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Sexual Violence in the Field of Vision

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What makes a photograph good for thinking? In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes (1981) proposed that photography is most effective “not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks” (p. 38). My own thinking in this chapter has been animated by a single photograph taken in 2012 by Meghan Rhoad, a senior researcher for the Women’s Rights Division of Human Rights Watch (HRW).¹ Rhoad is not a professional photographer and the photograph

¹Unfortunately, while Human Rights Watch’s images are covered by a Creative Commons license, the organization declined to grant permission to reproduce the photograph here due to the fact that Palgrave is a commercial press. The image and the full report, *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada*, can be viewed and downloaded here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/02/13/those-who-take-us-away/abusive-policing-and-failures-protection-indigenous-women>. The original caption reads: “A community worker in a northern British Columbia town holds underwear that she distributes to women on the street, some of whom reported to her of having been raped by police and having their underwear taken.”

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is neither frightening nor repelling. It depicts an anonymous community worker holding a handful of brightly colored undergarments in an undisclosed town in northern British Columbia, Canada. Despite this somewhat quotidian content—or indeed perhaps *because* of its ordinariness—the image has the potential to strain the faculty of imagination. Through a delicate interplay of textual and visual information, Rhoad’s photograph presents evidence of systematic sexual violence occurring in this region of the country. The violation is not pictured directly. Instead, the image entreats spectators to imagine the awful scenes haunting this territory, while at the same time, manages to safeguard the dignity of its subjects. It commands a distinct kind of labor—an affectively charged mode of thinking that involves something more than reason or aesthetic appraisal.

Rhoad’s photograph is exemplary in this respect: a model for a delicate representational strategy that manages to enlist the viewer’s imagination without subjecting individuals to the further withering force of the gaze. Such strategies are particularly significant for human rights work that involves sexual violence, and indeed, perhaps for any social or political crisis that reduces human persons to a state of “bare life,” that is, a condition in which people have been stripped of their very capacity to access the political and juridical communities that grant them the protections of human rights (Agamben 1998).

Typically, the photographs that accompany human rights reporting are designed to allow spectators to make a contact with a crisis that is still unfolding—to encounter distant strangers through the unique signifying capacity that the medium affords. But when the crisis involves sexual violence, it becomes particularly important to attend to the dynamics of what John Berger (1972) named “ways of seeing”: the various structures that govern the visible world, how we make meaning from what we see, as well as the very conditions under which something can come to be perceived—how the visible field is itself constructed and organized by structures of power.

An ever-growing body of feminist and anticolonial research has taught us that sexual, racial, and colonial oppression operates at the level of the gaze. Scholars and activists have become increasingly familiar, for example, with the ways that Western visual culture has effectively reduced female subjects to objects of male desire: “Woman as image, man as bearer of the look,” as Laura Mulvey indelibly put it in 1975. Myriad battles have been fought about representations of the female body,

including representations of sexual violence directed against women (Brownmiller 1975; Hesford 2011; Horek 2004; Azoulay 2008).

Racial oppression operates in a corresponding, if not exactly analogous, mode. This visual dynamic could be exemplified by the infamous encounter Frantz Fanon (1988 [1952]) describes in *Black Skin White Masks*, when a white child cries out simply at the sight of him in public: “Look, a negro! Mama, see the negro! I’m frightened!” Fanon is painfully eloquent about the “epidermalized” violence of this encounter, describing it as an instance of being sealed into a crushing state of objecthood, “fixed” by the gaze of the other, in the sense that a “chemical solution is fixed by a dye” (p. 82).

The gesture of reducing certain subjects to objects, effectively barring them from accessing subjectivity, is also a well-established technique of colonial domination (Said 1978). A variety of forms of settler colonial governance, for instance, have historically defined Indigenous territory as “empty” land (*terra nullius*)—effectively refusing to recognize or acknowledge the rights of original inhabitants—even as they unleashed a series of genocidal tactics of elimination. This logic persists in contemporary forms of settler colonial governance, which are in operation in the Canadian context where Meghan Rhoad’s photograph was made. It is by deliberate design that Indigenous lives continue to “disappear” through limited access to health care and education, leading to premature death, incarceration, impoverishment, and assimilation (Dean 2005; Palmater 2011, 2014; Taschereau Mammers 2017).

