"Against Transparency: Redacted Documents and the Visuality of Military Detention"

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During the presidency of George W. Bush, increased secrecy and noncompliance with Freedom of Information Act requests allowed torture and detention programs to function with systematic efficiency. Often, torture memos and other documents related to detention that were procured through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests were produced as heavily redacted that were nearly unreadable. This paper examines how redacted spaces - typically censored with black and white boxes - are visual images that often paradoxically signal the innate impossibilities of recording and witnessing violence. Though challenges to militarized imprisonment often attempt to 'make visible' unseen practices, the 'transparency' of these documents does not actually enunciate the detainee's social and experiential worlds. Instead, this paper argues the visual politics of redaction offer a point of entry that allow us to read these documents as more than simply the failure of transparency.

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