious instances of harm to animals, especially blood sports like dog-fighting, as part of a broader cultural shift toward what Katherine Grier describes as an "increased self-consciousness" about human-animal relationships. This was elaborated into a "domestic ethic of kindness" toward animals (Grier 130-131), whereby one demonstrated identity, status, and sentience through compassionate care for non-human beings. Humane societies set about the business of protecting abused animals and neglected children, while pet-keeping in general increased sharply in the United States, and the West more generally, over the course of the nineteenth century. Always, the emphasis was on the helplessness of animals (Grier 174), who had the capacity neither to speak nor to significantly improve their circumstances. Overall, anti-cruelty prohibitions were not so much about affirming animals' inherent subjectivity as about recognizing them *despite* their status.

Whereas the structures of sentiment and practices of protection for animals emphasize their helplessness, the structure of sentiment for American troops emphasizes their volition, their willing sacrifice for others, their choices made on behalf of all their countrymen and -women. The contemporary American discourse about "supporting the troops" generally presumes a position from outside their ranks; to support the troops rhetorically (rather than joining them directly) is to confess that, for whatever

[4] The anti-cruelty movement in England also had its own class dynamics, and generally emphasized criminalizing abuse of animals by the poor and working classes, but not more aristocratic pursuits like hunting for sport (Kete, 26-27).

reason, we have chosen not to locate ourselves among them, while also seeking to prove an allegiance to and affiliation with them. And so the job is to defend them against their detractors.[5] This work is often entangled in a complex of feelings: gratitude, sympathy, admiration, nostalgia, and perhaps a melancholy on their behalf, as when civilians seek to imagine the loneliness or alienation that they must feel. But of course, any such projection is never as selfless as it might seem. These feelings articulate an attachment, a wish. According to Berlant, "When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could seem embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, a smell, a good idea – whatever" (*Cruel* 23). Among the hallmarks of such attachment is the tenacity, sometimes self-destructive, with which we cling to and defend them. In the case of the imperative to "support the troops," that attachment was located on the militarized body, and functions simultaneously to demonstrate fidelity to those troops and, thereby, to assert and affirm their goodness.

With its loud, inarticulate, and competing claim for attachment, the puppy called spectators into a place of feral sentiment, proximal to but ultimately uncontrollable by the various systems and structures designed to organize our feelings; at the same time, it highlighted a different kind of savagery in its human tormenters. Licensed, perhaps, by the flagrancy of their actions and provoked by their flouting of shared cultural assumptions about the character of American military personnel and the moral imperative of kindness to animals, this feral sentiment emerges from specific histories of human-dog relationships and fantasies about the U.S. military, but also moves outside of them and the affective and ideological consolations they offer.

GOOD DOG, BAD DOG

Obviously, Motari's and Encarnacion's choice of victim seemed stark, gratuitous, uncomplicatedly cruel. But this clarity was also part of what made this video so unsettling, because it provoked a crisis of sympathy by forcing spectators to choose between two objects that usually seem uncomplicatedly worthy of this kind of emotional investment. Anne McClintock observed that

[5] This is different from the case of World War II, for example, when civilians were called upon to do specific things—from rationing to recycling to buying war bonds—that directly contributed to the war effort.

the torture of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib revealed a contradictory omnipotence and paranoia in American military power (89); similarly, this video starkly captures both a terrible sangfroid and juvenile cravenness on the part of the Marines. Motari and Encarnacion, with their actions, and the puppy, with its helplessness and reflexive panicked response, imperiled prevailing visions of contemporary American identity and, in the process, forced a re-apportioning of emotional loyalty.

