

# A Pedagogy of Rhetorical Looking: Atrocity Images at the Intersection of Vision and Violence

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**W**e begin with an image.

A 19-year-old young man with a wounded left arm hanging motionless at his side lists to the right as he crawls out of a small covered boat where he had taken refuge from the manhunt. His face bloodied and festooned with the red dot of a sniper's laser sight, he lifts his sweatshirt to demonstrate his lack of a weapon as he surrenders to the police. One of an array of 48 photographs leaked by Massachusetts State Police Sgt. Sean Murphy two months after the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon bombing, the photograph records the apprehension and arrest of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of two perpetrators of the tragedy that killed three and injured over 260 civilians (Cooper, Schmidt & Schmitt).<sup>1</sup> A "tactical photographer" for the state police and a participant in the search for the Tsarnaev brothers, Murphy released the set of documentary photographs for publication online in *Boston* without authorization (Wolfson). Portraying police officers, police vehicles, and emergency personnel, the array also includes a shocking group of images featuring Tsarnaev, docile before his

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captors, body injured, exposed, and vulnerable. Jeopardizing his career, Murphy leaked the photos to rebut a very different image of Tsarnaev published on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, one that Murphy believed glamorized the young terrorist. Fearing the image would serve as “an incentive” for others to commit terrorist acts, the police sergeant wanted the public to see the “real” Tsarnaev: an intimidated terrorist caught in a sniper’s gun sight (qtd. in Wolfson).<sup>2</sup>

We open with this image from the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing to emphasize three related points germane to *atrocious images*, which we define as photographs depicting human-against-human violence. First, Murphy’s unauthorized release of the photographs highlights the paradoxical role of an atrocity image in legitimating one act of violence—Tsarnaev’s capture—while protesting another—the Boston Marathon bombing. Second, the leaked images and the context reveal the presence of myriad acts of violence nested in and complicit with the overt corporeal suffering of victims and perpetrator; and, third, the tension Murphy identifies between the manhunt images and the *Rolling Stone* cover, between what he understands as real versus glamorized, stresses the importance of perception, or the ways in which the viewer—including the photographer—sees an image and thus determines the nature, cause, and effect of the violence portrayed. These three points encapsulate the reinforcing and troubling relationship of violence, image, and vision in an era when violence and its mass mediation proliferate. We situate our essay within this fraught relationship to argue for the value of *rhetorical looking* as a pedagogical strategy in the English classroom, one concerned with undermining violence through visual engagement.

As violence outside and inside the academy expands in scope and frequency, its salience within the language classroom likewise increases. Michael Blitz and C. Mark Hurlbert stress this point, arguing that “the teaching of writing has everything to do with both violence *and* peace” (51, emphasis original); to ignore its reality and its importance to literacy, they argue, “is to invite a living death into our classrooms” (22). The teaching of literature is equally implicated in the need to grapple with violence, as Mary Rose O’Reilley makes clear. In an era marked by “students’ calm acceptance of violence as a cultural norm” (27), the literary imagination and the literary text, she contends, can help teachers and students picture a “different kind of world, a different balance of forces” (35) where “people stop killing each other” (Hasan, qtd. in O’Reilley 9). Rhetorical looking enriches that language-oriented agenda, and it does so by directing attention to the intersection of image and vision with violence, identifying the atrocity image as a potential site for intervention in the narrative of humans harming humans.

