

# Hard-Won Images

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#### *I see a dog and a person*

I see a dog and a person, but perhaps it's more accurate to say I see a dog and half a person. Several other people are standing and walking, the asphalt street cut by large patches of dusty earth in regular patterns; asphalt lace. The blue bags all look the same, and there are several other dogs in the background, one for each lace hole.

The video which is looping is 16 seconds long, and a dog is spinning in circles around a person, all four feet off the ground. They are both holding onto a thick blue piece of fabric by which the person is pivoting and swinging the dog. Had the video been much longer I might have seen several other things; the moment this half suspended gyration started, when the dog's feet were on the ground. Whether or not the person enticed the dog with the blue cloth, and whether the dog reacted aggressively or not. Whether there is complicated affection or love between the two, or whether they have never met. Whether this is part of a long-standing routine or spectacle meant to impress passers-by. The muzzle of the dog in the video is clamped down on the piece of cloth as the man's hands dig into it too. Is this what holding onto each other looks like? Who's holding onto who? Instead, the video is short. It begins with the dog's first aerial twitches, its coming to terms with flight, and ends as the motion continues.

I feel something boil inside me because her breasts are protruding and swollen; visible as her stomach splays and stiffens. She does what many dogs do during moments like this; her body is locked and immovable, despite the movement she's part of. The word rigor applies to deathly stiffness as it applies to martial mentality and fear. I can't comment on what a dog knows or doesn't know, as I'm not a dog myself. I've met many dogs with their breasts so over-suckled and swollen through years of consecutive litters that they drag on the streets as they walk, blistering and chafing. No matter how battered and mangy the dog's skin is, wherever their breasts aren't ripped and bleeding the skin is soft and smooth.

Several repetitions in, and I'm not sure what I'm seeing anymore, or whether I'm seeing at all. The movement between them is now a solid cone determined by its axis and periphery, and this cone is moving across the screen. I wouldn't call this a dance unless you're keen on calling anything that moves a dance. The dance of the seasons. The dance of the cosmos. Often mentioned is the indifference of the cosmos, and of time. These are chilly dances that continue regardless of our feelings. Surely, I'm part of the cosmos though, and I feel sometimes. So, in that sense the cosmos feels a great deal more than one would think. I wonder if assuming the indifference in big, inscrutable, all-powerful forces is a way to relinquish belonging, and perhaps responsibility, and maybe pain. Perhaps an indifferent parent is a scary thing, and we'd rather not be in doubt. Does the person in the video wonder about the dog's love for them?

I forgot I wasn't going to call it a dance, so really none of these thoughts matter. It's more of a tug-of-war in which the victory line is a circle, inside of which is one party. The other is permanently outside, its feet off the ground. So, this is, by all means, an unequal situation.

One doesn't need to know anything about dogs, dogs in Casablanca, dogs in the dog market of Casablanca, or people, to know that this is an unequal situation by standard measurements of power. Nor does one need to know about these things to see violence. Selim happens to know something about dogs, dogs in Casablanca, and the dogs in the dog market of Casablanca, and people. He was there and caught this moment on video. He seems to have decided to keep things short and to the point, but upon closer viewing I realise the point keeps spreading out, and has by now washed over my feet, beyond my thoughts, and brought by a strange distortion which



borders on both clarity and derangement. So, in fact he seems to have decided to not keep things short and to the point at all.

When faced with something like this, the immediate response is to solve. This interaction between man and dog allows no solving though, and bats all gazing back. By its very nature and how we are seeing it, what is clear is clear and what isn't simply isn't. The funnel end of my viewership is crowded by a thronging mass of notions. Some aren't even mine (possessive) but show up anyhow by way of strange osmosis. Is the dog us? (No, it's a dog. But not all dogs are the same). Is this symbolic? How is this meaningful? Who's the observer? Who's the director? Who's both? How does this continue? Does it represent something? I'm in pain. I'm sad. I'm sorry. I'm angry. I'm amused. By the way, was Selim smiling (happily), smiling (appeasingly), or frowning while filming this? What is the person's face like, the one in the video? Are they smiling? Or grimacing like the dog. Are their teeth showing?

One could come to a set of conclusions regarding this video loop by arbitrarily making a few choices and enjoy the relief: the dog is having fun. The dog is used to this life. The dog on the side of the screen that lunges towards the duo is her jealous husband who resents the person and her love for them. Or, the dog is miserable. This is an accurate depiction of the mistreatment of creatures, of hierarchies bleeding into each other, of violence. Of the casual nature of violence. Of the way violence has a prodigious ability to seep downward through history and place. What's also possible is to hold each notion as simultaneously valid. As I did, two things happened:

1 I felt less like the god of understanding and more like something which just exists (which is more enjoyable albeit less practical), and 2 most things started feeling contradictory.

The contradiction opens up a gap, a glimpse into the ambiguity of being. I believe Selim has used the energy of every relationship in this work to create points of ease and tension, and an oscillation between them. Where the oscillation stops, or slants, or spills over - there comes a flicker, a change.

Uncannily, the oscillation mirrors itself in the one we see on-screen. Is there any part of existence which is inalienable?

I feel that gazing into mysteries could be one of the most practised and lived pleasures, habits and responsibilities available to us - but it isn't. I feel relinquishing our favoured positions within this gazing, or having more than one position simultaneously, is also an oscillation. One might say this is confusion, but this work seems to exalt it meaningfully.

What else is known to me, is that this one work exhibition is one part of two. The second iteration will take place elsewhere, at a different time. Where there could have been at least one ending, one conclusion (this work's viewing beginning and ending here) there is none. The oscillations stack up and lay onto each other, and there's no real ascertained foothold for viewership. Or there is, but that's on you.



– Jackie Poloni