Any instance where soldiers and dogs seem to be working together enables affective and discursive harmonization of sympathies. Witness, for example, the popular fascination with the dogs involved in the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in 2011. Stories about soldiers rescuing dogs (usually strays in places like Iraq or Afghanistan) often make the news.[6] Whether the bond forms through happenstance (as when a dog 'adopts' a serviceman or group of them) or intention (if a soldier deliberately set out to rescue a particular animal) the result is a feel-good story about human-animal relationships that secures each one's role while also valorizing the military personnel, reaffirming the hierarchy of species and the benefits of being tame. Simultaneously, the obvious affection that the military personnel display for their creatures seems to serve as comforting evidence that they were not entirely broken or corrupted by war. In these narratives, the dogs often seem helpless or pitiable, but spectators can identify with their vulnerability and also admire their good taste in humans, their keen animal intuition, as they seem to be discerning in choosing whom to love and follow, falling for the same men in uniform that we do. A similar dynamic is operative in the popularity and warm reception of stories about soldiers finding healing through relationships with dogs. Whether the dogs serve as comfort animals for military personnel who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), service animals for veterans who have lost limbs or functionality in combat, or as canine students for veterans who find purpose in training the animals how to help others.[7] In other cases, dogs seem to perform a perfected kind of wartime citizenship, an affective pedagogy on how to feel about military personnel. Dogs like Gracie, who briefly became famous in a 2008 YouTube video for effusively greeting her human upon his return from Afghanistan, enact an uncomplicated fairy-tale homecoming at the conclusion of

[6] There is also a subgenre of war memoirs from Iraq and Afghanistan about these relationships. See, for example, Kopelman; Dowling; and Ritland.

[7] Stories about these programs are myriad and far too numerous to list exhaustively. Some examples include Colin; Jones; Maryland Morning; and Murray.

deployment (ltschmidt). There are the dogs who lose their humans in combat, and seem to know just how to mourn. In 2011, for example, a widely-circulated photo of a dog named Hawkeye lying prostrate on the floor below the flag-draped casket of his owner, a Navy SEAL who died when his helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan, demonstrated the incredible, almost excessive, poignancy of this bond. It is a combination that is affectively simple, even if it is overwhelming.

In these posthumous displays of loyalty, the dog's attachment to the lost owner is the index of its subjectivity; alternately, when the dog itself is the casualty, spectators demonstrate the refinement of their own sensibilities by grieving. Following the associative logic of the video selection algorithm, many of my viewings of the Motari-Encarnacion video prompted YouTube to suggest footage of the cull of wild dogs in Baghdad. This grisly record coalesces with other wartime dog imagery to form a discourse about species, suffering, and humanity. The CNN story on the killing of stray dogs in Baghdad begins with a shot of brown puppies lying on the dusty ground, one absently chewing on the other's tail, as the narrator observes that "if these stray puppies were born in America, they might have a better chance of finding a loving home" (Damon). But because they had the misfortune to be born in Iraq, they would be targeted by the municipal government there, which dispatches veterinarians and other civil employees to shoot the dogs or lure them with strychnine-laced meat in an effort to manage what it describes as a problem with rabies, attacks, and feral dogs eating the corpses of human casualties of sectarian violence. The subsequent montage shows dogs expiring and lying dead on the sidewalk, and then being shot, followed by a woman from SPCA International who suggests that the far more humane option would be to tranquilize and then euthanize the animals. The video is prefaced by a warning about its graphic content, but the camera seems to linger on the dying dogs in a way that it unusually intent and protracted. The visual and narrative elements of the piece emphasize the violence of the deaths that these dogs meet, and the seeming insouciance of the officials in charge of meting them out. Rationally, I understood that this was part of a racialized discourse of savagery depicting Middle Eastern men as bloodthirsty and cruel to animals (Pearson 64), but this awareness did not insulate me from the strong emotional responses (sadness, anger, revulsion) that the story was clearly meant to elicit.

While Western viewers have been trained to interpret scenes like those from the cull in particular ways, other wartime dog stories do not conform as

readily to ideological and emotional templates. Among these were the photos from Abu Ghraib that showed large Military Working Dogs snarling at terrified prisoners. Such dogs occupy a curious position. They do not seem as uncomplicatedly loveable as the service dogs that comfort or assist veterans. Their fearsome collaboration bespeaks what Boggs has described as a "symbiotic relationship" between the guards and the dogs (*Animalia* 66). These animals are not as helpless or pitiable as the puppy that Motari threw, or the strays killed by Iraqi officials in Baghdad. But neither are they full agents in the scene, and one presumes they are not capable of reasoning out the implications of what they are doing; they are merely following orders, but seem to demonstrate an intention in doing so that bespeaks a willingness, if not a will, to become a dog that is obediently bad.

