

# The power of images or Athena kicked

The video of someone cruelly torturing some puppies to death recently circulated in the web for a few days. This person showed his crime in detail and even dared say where he lived (supposedly somewhere in Extremadura) and gave identifying information, as if he wanted to challenge the police to find him. The images showed him playing a gruesome game with his victims, poor trusting puppies who may have thought they were beginning another way of having fun, as they happily wagged their tails, right until the moment they felt they were being mutilated.

The reaction of many people was to report the existence of the video and alert the police so that the abuser, who named himself “Knino” might be apprehended. Many signatures were collected, and a platform to start a citizen-based action against the callous perpetrator of the crime was created. What wasn't prevented, however, was the broadcasting of the video on several television channels accompanying the news report. Some of us changed the channel, but I'm certain the images were widely viewed. I know this through the comments of friends and colleagues.

It is unacceptable that images of violence against animals are broadcast without control and without submission to any form of regulation. A few years ago we were shocked by the images and the cries of pain of a dog tied to a shed and beaten mercilessly by his keeper, images which were broadcast by many television channels on their news programmes between 20:30 and 22:00h, times at which children may be viewing. What do people react to? Visible and audible violence or respectful attitudes toward animals? The question is by no means banal.

There is no general and consensual ethical code regarding the appearance of animals in the media. It is therefore not surprising to come across images of violence against animals shown with no restraint whatsoever, save that which responds to the pressure of viewer complaints. This can be too late, as the images will have already been shown.

Another recent example of regrettable treatment of images of violence toward an animal involved the kicking by a football player of an owl, the mascot of the rivals that lived in the stadium and that day had fallen to the pitch after being hit by the ball. The veterinary service could do nothing to save the owl's life. Several television channels showed and replayed the kicking of the helpless and flightless bird. The commentators offered no sign of disapproval of the act; they simply and repeatedly gloated over the scene of the kicking of the “owl-unofficial-ball”. To add to the harm, there is no knowledge that the officials imposed disciplinary measures on the player or as much as reprimanded him. There has been a reaction against this presumably punishable act of violence in Internet forums in Latin America, where it took place, and around the world. It may turn out that the real life, that which reacts against violence and is inclined to defend animals, is the virtual one. It may turn out that the symbol of wisdom and philosophical reflection, the incarnation of the goddess Athena, the owl, today lies helpless on the ground and is kicked without mercy.

The first thing I would like to put in the spotlight is the lack of ethics of our media. Secondly, I reiterate the need to appropriately respect animals and their environment and their idiosyncrasy when they are portrayed in the media. A third notion I would like to end with is the need to recognise that images of violence against animals are as harmful to children as other bloody scenes involving fights and guns, and that they must be adequately regulated. Violence, whoever it is inflicted on, only generates more violence.

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