The history of our various ways of seeing operates, in this respect, as a kind of parallel to the history of human rights struggle itself. Both histories are filled with episodes of violence that are both materially and symbolically devastating. And as Kimberle Crenshaw (1997) has taught us, these dynamics have a multiplying effect when they are intersectional—when the violence that women experience has been shaped by multiple dimensions of their identities such as race and class.

There is, nevertheless, reason for hope. As bell hooks argues, our historically entrenched structures of visual domination also contain possibilities for agency. In her landmark essay, “The Oppositional Gaze,” hooks (1992) offers an account of her early education in the ways of seeing. As a young black girl growing up in the southern United States, she was repeatedly punished for staring and quickly learned to look the other way when necessary. And yet the punishment also provided its own lesson about the power of the gaze: “Afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze.

There is power in looking,” she notes (p. 115). hooks also describes spaces of resistance where the subject-who-is-looked-at can interrogate the gaze of the other and look back: “Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of the structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (p. 116). hooks essay champions this courageous kind of looking, nurturing the idea that transforming our ways of seeing can serve as a strategy for changing reality.

Inspired by Rhoad’s photograph and from hooks’ critical example, this chapter aims to identify some of the strategies that might enable spectators to visually interrogate instances of sexual violence, strategies that might help us document this pervasive form of human rights violation (in the sense of providing evidence), as well as enable us to emotionally confront and work through some of the traumatic effects.

A warning to the reader: this exercise in looking aims to enlist your active engagement, indeed, to stretch the limits of your imagination. While it has become a common tactic to try to neuter the gaze—to ban images of sexual violence from the field of vision or otherwise police the perverse pleasure they can yield—I believe such disavowals only deepen the dilemmas surrounding this difficult material. I follow Joyce McDougal’s (1995) definition of perversion here, which aims to define a specific kind of human relations, notably sexual relations, that are imposed upon another person (or group of persons) who has not granted consent—a form of human relationality in which one individual (or group) is indifferent to the vulnerability or the desires of the other. The reader needs to access the full power of her imagination in order to traverse these difficult scenes of sexual violence. Like bell hooks, I want to nurture a courageous kind of looking—indeed, a courageous kind of *imagining*—as the means to defend and protect the idea of a fundamental right to an embodied sense of human dignity. Put differently, I am suggesting that our ways of seeing—our modes of attending to the vulnerability and integrity of particular bodies—can itself be understood as a form of human rights practice.

THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS

I first encountered Meghan Rhoad’s photograph in a 2013 Human Rights Watch report titled, *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada*. The image is one of seventeen photographs

included in the report, the majority of which were taken by Samer Muscati, another HRW researcher. While the report is richly illustrated, the researchers make sure to note that several of the photographs they made during their six-week investigation could not be published due to fears of compromising the safety of the women and girls in question. We could perhaps place these documents under the heading of “unshowable photographs” (Azoulay 2012). Despite the increasingly banal claims that our contemporary mediascape is overwhelmed by a flood of information, there are any number of important documents that remain unshowable—including images that we cannot see (or “share” in the ubiquitous language of social media), precisely because of the coiled force they are thought to contain. If we have, indeed, entered a post-photographic era, as many critics claim, we would do well not to lose sight of what such unshowable photographs continue to ask us to think and to imagine.

Built from research conducted in ten towns across northern BC, the HRW report chronicles the relationship between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Indigenous women and girls who live in the region. The report offers evidence for the ways the police have failed to protect this population from violence, but more significantly, it documents cases in which the police have been the chief *perpetrators* of this violence.

The HRW report contributes to a growing collection of evidence documenting the on-going forms of abuse committed against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The Native Women’s Association of Canada has been at the forefront of this battle, tirelessly documenting cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, as has Justice for Girls, the Vancouver-based civil rights organization that first petitioned HRW to investigate the situation in northern BC. The crisis has also drawn the attention of the international humanitarian community: apart from HRW, Amnesty International has conducted an investigation, as has the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States whose mission is to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere. More recently, the United Nations has become involved, conducting an investigation under the auspices of their Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In September 2016, the Canadian government finally launched an independent National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (on-going at the time of writing), and in 2017, HRW released a second submission to the government on police abuse of Indigenous women in the province of Saskatchewan.