But the case of Motari, Encarnacion, and the puppy stands apart: viewers were forced to sympathize with the puppy, or with no one at all. Wartime sympathizing with a dog affected by a conflict is easiest when that animal looks helpless. Likewise, it may also be easier to support the troops when one can imagine them in conditions of danger or privation, when support can be tinged with a muted form of pity.[8] Sunaina Maira, for example, writes of the distinctions made between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims in the allocation of civil rights and protections. But making such a distinction in the case of the puppy is impossible, because the animal does not seem to have any agency or the potential to be anything but a victim doomed by the misfortune of encountering these two men: the puppy is a good, but very unlucky, dog. There was no apparent utility in what Motari did, no reason for Encarnacion to film it. The hierarchy of human and animal was on clear display, but only as a scaffold for cruelty. There was no credible reason for their conduct, no one to blame for it, no persuasive way to exonerate it: it was wanton.[9] But to simply call them uncivilized might be somewhat unsatisfactory, because any such attribution runs up against discourses about the nobility of American military personnel, and about the essential compassion and humaneness that characterizes America itself. While it is true that depictions of cruelty to animals often elicit strongly, sometimes ferociously, angry responses and public calls for vengeance against the perpetrators, this video is unique because of who those perpetrators are, and the cultural, political, and ideological difficulty of understanding them as capable of atrocity and transforming them into the targets of such animosity.

[8] Kozol describes the "affective tug" of sentimental fantasies about U.S. military personnel (n.p.).
[9] On the legal discourse of wantonness in general, see Dayan.

To disregard the suffering of the puppy would be to disregard a long history of nationally-inflected sentimental care for animals.[10] But to condemn Motari and Encarnacion unreservedly requires a departure from fantasies about the goodness and character of American military personnel, and also a refusal of the imperative to 'support' them in any circumstance. In "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics," Berlant argues that sentimentality, an empathic but problematic form of identification with less fortunate and suffering others, has been essential to the formation of American political culture and subjectivity. Dogs like the thrown puppy extend these relationships beyond the boundaries of the human, and historically, dogs have been the animal that have generated the most abiding affective intensity in American culture (Grier). Just as supporting the troops has become something of a trans-political imperative no matter what one's feelings on the war, historically there has been a linkage between care for animals like dogs and national American identity, a regard that is portrayed as non-partisan, simply moral. In the case of Motari and Encarnacion, reconciling these two sympathies not only seems impossible: it is.

A CRISIS OF SYMPATHIES

We cannot know definitively what affect was the predominant one circulating in response to the video, but it is apparent that anger was among the most salient; desire for vengeance surfaced quickly and ferociously. The death threats against Motari and his family are perhaps the most dramatic evidence of this, while most other responses fell on this continuum of anger, even if they did not go so far. Some are comic fantasies of the dog getting revenge (as by throwing Motari and Encarnacion off a cliff), whereas others are rather more earnest expressions of a wish for justice and punishment. Sianne Ngai argues that "ugly feelings" often arise at the site of "suspended agency" (1), and here, with the puppy long since dead and Motari and Encarnacion beyond the pale of anyone's power to punish them, all that a concerned spectator can do is be angry, and there are many discursive and emotional frameworks available for shaping such a feeling.

[10] This is not to imply that every American loves, or even cares about, the suffering of dogs. Surely there are many people who find them uninteresting, frightening, or even disgusting. In this instance, I am speaking not so much of individuals as of broader historical and cultural trends.