Comprised of four interlocking and reciprocal tactics that operate nonlinearly, rhetorical looking presents a new way—a measured and deliberate way—of looking that addresses the troubling conundrums raised by an atrocity image and its partnership with violence. “We cannot look at atrocity photographs in the same ways as we look at other photographs,” Jay Prosser warns, for the old ways of looking too easily invite viewers to deflect the knowledge of violence, to intellectualize and thus detach from its anguish, to reinforce it, or to accept it as an intransigent quality of human nature. Instead, to undercut rather than replicate violence, atrocity images necessitate different, more mindful, ways of perception, he argues (10). Rhetorical looking constitutes one response to that necessity. More than a revision of conventional approaches to analyzing visual artifacts, rhetorical looking moves beyond reception and critique to attend to both a photograph’s image-content *and* to the perceptual habits by which that content is evoked. By reflecting on its own processes—revealing agency and answerability in looking—rhetorical looking performs what we call *slow looking*, or a thoughtful and conscientious method of interacting with visual representations of human violence. Such a mode of slow looking, we contend, is crucial for redressing the violence circulating within and around atrocity images, especially in an “image world . . . [that] privileges speed” (DeLuca 87). As Kevin DeLuca argues, the “ceaseless circulation of images in our media matrix” fosters a rapidity of perception that erodes contemplation, favors surfaces over depth, and replaces the gaze with the glance (87). While DeLuca argues for speed as the founding premise of a new criticism of images, Jeremy Engels underscores the limits of the glance for intervening in violence. Visual speed, he warns, makes understanding and countering violence difficult because it “encourages us to attune to violence at only a surface-level depth” (3). Aligning with Engels’s concern, rhetorical looking slows down perception, helping viewers get below the surface-level depth of the suffering captured by a photographic image and, in the process, potentially fosters actions that answer to rather than dismiss visual violence.

The English classroom presents itself as a powerful site for learning and practicing rhetorical looking. By positioning itself at the intersection of violence, image, and vision, a pedagogy of rhetorical looking responds to calls for the English classroom to deal more fully with violence and to do so within the context of the current visual tsunami. Diana George and Diane Shoos bring violence, image, and classroom together, arguing that, while English studies has increasingly attended to visual communication over the past two decades, such attention has achieved a “singular urgency” in the wake of the widespread distribution of “images of torture, humiliation, and death” (587). To undermine violence requires more than alphabetic literacy and literary imagination; it requires, as

well, attention to the visual. This need becomes even more exigent when we consider not just the images of violence dispersed throughout our culture at large but also the images of violence entering into the classroom itself. Atrocity images do not merely impinge on our students' extra-curricular lives; they become part of their instructional experiences. From still images of the Holocaust (Bernard-Donals) to photographs of the Tiananmen Square massacre (Cook), from documentary films of violence against women (Hesford; Miller) to YouTube videos of Vietnam news footage (Berkelhimer), representations of human violence have proliferated within course content, student multimodal compositions, and class discussion. As atrocity images become an assertive presence in the English classroom, they carry with them the ethical imperative to wrestle consciously and diligently with the relationships among violence, image, and vision. Michael Bernard-Donals notes the singular salience of this imperative, insisting on the importance of including *and* addressing "photographic images of atrocity" (381) in the English classroom, a form of course content that, he argues, bids us to ask "just *what* did the viewer see?" (383, emphasis added). To that vital question, rhetorical looking adds an equally vital question: "Just *how* did the viewer see?" In so doing, rhetorical looking offers an invitation to take the what and how of seeing violence as a means to discover the what and how of ameliorating violence.

As we advocate in this essay for the value of a pedagogy of rhetorical looking, we simultaneously acknowledge that rhetorical looking does not offer a panacea for violence, if such a curative even exists. Rather, rhetorical looking presents just one facet of the larger, ever-responsive and demanding project of living and teaching within a world saturated with violence. Attending to the dynamic wherein violence binds to image and vision, rhetorical looking seeks to intervene at the point where atrocity image reinforces rather than ameliorates human-on-human violence. To illustrate the possibilities of rhetorical looking, we begin with the intertwining of violence with image and vision, situating the need for rhetorical looking within this matrix. We then turn to the promise of rhetorical looking, introducing the four tactics comprising its operation—looking-through, looking-at, looking-with, and looking-into—that collectively invite the viewer not only to look but also to look as a means of determining an answerable action. Such action is Janus-faced: it turns to the past, sensitive to the material bodies in pain temporally frozen within the two-dimensional confines of an atrocity image, and it turns to the future to devise actions that mitigate the possibility of even more bodies in pain. In sum, while rhetorical looking begins with the atrocity image, it does not end there. We illustrate the possibilities of rhetorical looking and the diversity of answerable actions it inspires by sharing our students' performance of this mode of slow looking, finding in their engage-

ment the hope for disentangling, if only momentarily, the complicated weave of forces that we call human violence.

### THE MATRIX OF VIOLENCE, ATROCITY IMAGE, AND VISION

We begin with an image.