Despite the growing spotlight cast on this issue, the HRW reports remain the only extended, independent investigation of police violence against Indigenous communities. The 2013 report relays accounts of young girls being pepper-sprayed and Tasered, a 12-year old attacked by a police dog, a 17-year old punched repeatedly by an officer who had been called to help her, women strip-searched by male officers, and women injured due to excessive force during arrest. The most disturbing allegations concern rape and other forms of sexual assault. The HRW researchers gathered testimony about police officers raping women in five of the ten towns they visited in northern British Columbia.

One of the most disquieting testimonies contained in the 2013 report is from an Indigenous woman who was given the pseudonym Gabriella. Gabriella describes how, in July 2012, RCMP officers picked her up off the street, took her outside of town, raped her, and threatened to kill her if she told anyone, warning her that they could “make it look like an accident” (HRW 2013, p. 59). Based on Gabriella’s description, HRW was able to find and photograph the remote location (which is inaccessible by public transportation) where the rape occurred. When the researchers showed her these photographs a week later, Gabriella reacted with distress. Pointing at details in the images, she further explained how the officers had made her stand with her hands against the side of a building while she was being raped. The organization declined to publish these images in order to protect Gabriella’s safety. They note that there is a disturbingly acute fear of exposure and retaliation from the police in this region (HRW 2013, pp. 59–60).

The report also situates this contemporary sexual violence within a historical context. As the police force of jurisdiction in many areas where Indian Residential Schools were located in British Columbia, the RCMP served as historic partners to the Indian Agents. From the 1840s through to the 1970s, this police force helped to remove Indigenous children from their homes and returned truants to the boarding Schools, often by force. The school system was created for the purpose of removing children their own culture and assimilating them into the settler colonial society. Over the course of the system’s existence, it is estimated that about thirty percent of Indigenous children—roughly 150,000 young boys and girls—were placed in Residential Schools across the country. At least 6,000 of these students died while in state care. Thousands more were subjected to a multitude of abuses (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015). There is an on-going debate about the RCMP’s complicity in the crimes that occurred in these Schools.

The title of the HRW report is drawn from the Carrier word for “police,” which translates, literally, as “those who take us away.”

We are beginning to understand the ways that trauma involves an unconscious structure which is actualized and transmitted inter-generationally. We know, in a certain manner of speaking, that the historical violence of the Indian Residential School system lives on in the generations that follow (Quinn 2007; Bombay et al. 2013; Stewart et al. 2001). But the inherited memory traces of these abuses are not just carried by the survivors. We do not yet know enough about the ways the structure of this trauma (or more precisely, the “pre-structure”) is carried and transmitted by the perpetrators. It perhaps bears pointing out, in this context, that policing tends to be a family profession. The violence that continues to unfold in various parts of the country undoubtedly has its roots in this living history.

The 2013 HRW report also mentions the former provincial court judge, David Ramsay, who in 2004, plead guilty to several charges, including: sexual assault causing bodily harm, obtaining sexual services from someone under 18, and breach of trust by a public officer. Ramsay had been buying Indigenous girls for sex for almost a decade. Some of these girls had appeared before him in his own courtroom. A group of his victims eventually came forward to testify that the judge had hired them for sex when they were between ages 12 and 17, and in a number of incidents, had violently abused them. In one case, Ramsay rammed a girl’s head into his car’s dashboard, raped her, and then abandoned her in an outlying area without clothes, forcing her to hitchhike into town naked. Ramsay’s actions continue to haunt the community, in part, because of unresolved questions about who else was involved in his systematic abuse. There have been allegations that as many as ten RCMP officers were party to the sexual exploitation of these girls (HRW 2013, pp. 31–32).

Similar stories of sexual abuse perpetuated by agents of the state are beginning to emerge in other parts of the country (Leavitt 2016). Taken altogether, it is becoming clear that this form of violence is, in fact, one of the technologies of Canadian sovereignty—an atrocious form of governance that is designed to disenfranchise the Indigenous population’s claim to dignity and basic human rights while simultaneously demonstrating the power of the state.

For HRW and other human rights organizations, the key question becomes: how to make this form of violence visible without subjecting its victims to further harm?