Among the most obvious examples of this are the spluttering reaction videos posted back to YouTube. The speakers are often stammering; sometimes with rage, other times with what seems to be a shortage of words or wherewithal. Something about the Motari-Encarnacion video makes it hard to think; we are often dumbfounded in response to horror (Cavarero 8).[11] Often, when we encounter animals who cannot speak, their muteness elicits our own (Bullock 99). Here, however, the yelping puppy is not exactly mute; it can verbalize, but inarticulately, and it seems this is contagious. Comments posted about these videos seem vitriolic in all directions; certainly, this is characteristic of much online conversation, but here it also shows that there is diffuse anger that needs a clearer target. Some respondents offer their own anger in support of those who made videos condemning Motari and Encarnacion, while a minority sought to exculpate the two Marines. Among those, some appealed to the militarized sympathies that they imagined angry spectators would hold, suggesting that they could never understand the trauma of war and what it drove humans to do. Other defenders were defiant, insulting the sense and also the patriotism of Motari and Encarnacion's detractors, arguing that sympathies with the animal were absurdly, insultingly misplaced. But of course, none of these exchanges ever actually got anywhere. The various sympathies only became more entrenchedly irreconcilable.

Ostensibly, the anger of the people who found the Marines' actions indefensible was directed at Motari and Encarnacion: on behalf of the puppy, on behalf of a nation now besmirched by their conduct. However, I suggest that the actual target of this anger was the crisis of sympathies that they provoked, and only secondarily, or derivatively, the Marines themselves. Consternation over the human consequences of cruelty to animals is as old as anti-cruelty legislation; in early law on the matter, as Deckha notes, "the offense was understood as an assault on public morals and not a direct harm to the animal," so that any prosecution was, first and foremost, "motivated by anthropocentric interests" (519).[12] In callously tossing the puppy off the cliff, the Marines forced a failure in available discourses that instruct spectators

[11] Cavarero writes, "Gripped by revulsion in face of a form of violence that appears more inadmissible than death, the body reacts as if nailed to the spot, hairs standing on end."

[12] U.S. military justice, for example, does provide some protections for animals. In the massive *Manual for Courts Martial*, for example, animals appear in two main places; among the list of possible victims of sodomy, and as objects of abuse in the form of "public animals" who are the property of the government. In both instances, however, the offenses are framed as transgressions against the military, affronts to 'good order and discipline' or a way of defaming the service itself.

and citizens how to allocate their sympathies, and also the discourses that explain militarized violence.

That is: Motari and Encarnacion threw American identity itself into question. Consequently, sympathy with the dog becomes a way of recuperating it, partially. Anger at the Marines might be more palatable if it can be partly offset by sympathizing with the puppy. Kelly Oliver has written of the overwhelming emotion provoked when we see ourselves through the eyes of animals (125). The comfort of pitying the dog cushions the anguish caused at the sight of its death, while also reaffirming the triumph of a form of Americanness that cares humanely for non-human beings. But as Rebecca Wanzo points out, stories that 'touch the heart' or play on the emotions very often reinforce the status quo (16), and here what is reinforced is a particular fantasy about American identity and compassion. For viewers seeking the emotional frisson of sympathizing with someone in the video, the Marines made it relatively easy to opt for the puppy, and that sympathy is necessarily bound up with not-unproblematic American histories of sentiment. Given all of this, claiming sympathy with the puppy is not a courageous ethical act. It is more of a sentimental drift toward an easy target.

Fully empathizing with the dog is ultimately impossible. There can be no meaningful redress for the animal's mortal suffering, and any response is, necessarily, too late to be of any real use. Even if the puppy had survived the fall, there remains an unbridgeable gap between it and even the most compassionate of spectators: how could one apologize to it? What could any other being, really, hope to communicate? Despite all this essential futility, however, I still want to insist that attending to this kind of cruelty, caring about this kind of suffering, is an ethically important thing to do. And so, I suggest the yelping puppy nudges us to find a different orientation toward the suffering subject. Donna Haraway has argued that an ethical relationship between human and canine species requires meeting dogs as "strangers first," rather than through a screen of "assumptions and stories" about what the animals are (232). In this case, this means seeking a form of attunement to suffering that is somehow (even if temporarily) outside of the discourses that seek to confine or channel it. The rush to make sense of the video obscured not only the pain and terror of the animal, but also its ability to articulate it. A too-narrow focus on human reactions to the video eclipses the agency of the puppy (which is, admittedly, very limited, but not entirely absent) and its capacity to communicate its suffering to distant spectators.