Taken by award-winning *Boston Globe* photographer John Tlumacki, the documentary photograph records a scene on Boylston Street near the finish line of the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon (Figure 1). Snapped almost immediately after the explosion of two homegrown bombs, the scene captures a bewildering array of unidentifiable people standing on a bloodied street. Amid sneaker-clad feet and trousered legs, two prostrate figures vie for attention. In the right corner foreground, a blonde white woman sits leaning back on her arms, legs bent at the knee, shoe missing, clothing tattered, exposed skin dirty. With hair swept back to expose a face wiped clean of expression, the woman gazes off the right edge of the image, as if longing to escape the pandemonium around her. In the background, with a good Samaritan crouched beside her, a second woman lies in a twist, hand covering her face and the lower half of her left leg hanging from splintered bones and shredded flesh.



**Figure 1: Boston Marathon Bombing Atrocity Image. Photo by John Tlumacki courtesy of *The Boston Globe*.**

Chronologically preceding Murphy's unsanctioned photo sharing and serving, in part, as its impetus, the documentary image holds in stasis one moment of the carnage caused by the Tsarnaev brothers' pressure-cooker bombs. That one moment then circulated in publications across the nation, particularly in a version where the scope of the original photo narrowed to a single victim (Lemire).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2: Cropped Boston Marathon Bombing Atrocity Image.**

In the edited version (Figure 2), the victim in the foreground—identified as Nicole Gross—becomes focal while the second figure—identified as Gross's younger sister, Erika Bannock—disappears entirely from this visual record of the tragedy.

In this section, we establish the why and what-for of rhetorical looking via an exploration of the relationships by which violence unites with image and vision. We open with the Boston Marathon atrocity image for three reasons.

First, from the outset, we

want to emphasize the stakes of rhetorical looking: an effort to alleviate the material suffering caused by human-induced brutality and halt the cascade of future acts of violence. From the broken figures in the photograph to the blood pooling on the sidewalk, from the helplessness of shocked bystanders to the compassion of first responders, the atrocity image at the beginning of this section illuminates the need to devise perceptual strategies that help dismantle the connections binding violence to image and vision as one move in the effort to curtail future violence. Second, we choose this image from the Boston Marathon tragedy because it is a documentary photograph, a crucial player in the violence-image-vision dynamic and thus a powerful site for the work of decoupling violence from image and vision. The sheer ubiquity of this visual form has made it “the premier visual genre” (Kennedy and Patrick 1) and, as a result, a significant contributor to the mediatization of violence (3). It is the documentary mediatization that constitutes a key attractor wedding violence to image and vision. Richard J. Bernstein notes this relationship, claiming that

“our age may well be called ‘The Age of Violence’ *because* representations of real or imagined violence (sometimes blurred and fused together) are inescapable” (viii, emphasis added). Finally, we position the image of two agonized women at the beginning of this theoretical framing to remind us all that the ties linking violence to image and vision manifest as more than theory; they manifest as bodies suffering the trauma of broken bones, ripped Achilles tendons, and severed limbs. This atrocity image, then, anchors the ensuing exploration of the violence-image-vision matrix, and that exploration begins with a definition and an inquiry into its nature.

Constituting the dominating component in the violence-image-vision matrix, violence—its escalation and its reduction—also constitutes the dominating motive for rhetorical looking. Peace studies scholar Johan Galtung provides a helpful definition of violence and a useful typology for understanding its multifaceted nature. Eschewing simplistic definitions, Galtung defines violence as “that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual” in human flourishing (“Violence” 169). In other words, violence occurs when people are influenced in such a way that the current status of their physical and mental health is less than the promise of both their physical and mental potential (168). This definition encompasses depriving people of their ability to walk, as Gross and Bannock experienced on April 15, and it also encompasses depriving people of their belief in their own physical safety at a public event, again as Gross and Bannock experienced. Galtung complicates his definition by pointing out that violence can emerge in three forms—direct, structural, and cultural—each of which impinges on the other. In brief, direct violence occurs between persons as an event that can be witnessed, as when an individual (group, institution, or state) acts with intent to undermine the physical potential of another (“Cultural” 294). Less visible, structural violence exists not as an event but as a “process with ups and downs” (“Violence” 172). Implicated as a motive for direct violence, structural violence occurs through the uneven distribution of power systematized on the institutional level. For example, humans can see the direct violence of a man beating his wife (or evidence of that act). But we have no visual reference for the structural violence that occurs when a million men deny women an education (172). Finally, synchronized with both direct and structural violence, cultural violence occurs at the symbolic level. Galtung characterizes cultural violence as “the symbolic sphere of our existence . . . that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (“Cultural” 291). Such domains of cultural violence include language, religion, ideology, and empirical science, among others. If direct violence is an event and structural violence a process, then cultural violence is “an invariant, a ‘permanence,’” Galtung explains, a kind of brutality so deeply intertwined within the fabric of a culture’s, and an individual’s, existence that