ACTS OF IMAGINATION

Rhoad's photograph appears early on in the Human Rights Watch report. The image shows an anonymous community worker displaying several pairs of women's undergarments to the camera. Sometimes I count nine, sometimes eleven. As the report describes, the community worker distributes these undergarments to women on the street as part of her work. She does this because the women she encounters have been raped by the police who then "confiscate" their underwear. This combination of textual and visual evidence provokes distressing questions: Do the police take the underwear because they know it may contain evidence of the sexual assault? Or do they steal the clothing as some kind of perverse trophy? How many times has this community worker distributed clothing to women in the region? The answers are surely significant, but either way, this community worker has learned from her experience. She knows what supplies to pack to help ameliorate the vulnerability she encounters (HRW 2013, p. 60).

The photograph entreats spectators to learn from this experience too. It asks us to try to digest the nature of this crude political anatomy, the way sovereign forms of power are brokered across and through women's bodies. The photograph represents a particularly fragile form of human rights evidence in this respect: it can only perform its work by luring the spectator into imagining the scenes that precede this picture, and by demanding that we tolerate the affective force of this imagining—scenes that are, of course, nowhere to be seen in the photograph.

"In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves," Georges Didi-Huberman (2008, p. 3) has insisted in relation to a rather different set of images. The art historian's entreaty concerns four clandestine photographs taken in Auschwitz, but spectators of Rhoad's photograph are similarly implored to imagine, in this case, to imagine the hell that is the dark streets of Prince George, to imagine what takes place in jail cells and in the back of police cars, indeed, all along Highway 16, nicknamed the "Highway of Tears" by locals in a grim reference to the historic Trail of Tears—because on this route Indigenous peoples are once again subject to all-too familiar forms of exposure and abuse.

Spectators of this photograph are entreated to imagine for themselves what rape can do to a young person's body and mind. Apart from the bruised and bloodied flesh, the "wet" left between women's legs (HRW 2013, p. 61), we are entreated to imagine how such acts can install a state of social death inside a living human being, exiling a person from

her own body, and engendering “a total collapse of spirit” in Marcia Crosby’s (1993, p. 110) powerful account, shattering the very capacity for trust in a shared and sharable human condition.

The photograph asks us to imagine all this for ourselves. It does this work quietly. There is no spectacle of suffering pictured here. But the image nevertheless manages to bring us closer to the primal scene that lies at the heart of sovereign power. Put differently, the photograph entreats us to begin to regard this scene of sexual violence as central to sovereignty’s plot. As it turns out the “abstract nakedness of the being nothing but human,” as Hannah Arendt (2004 [1951], p. 380) famously phrased it, is not so abstract at all. In other words, it is not only the loss of a political community that can cut off a human being’s access to the human condition. Rhoad’s photograph helps us understand that there is a much more intimate—and as yet, largely unrecognized—strategy that sovereign power has at its disposal to cleave a subject from their capacity to live a human life—namely, by attacking the individual’s claim to her own body, and more specifically, her sexual integrity.

The role sexual violence plays in the exercise of sovereign power does not typically command the spotlight. Since 9/11, the chief protagonist in the political and legal literature on sovereignty and human rights abuses has been the “detainee,” a figure that has come into view largely through the United States government’s decision to detain terrorist suspects at Guantánamo Bay Prison without judicial review. The focus on this figure is understandable. This historical period has witnessed an almost unprecedented distortion and destruction of centuries-old legal and political principles—a complete abandonment of habeas corpus—in favor of secret courts and ever expanding “security” measures (Peirce 2010). The “detainee” goes by several names and is generally defined as the subject of unlawful rendition, detention, and torture. Giorgio Agamben (1998) has shown how this figure has a historic-legal precedent in *homo sacer*, a figure from ancient Roman law who is cast beyond the pale of the law precisely so he may be tortured and killed with impunity.