The resultant affective outpouring is especially remarkable, given that American audiences are by now thoroughly accustomed to bearing mediated witness to the suffering and dying of humans in wartime. These scenes have become so commonplace that—as Carrie Rentschler notes—the act of bearing witness to them has become, for most spectators, banal (299). Susan Sontag, in her critically important *Regarding the Pain of Others*, has intimated that even (or perhaps, especially) the most graphic photos of wartime suffering often fail to alert spectators to the true horrors of war, leaving them disaffected or bored. If the sight of another's suffering can introduce a distance between her and the spectator, so too can the sounds of such anguish. Elaine Scarry, for example, has argued that the tendency of pain to "monopolize" the language of the sufferer is what alienates her/him from other people at the very instant when s/he most desires or needs a connection (54). The puppy's cries, however, seemed to have the opposite effect, drawing others in, rather than repelling them. Likewise, the puppy's appearance. The brief moments when the puppy is made to face the camera directly are wrenching. Despite all that might militate against such a connection, the puppy moves affected spectators beyond the ambivalence and non-recognition with which we often confront mediated representations of others' suffering, demonstrating a capacity to reach out beyond the grainy frame of the video to the spectators, and use its voice to connect to them.[13]

Even mediated by the cell phone camera, then mediated again by the computer screen, and in some cases mediated triply by the rebroadcast of the video on television, the puppy's cries had an effect. Marie-José Mondzain's description of a violent image is instructive here. She writes, "When we say that an image is violent we suggest that it can directly act on a subject without any linguistic mediation" (25). And so the puppy ought to prompt us to explore the possibility of an extra-discursive response to the suffering of another.[14] The animal, whom viewers encounter in the last moments of its life, might nudge us beyond the institutions and imperatives of sentiment, to consider the possibility of something that exceeds the blunting force of mediation, and to inquire, seriously, about what that might be. The puppy's

[13] There is an extensive, and growing, body of scholarship on the process of bearing mediated witness to suffering. Among the many influential texts are Butler; Linfield; Sliwinski; and Zelizer. My thinking on these issues is indebted to these, and many other, sources, even as it builds upon or departs from them.

[14] Ann Pellegrini and Jasbir Puar note recent research suggesting that affect might be something beyond language or cognition. Theresa Brennan describes affect as literally and bodily contagious.

yelps puncture spectators' defenses, so that even as they are removed from the scene, they are affected by it. Indeed, even representatives of that minority of viewers who purported to find the video unobjectionable still felt compelled to take a public position on it, rather than leaving it unremarked. In this way, with its non-linguistic but profoundly communicative utterance, the puppy forces those who see and hear it to recognize and attend to it.

This requires a deviation from established cultural patterns for sympathizing with animals. Historically, sympathy for suffering animals has operated by an emphasis on their voicelessness, their lack of agency over their fates, their helplessness; in this model, the role of the compassionate human is to defend the animal against other humans. This gives way to an array of feelings for animals like love, pity, and compassion, accompanied by a certain outrage at those who would harm them, and perhaps a feeling of charitable satisfaction or nobility for having protected them. By reacting to the suffering animals in all of these ways at once, we seem to prove something about ourselves, our ethics, our sensitivity. Our reactions to suffering often seem automatic, or involuntary. The very ideologies and institutions that condition us to feel certain things in response to certain stimuli condition us simultaneously to ignore the mechanisms of that conditioning, and encourage us to think of ourselves as naturally sensitive and responsive to the suffering of other beings. Thus, our affective responses start to seem, in Berlant's words, like "expressions of [a] true capacity for attachment … rather than effects of pedagogy" ("Uncle" 32). These investments get institutionalized in various ways, often within a framework of advocacy for animal rights; such initiatives afford important protections to animals but do not necessarily undermine the hierarchy of human dominion over animals. Instead, they merely soften it.[15]

Generally, these structures of sentiment are meant to help organize, channel, manage, or hierarchize feelings, but in the case of Motari, Encarnacion, and the puppy, they could not do that work. "Sentimental politics," according to Wanzo, dictate the "logic that determines who counts as proper victims" in American culture. Wanzo traces out various American histories to demonstrate that "the logic that determines who counts as proper victims has historically been shaped by sentimental politics" (3). These politics train us how to allocate our affections, identifications, cares, and