it is difficult to detect and even more difficult to change (294). If a man beating his wife reflects direct violence, and a million men denying women education reflects structural violence, then sexist language or privileged dialects reflect cultural violence. Adding further intricacy to violence, these three levels operate in conjunction. Direct violence does not occur outside of the influence of structural and cultural violence. In fact, structural and cultural violence foment direct violence just as direct violence can lead to further instances of structural and cultural violence through forms of repression, such as martial law. Mitigating one, then, requires mitigating all three. Focusing on the atrocity image, an image within which the three faces of violence circulate, rhetorical looking seeks to expose the complexity of violence and unravel the knots that tie it to image and vision. The typology of direct, structural, and cultural violence offers a way to chart that tangle, and the most overt starting point into the matrix is through the direct violence depicted in and potentially enacted by the atrocity image.

As the initiating incident for rhetorical looking, the atrocity image itself provides the most explicit connection to violence because its content is a visual record of an act of direct violence. The image content operates as what Roland Barthes, quoting Blanchot, calls “absence-as-presence” (106). The image content testifies to the reality of direct violence—“*the thing has been there*” (Barthes, 76, emphasis original)—and it is “at once the past and the real” (82) because the atrocity images freeze the violence in the present even as the violence exists only in the past. From the perspective of this paradox, the material comprising Tlumacki’s photograph makes apparent in visceral terms the thing-that-has-been-there: the results of an act of direct violence perpetrated by the Tsarnaev brothers. The image content delivers a glimpse of the direct violence, zooming in on two badly injured victims, recording their anguish. However, that light-inscribed thing-that-has-been-there possesses a suspect simplicity, for direct violence operates on myriad levels in a single record of tragedy.

Viewer responses make clear the convoluted character of direct violence and the anomalous nature of the content as “at once the past and the real.” Two examples illustrate the multifaceted nature of direct violence and its visual representation. The first stems from Carol Downing, Gross and Bannock’s mother. In the wake of the violence and the widespread circulation of the atrocity image depicting her daughters’ distress, Downing publicly pleaded for “patience and privacy,” specifically requesting that the press and the public “refrain from using the graphic pictures . . . taken at the scene of the bombing; as they are tremendously painful for the family” (Washburn). Downing’s response gestures to a different agent of direct violence—the image itself—and a different victim—the family. For Downing, the record of one violent act, Tlumacki’s photograph, becomes a violent act in and of itself. A second example

concerns Tlumacki's own responses. He also acknowledges the anguish evoked by the image content, but he sees a purpose for that agony. As he explains, the image was "painful for us to look at," but it is an image that "the world had to see" (qtd. in Washburn). The direct violence of the image itself—its power to cause suffering in the viewer—had to be seen because it afforded a testament to the brutality of terrorism and, in turn, inspired efforts to curb future acts of similar brutality. For Tlumacki, the direct violence enacted by the image content morphs into a tool for preventing direct violence. Turning rhetorical looking on the direct violence of an atrocity image's content allows viewers to search below the surface-level depth of direct violence to perceive the intricacy of both content and violence. However, the value of rhetorical looking goes beyond its investigation of atrocity image content; it also plumbs the less visible depths of structural violence circulating within the image qua image.