The predominant focus on this figure in the literature on sovereign violence has a way of erasing important political distinctions about race and gender. As Ewa Ziarek (2008) points out, such erasures have the effect of eliding important differences about the particular forms of life destroyed by state power. It is important, in this respect, to point out that the “detainee” is not the central protagonist of the 2013 Human Rights Watch report. Nor does this figure appear in any of the dreadful

scenes that Meghan Rhoad's photograph can conjure to mind (which is not the same thing as saying they are absent from this story). In this particular account, it is individuals like Gabriella who are central—women who have been drawn into sovereignty's plot, not so they may be tortured and killed, but so they can be *raped* with impunity. Positioning women such as Gabriella as the chief protagonist in the story of sovereign violence shifts our view of the concealed nucleus of Western biopolitics (Sliwinski 2017). Sexual violence becomes perceptible as a central technology of sovereignty, serving, in particular in this case, as form a "law-preserving" power, to cite Walter Benjamin's (1921) important distinction. In the Canadian political landscape, Indigenous women and girls have been positioned by the government as figures of exclusion—relegated to a space of unlimited exposure to human rights violation, which, in turn does not count as a crime.

By placing Rhoad's photograph at the center of this story, spectators might begin to understand how sexual violence serves as one of the most insidious technologies of settler colonialism. This violence does not simply divest subjects of territory in the standard sense of the term, but rather targets the individual's sense of sovereignty over her own body. It does its work, in part, by installing a sense of shame, by attacking the individual's core capacity to form a stable and coherent bodily ego, by shredding the ability to create a sense of self as a subject who is worthy of dignity and rights. And importantly, this violence is not limited to individual acts of rape. The strategy is part of a broad set of policies designed to target and destroy a community's sense of cohesion—indeed, to destroy the very sense of being *a people* (Smith 2005; Warwick 2009).

EVOCATIVE OBJECTS

The historic difficulty in registering this dimension of sovereign power has been, in part, a problem of vision. Scenes of sexual violation, when they are pictured at all, are often governed by an unspoken instruction to turn away, to avert one's gaze so as to preserve the dignity of the victim or to avoid the moral accusation of prurient looking. There is good reason to tread cautiously here, but as Sharon Marcus has taught us, there are also good reasons for *not* turning away. In a landmark essay from the 1990s, Marcus (1992) defined rape as a matter of language as much as a physical act, as "a *process* of sexist gendering" (p. 391). Working against an identity politics that defines women as inherently violable, Marcus's

approach emphasizes the possibilities for resistance. Rather than treat rape as fact to be accepted or opposed, Marcus shows us how analyzing and undermining the linguistic terms of sexual violence can serve as an important means of prevention. This means interrogating how this violence is “enabled by narratives, complexes, and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force, but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts” (p. 389). Defining sexual violence in this way is to insist on the possibility of changing the script.

To translate Marcus’s intervention into visual terms, spectators must learn to defy the predominant script that governs the gaze, directing spectators to look away. In order to combat the pervasiveness of sexual violence, we must find the courage to look, and indeed, to look precisely as a means to critique and resist—to challenge the ubiquity of this form of violence and to protect the idea of a fundamental human dignity as central to human rights.

Meghan Rhoad has provided a model for this courageous kind of looking, and I take her photograph to be an exemplar of visual human rights practice: in order to simultaneously protect the dignity of her subjects and to indict the agents of the state, Rhoad trained her camera on the material artifacts. The gesture involves more than simply collecting evidence (in the legal sense); the strategy effectively turns the accouterments of sexual violence into “evocative objects”—that is, into items that can serve as carriers and transmitters of intense affective experience (Bollas 1992, 2008). This creative visual practice makes use of whatever materials are available to hand—in this case, the undergarments carried by a social worker. These materials become evidence of a crime in Rhoad’s hands, but perhaps more importantly, they become visual objects that can enable spectators to actively imagine the ways in which Indigenous women are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence in the Canadian state. The relatively simple gesture of foregrounding and framing these quotidian objects helps transmit something of the devastating force of this sovereign violence, evoking strongly affective scenes that spectators might not be able to imagine otherwise.

The American photojournalist, Nina Berman, has mobilized a similar visual strategy in her recent series of images depicting trial evidence from cases involving sexual slavery and human trafficking in the U.S. Included in the series are several photographs of a set of jewelry designed and worn by Alex Campbell, a violent and seasoned Chicago pimp. Campbell, who

called himself “the Cowboy,” had a collection of custom-made jewelry that featured his personal horseshoe logo (Fig. 11.1, 11.2). The branding extended to the women who worked for him: he tattooed his logo onto their necks, and in one case had a thirteen-line, sixty-word homage to himself tattooed onto a woman’s back (Berman 2014).