[15] For a critique of the limits of animal rights discourse, see LaCapra (152).

judgments. But in this case, that accounting is not so tidy, as the histories of sentimental politics draw spectators into conflict, rather than offering easy guidance about how to apportion their sympathies. The little dog provoked a crisis, revealing the limits of these structures, their flimsiness and incommensurability. The dog compels spectators to make a choice, and so perhaps the anger that the video elicited was not so much at Motari and Encarnacion themselves, or at their actions, but at the crisis they provoked, the way they coerced spectators into making an untenable decision. And so the dog, without being an agent in the human sense, or intending to provoke a reaction (or do anything at all, beyond vocalize its own experience in the moment) did. In this way, the dog creates a zone something like that which Giorgio Agamben theorizes as "the open": a space where we veer, or fly, or are thrown into an encounter with radical otherness that destabilizes familiar categories of difference, a brief freefall outside of discourse.[16]

UNDOMESTICATED AFFECTS

The emphasis on animals' voicelessness and helplessness in anti-cruelty discourse generated a movement that saw its mission as speaking for those who could never hope to speak for themselves. The gradual stretching of the boundaries of citizenship meant that the state took on the role of defender of animals (Pearson). Simultaneously, those who cared for their animals within this framework were able to define themselves through these relationships, rather than defining themselves against, or as the superior opposites of, the non-human animals that shared their homes and their lives, which was a different (and much more contingent) mechanism for subject-formation.[17] Yet given the complex ideological history of American canines, the "dog" beside which these humane citizens defined themselves is not a stable entity, but rather is a construct infused with meaning, overlaid with various fantasies, wrapped in affects. So what, then, does it mean to care about a suffering dog?

The staggering complexity of this question hinges on the otherness of the dog and the human capacity to understand its suffering: the difficulty of deciding on the object and orientation of our care. It is important, on the one

[16] This confirms, in many ways, Jacques Derrida's contention that the speechlessness of animals should not be understood as a "privation" (47). Relatedly, Alice Kuzniar has claimed that it's not the dog, but the human, who cannot speak the right language (2). Carla Freccero writes of human-animal encounters so graphic that they cannot be "contained" by the framework of humanism, and their lingering "hauntology."

[17] This is especially true of the relationships between dogs and humans, which Raymond Madden has described as 'co-constitutive' of both species at once (503).

hand, to acknowledge what Jacques Derrida describes as the absolute, perhaps ultimately unknowable otherness of the animal's point of view (11). Yet there is also an abiding need to make animal suffering humanly legible, on the assumption that humans are the only beings that can prevent, ameliorate, or remedy that suffering.[18] What is required, ultimately, is a willingness to be undone by another creature's suffering, to depart from the familiar mechanisms by which we generally internalize another's feelings as our own.

Thinking through this, how the puppy engages us across a chasm of species difference, requires dwelling on the puppy's yelps and attending also to the puppy's presence before the camera (but moving beyond its "cuteness," which apparently was insufficient protection against cruelty). John Berger writes eloquently of the power of the zoo animal's gaze to make us discomfitingly aware of our own spectatorship, arguing that in such encounters, humans become attuned to the reciprocity of gazes between themselves and captive animals (5). Perhaps this puppy has a similar effect, provoking us to awareness of our own spectatorship, our own helplessness, which leaves us feeling angry and disoriented, but also stripped in some way of the power that would otherwise accrue in us as humans. At the same time, the puppy also underscores the radical limitations of our ability as spectators to set this wrong right, the radical inadequacy of our various human mechanisms for redressing animal suffering, or even comprehending it.