In addition to an atrocity image's overt visual connections to direct violence, less obvious enactments of structural violence, hidden behind the explicitly horrific content, also permeate an atrocity image. Because structural violence is systemic, it "shows up as unequal power and consequently unequal life chances" (Galtung, "Violence" 171) rather than in the performances that can be readily witnessed. But structural violence is present in and contributes to direct violence, and its influence can be traced in the atrocity image through the auspices of rhetorical looking. Two examples of structural violence highlight the importance of this form of violence. The first instance of structural violence emerges from the nature of the atrocity image as documentary image, not from the image content itself. Evolving from the nineteenth-century, the protocols and conventions surrounding the documentary image exercise their own structural violence by disenfranchising the viewer and reducing his or her power to act, including the power to act against violence. The documentary genre is deeply entrenched in the belief that vision is natural or transparent and thus requires no active agency on the part of the viewer: vision occurs automatically and innocently. Influenced by these conventions, viewers are brought to accept that what they see as "factual reporting" (Newhall 6)—the "pictorial evidence of an eye-witness" (3)—is what everyone sees and thus a reality that cannot be changed. For atrocity images, transparency results in what Prosser calls "a failure of witnessing and a failure to respond" (10). Furthermore, structural violence also operates in a second quality of the atrocity image: its widespread distribution across diverse media platforms.

Crucial to the tenacity and escalation of violence is its proliferation through atrocity photographs, a founding premise of rhetorical looking. At issue here is not just the documentary depiction itself, terrible as it may be; also at issue is the multiplication of that depiction across media platforms and sites. The hypermediatization of the atrocity image extends beyond content to construe

violence itself in visual terms, an act of structural violence that transforms atrocity not into object or performance but into what French situationist Guy Debord calls a *spectacle*, a “social relationship among people mediated by images” (12). Important to rhetorical looking and the mitigation of violence, spectacle strips viewers of agency by trapping them in the immediate moment, erasing their sense of expertise, and endowing them with a false sense of unity (19). Spectacle through hypermediatization conflates life with representation so that atrocity becomes just another image rather than a lived experience; it masks the material suffering—Gross’s fractured leg and ankle, her fear for her sister lying bleeding behind her with left leg virtually amputated—hiding it beneath the hypermediatization and thereby diminishing the impetus to rectify that suffering. Violence becomes just another force outside of the viewers’ control, expertise, and authority.

The self-sustaining relationship between violence and image collaborates in the third form of violence: the cultural violence of vision itself. As its name suggests, cultural violence operates at the level of the symbolic, or the means (and meanings) by which a culture constructs—and legitimates—its realities (Galtung, “Cultural” 291). In his domains of cultural violence, Galtung includes such examples as language, religion, ideology, art, and even empirical science, all systems that can be used to justify a reduction of an individual’s or a group’s potential. An important and powerful symbolic force omitted from this list is vision. Neither solely the product of individual physiology nor solely the product of cultural training, vision exists on the permeable “boundary between the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’” (Jay 9). As a result, vision, like language, operates on the level of the symbolic as well as the corporeal; vision, like language, legitimates realities, and, again like language, it intersects with violence. Donna J. Haraway, whose concern with vision threads throughout much of her work in the 90s, calls attention to the vision-violence interface. “Vision is *always* a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices” (192), she contends, pointing to the “Western eye” as a mechanism for mirroring the “conquering self” (192).

Two examples of vision as cultural violence illuminate the interweaving of vision and violence. First, vision can shape itself so that it justifies, even naturalizes, direct violence as Allen Feldman’s fieldwork in Northern Ireland indicates. Feldman points out that the overt and covert war in Belfast encompasses not just the image—its content, its provenance, and its circulation—but also a special form of visual perception, one that unites seeing and death. “Seeing and killing, being seen and being killed” in this conflict zone, he claims, “are entangled and exchangeable in the ecology of fear and anxiety.” Visual perception itself, he adds, is “informed by, if not actually modeled on, actions of violence” (29). Trained

in a particular form of vision, combatants in Belfast see in order to live and see in order to kill. Vision and violence are inextricable in this mode of perception. The second example of visual cultural violence exists within the phenomenon of spectatorship itself, especially in regards to the spectatorship of the atrocity image. Prosser points directly to this vision-violence collaboration, underscoring the degree to which seeing atrocity images can operate as a kind of mob mentality, tempting the viewer to partake in the violence (10). In a similar vein, Susan Sontag worries that viewers can become voyeurs of the depicted anguish, deriving a guilty pleasure from the suffering (42; see also Hesford 194). Stemming from vision as cultural violence, these threats reinforce rather than undercut violence, the very result that rhetorical looking works to change.