Fig. 11.1 Nina Berman. A mallet used by Donnell Baines to beat his victims in an Upper East Side sex-trafficking operation. In 2013, Baines was sentenced to sixty-two years in prison



Fig. 11.2 Nina Berman. A diamond ring and cufflinks owned by worn by the pimp Alex Campbell, who called himself “the Cowboy.” Campbell also tattooed the horseshoe logo on the women he enslaved, some of whom came from Belarus and Ukraine

Berman’s series explores the psychology behind this mode of relating to others. She brings the most disturbing aspects of human relationality to the surface and then invites spectators to imaginatively enter into these perverse environments where people are treated like things. Her stated aim is to reveal “the mindset of the perpetrator,” although spectators could just as easily find themselves identifying with the victim. Either way, by casting us as agents in these scenes, the photographer has placed spectators in uncomfortable proximity to sexual violence. Encountering these images is a bit like being suddenly thrust into an improvised play—like being handed a stage prop with minimal instruction.

The visual strategy borrows equally from the genre of crime scene photography and from the work of feminist performance artists like Ana Mendieta or Rebecca Belmore, who mobilize their own bodies as a medium for registering the emotional impact of sexual violence that has gone otherwise unrecognized. Like these artists, Berman’s attention to the material dimensions of this violence underscores the embodied dimension of human dignity. Her photographs insist upon the idea that dignity is not just an abstract concept, but perhaps more importantly a lived experience. Her patient meditation on these objects exposes the fragility of human dignity, and more specifically, the way that a woman’s

capacity to protect and maintain the integrity of her own body is particularly vulnerable to the social bond. Like Meghan Rhoad, Berman helps us understand that the “human condition” is just not an abstract political community, but a profoundly embodied aspect of human experience that depends on protecting and maintaining the body’s integrity.

NEW WAYS OF SEEING

By focusing on the imaginative dimensions of our object relations, these visual practices provide a new way of seeing sexual violence. The “lesson” here rests on cultivating the spectator’s willingness to intimately engage these violent and chaotic scenes. The photographers ask us to cast a clear, dry, unblinking eye on the tactic of sexual violation as integral to the logic of sovereign power. These images put spectators into contact with the material traces of experiences, which, for many of us, remain difficult to comprehend.

This visual strategy becomes particularly important in situations where there is a dearth of other forms of evidence, as is so often the case with sexual violence. In such instances, these evocative objects take on a distinctly political cast, helping to lift some of the repression that surrounds these scenes, putting emphasis on context and power rather than more conventionally measurable forms of evidence. The objects do not speak for themselves, but they can help ground and substantiate fragile testimonies that have exceeded other epistemic frames (Givoni 2011; Keenan and Weizman 2012).

Spectators’ collective acts of imagination, by extension, become an important supporting activity—a kind of counter-*dispositif*, if you will—that works against the larger structures of state domination. This is Hannah Arendt’s (1992) point about the political significance of the imagination: this faculty works when there is an absence in the visual field; it uses appearances to offer a “glimpse of the nonvisible” (p. 80). For Arendt, our imagination is integral to the capacity to think and judge because it provides the *schema*—the mental images we use to form concepts.

In less philosophical terms, these kinds of photographs are important to human rights work because they use the materials that are available to hand in order to cultivate new ways of seeing and imagining what is not given to sight. The objects appearing in the photographs serve as a springboard for imagining what has been deliberately barred from view.

The images are designed to train and hone spectators' capacity to register this violence, and to do so in a way that protects the fundamental dignity of the human person. As paradoxical as it might sound, the lesson here is to learn to look courageously—to steadfastly imagine this awful violence as the very means to defend and protect the inviolate place that exists in each of us. No doubt, this is a kind of learning that hovers at a boiling point, threatening to break experience open. We are asked to enter a world where sexual violence is not so much exceptional as unending. The photographs put us into contact with this world not simply to arouse feelings of outrage, but so that spectators are faced with the task of confronting this form of sovereign violence and imagining it for themselves. We must face and, indeed, imagine what is happening to our most vulnerable citizens in order to build a better political future for all.

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