Although many cases of animal cruelty appear to go unpunished—whether because they are never tried, or the alleged perpetrators are found not guilty, or leniently sentenced—this was not the outcome for Motari and Encarnacion. But still, something lingers, inconsolably. That initial empathic response to the suffering of the puppy has no place in official or legal narratives about the crime; that hovering residual anger cannot be sufficiently redressed. Boggs observes that as a culture, we "reserve … apologies exclusively for human beings, because only they participate as subjects in the structural and representational schemes that make up the symbolic order" ("Bestiality" 99). In this case, even if an apology were offered, it would be far too late, and impossible to convey in a form that we could know with any

[18] This draws us near to what Dominick LaCapra describes as the necessary ideal of "empathic unsettlement," which he posits as an alternative to problematic forms of sympathy that rely on false identification with the other or appropriation of their suffering (65-66). Empathic unsettlement, as I understand it, is a way of keeping otherness intact within a framework of deep and profound compassion.

certainty the puppy would comprehend. And so I want to suggest another possibility.

In 2005, the ASPCA launched a new campaign under the slogan: "We Are Their Voice." The claim that "We Are Their Voice" suggests that the ASPCA speaks for those creatures that cannot speak for themselves. Because the ASPCA has persisted in this campaign for nearly a decade so far, it stands to reason that it is effective in cultivating support for their mission. Relatedly, one of the ASPCA's signature television commercials from the same period is a silent montage of pitiable domestic animals—who have presumably been abandoned, neglected, or abused—overlaid with a non-diegetic song, most famously Sarah McLachlan's "Angel," which has proven to be an extremely successful fundraising instrument (Strom). When the ASPCA asserts that "We Are Their Voice," it domesticates the articulations of the suffering animal, silencing the creature, institutionalizing the potentially unwieldy human reaction to it, and inserting a mediation, or a translator, where none might have been required. So what would happen if they let the animals 'speak' (or whimper, or howl, or whine) for themselves?[19] The puppy's cry hints suggestively, piercingly at the answer.

In recent years, the ASPCA has been mailing out fundraising brochures describing itself as moving "Beyond Emotion to Action: Saving Animals' Lives." The message here is that the unruliness of emotion is insufficient, or impractical for their urgent work. But as I think about Motari and Encarnacion's puppy, or what little must remain of it, I wonder what is lost in that transcendence, that move "beyond" the emotion, sometimes violent, that it elicited. As the ASPCA suggests that we (who are their voice, after all) need to become rational subjects in order to help the animals, it overlooks the ways in which humans are simultaneously made and unmade by encounters with other species (Boggs, *Animalia* 24). The thing about this video that staggers me is that I cannot move "beyond" it.[20]

And so it seems that there might be a value in the way that the video mires its spectators.[21] After all, the historically established modes of sympathizing with animals, which conceptualize them as voiceless and either

[19] Deborah Rose implores us to attend to the "implications of the howling of living beings in a time of death" (67).
[20] Hélène Cixous dramatizes the impossibility of such movement.
[21] On the value of dwelling in unpleasant feelings, see Cvetkovich; Ngai.

rely simplistically on emotion or seek to shunt it aside, have not succeeded in eradicating animal cruelty, and did not prevent it in this case. Certainly, I am reluctant to assert that there is any true or authentic sympathy that is somehow untouched or uninflected by ideologies, something magically pure and apolitical. Indeed, deeming something "apolitical" is often a ruse designed precisely to obscure its politics and its histories.[22] Nor am I implying that I have a solution to the so far insoluble problem of cruelty to animals. But the puppy loudly reminds us of its continued urgency, and the inadequacy of the policies and mechanisms we have in place to prevent and adjudicate such cruelty. There is something, I think, in the fumbling responses—these messy articulations—to the video that points in a new direction, somewhere beside these structures, if not entirely beyond them. Just as feral creatures live in uneasy, partial, shifting symbiosis with their human cohabitants, neither dependent upon them nor entirely free of their influence, we might try to cultivate our own feral sentiments in response to animal suffering, affects that bear the traces, necessarily, of their tamer and more regulated counterparts, but refuse the enchainments that come with them. Such undomesticated affects can mark the limits of traditional forms of sentimentality, but also a chasm around them, somewhere wild, loud, and vertiginous that demands to be explored.

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[22] For a critique of the recent scholarly fashion of conceptualizing affects as separate from discourse or purely physiological, see Leys.

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