If violence—direct, structural, and cultural—is so multifaceted, if the atrocity image records and courts all facets of violence, and if vision itself becomes a partner to violence, how then do we combat such an obdurate dynamic? We must look because refusing to look might be even more pernicious than the threats posed by atrocity images themselves. Sontag concurs, contending that people—including students and teachers—cannot afford to avert their eyes from atrocity and atrocity images, to ignore “how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world” (114; see, also, Berger 42). “No one,” she continues, “after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia” (114). Thus, a response to the violence-image-violence triad lies not in dismissing vision, but in devising new ways to look that mitigate rather than encourage violence. Vision does not need to be always wedded to violence, and here is the hope for a pedagogy of rhetorical looking. As a deliberate and conscientious way of seeing, rhetorical looking works to expose and disentangle the complicated interconnections among image, vision, and violence. Through slow looking, it supports inquiry into the production and circulation of the image, the practices and uptake of public perception and reception, and the nature of viewers themselves, the “we” who are “hungry for images of suffering” (Pollock 71). It recognizes that a multifaceted violence exists outside and inside of atrocity images, and it seeks to challenge that dynamic by enriching our students’ perceptual repertoire through classroom engagement.

#### RHETORICAL LOOKING IN THE CLASSROOM: PERFORMANCES OF SLOW LOOKING

We begin with an image.

Bereft of aesthetic appeal or narrative drama, the photograph of a whiteboard starkly displays blocks of text slanting in myriad directions (Figure 3). Taken

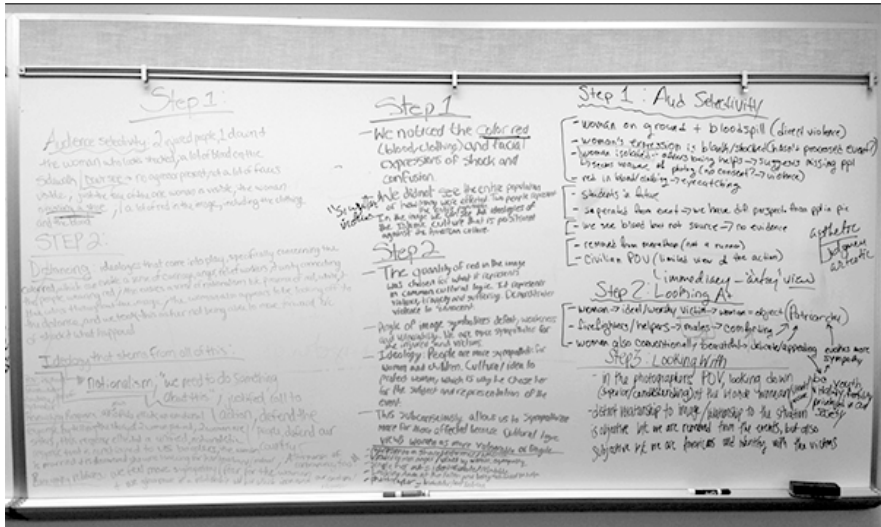


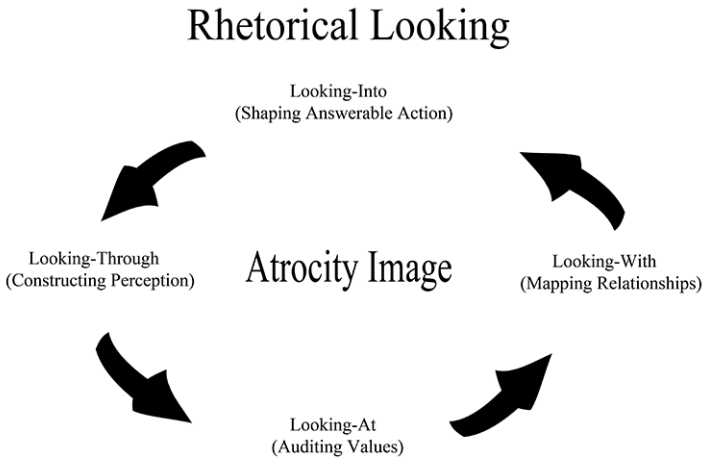
Figure 3: Student Work with Rhetorical Looking

with a student’s iPhone, sent to the teacher, and then distributed to the class as a whole, the image gestures to the presence of students’ bodies despite their invisibility. The three columns written in green, red, and black dry erase markers, the radically different penmanship styles, and the variation in organizational patterns all attest to the prior presence and active participation of those absent students.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the whiteboard image gestures to the presence of violence even as it, like the students, remains invisible. Although no trace of atrocity or its visual representation appears, no evidence of injured bodies, of violence enacted, of corporeal brutality survived, the atrocity image and its violence hover over the whiteboard. The columns of multicolored text constitute an enactment of rhetorical looking as students engage with Tlumacki’s photography and its popularized edited version. The whiteboard image records a struggle, but it was a struggle to look slowly and, through that slow looking, to determine what, for each participant, might constitute an answerable action to the terrorist act that flings Gross and Bannock to the unforgiving surface of Boylston Street.

We open our last section with this whiteboard image and its evidence of students performing rhetorical looking to highlight the value and the painstaking nature of this visual practice. As Bruce B. Lawrence and Alisha Karim warn, we cannot simply blame “the news media, whether print or visual or virtual” for “the chain of violence forged through image and narration” (2). Rather, violence—especially the weave of the image and vision with violence—requires holding ourselves responsible for how we see and how we act in response to that seeing. Through its four tactics, rhetorical looking constitutes one way to

take that responsibility by intervening in the complex weave whereby vision and atrocity image promote violence (Figure 4). Drawing on students' work on the whiteboard, their discussions leading up to it, their discussions following it, and their blog posts reflecting on it, we describe rhetorical looking in action. We delineate the four tactics (looking-through, looking-at, looking-with, and looking-into), their nonlinear operation, and the various ways in which students practice this new way of seeing.

As we describe rhetorical looking in action, we emphasize two points: the myriad ways in which slow looking loosens the threads binding violence to vision and image, and the recursiveness—both within and across tactics—that characterizes this mode of perception.



**Figure 4: A Diagram of Rhetorical Looking**

Because of its nonlinear nature, we arbitrarily begin our discussion of a pedagogy of rhetorical looking with looking-through, a tactic that illuminates a viewer's active perception and agency in any evocation<sup>5</sup> of image content. Looking-through particularly seeks to uncover structural violence hidden within an atrocity image as a means to combat an atrocity image's power to erode agency. To redress violence rather than reinforce it, viewers need to believe in their ability to act and their ability to act efficaciously. Looking-through works to reaffirm viewer agency by focusing on one face of structural violence: the conviction that perception is transparent, an error fostered by documentary protocols. Looking-through supports visual agency by interrogating transparency. It directs students

to look through an atrocity image to perceive not just a trace of reality—crucial though this reality is—but also a trace of themselves construing that reality and thus evidence of their own perceptual agency. Undermining students’ belief in transparent vision is not easy because vision seemingly works automatically. By internalizing many of the processes required for vision and thus enhancing the efficiency of vision, people lose track of the extent to which they construct rather than merely see a visual stimulus. As a result, viewers rarely acknowledge the contingency of their own perception or the contingency of the reality perceived. Instead, within their daily lives, people experience a false sense of visual unity, assuming that everyone sees the same phenomenon. Both the perception and the reality perceived, then, are situated as outside the viewer and thus outside the viewer’s control. Under the sway of transparency, neither the act of violence nor the existence of violence can be changed. Goaded by the structural violence of a documentary orientation and a spectacle mindset, transparency all too frequently leads to a dead-end response of “empty empathy”: a “feeling of hopelessness, of not wanting to believe people have to suffer in these ways, or to live like the photos show them living and dying” (Kaplan 16). The consequence of such empty empathy, Ann E. Kaplan warns, is a disinclination to act in a “positive pro-social manner” (4), uniting passive response and passive visual consumption in a debilitating feedback loop. Looking-through aims to disrupt transparency by reminding students that they are perceptual agents, something they forget in the quotidian practice of seeing.

While students *know* on some intellectual level that they are agents of their own seeing, they do not always *experience* that agency as a lived event. The recursiveness of looking-through helps students rediscover their perceptual agency by repeatedly moving them between the details of the atrocity image and the details of their description. For instance, students in class faced two difficulties in their initial practice of looking-through. First, they conflated describing with interpreting. To illustrate, a common move across the class was to decipher the meaning of facial expressions without accounting for the details of that expression. One group’s whiteboard contribution reflects this leap: the “woman’s expression is blank/shocked (hasn’t processed the event).” They omitted their evocation of her face and, thus, their own agency in that evocation. The essential aspect of choosing what to see—of perceiving and assigning importance to one detail over another—remained unacknowledged. Second, students overlooked the degree to which they filled in visual material unavailable in the image itself. One whiteboard group noted that Gross’s figure was “removed from the marathon/ not a runner” unaware that in so doing they drew on their own knowledge that marathon runners wear a number over their running clothes. They described Gross as “not a runner” only because they supplied visual information absent

from the picture, an element of their agency they did not recognize. Because any act of perception is already a process of interpretation, it is no wonder that students moved so quickly from detail to meaning. It is also no wonder that they automatically provided the details from their own knowledge of marathons to enrich the image. But the point of looking-through is to slow looking down so that students become hyperaware of the movement between details and evocation. As the exercise re-engaged students in looking-through, their visual agency became more apparent.

Slowing down to disarticulate the image content, students returned to looking-through by detecting the agency operating in their selection and omission of details. They set up a three-way conversation involving the original image, the cropped image, and their own record of their evocation, questioning that evocation to make more manifest their internalized visual practices. In their redeployment of looking-through, students noted “the copious amounts of blood,” but added such questions as “whose blood?” and “where is that person?” They noted the distress at the same time they recognized the lack of evidence concerning the cause of that distress. Each new contribution they derived from looking-through kept them poised between the details of the image—visible and invisible—and the details of their evocation, reminding themselves of the degree to which they actively contributed to their own vision. The value derived from looking-through lay not in answers to the questions they posed but in the need to ask the questions. What resulted was a sense of the uncertainties of—and thus their agency in—vision and violence. Both uncertainties and agency highlighted their power to witness and respond with something more than empty empathy. In this instance, looking-through reminded students that seeing is an agentic process; without that realization, the ostensible naturalness of vision remained unacknowledged and unchallenged. But addressing the problems posed by the violence-image-vision dynamic requires more than insight into structural violence and its cost: it requires sensitivity to the cultural violence that rationalizes both direct and structural violence.

The second tactic of rhetorical looking—looking-at, or auditing the viewer’s values to arrive at an accountable interpretation—complements looking-through by inviting students to consider one facet of cultural violence—ideology—and chart the way in which belief systems thread through their perceptual practices, their agency, and the atrocity image. Looking-at seeks to make viewers’ investment apparent by uncovering the belief systems contributing to any act of perception. It does this by enlisting students as critics of their own vision and of the atrocity image to assess the values impinging on both. Barthes notes that “photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks” (38, emphasis original). David Campbell

argues similarly, contending that viewers, in engaging with atrocity images, require visual strategies that are “reflexive and penetrating” so that they recognize the stereotypes guiding their understanding and contest those stereotypes (“Iconography” 89). Auditing values presents an effective way of thinking photographically to achieve an accountable interpretation, one that holds viewers liable for the meanings they develop, thereby undercutting cultural violence.

Recursiveness within and across tactics is particularly important to the practice of looking-at because it helps slow down critique. A challenge posed by the critical component of looking-at is that auditing ideologies invites English students to inhabit a comfortable role: that of discursive and visual critic. Jeremy Engels and William O. Saas emphasize the crucial importance of the critic’s job to “describe and demystify the discourses justifying war” (225). At its best, they contend, a rhetorical critic “generate[s] a meaningful critique of endless war’s evolving rhetorical infrastructure” (226). However, because of students’ familiarity with the role of critic, they move at light speed to identify a belief system—such as “terrorism is bad because it attacks the innocent”—without carefully building connections among the details of their evocation, the meaning they ascribe to those details, and their analysis of those meanings. The tactic of looking-at slows down critique by returning students to the details (visible as well as invisible) of their evocations, the meanings they construe, and the contribution made by ideologies to both. To illustrate, students returned to the ideological sound bite “terrorism is bad because it attacks the innocent” to audit the ideologies latent within it by asking, first, what details in the atrocity image indicated that the people depicted were innocent; second, of what did students think the victims were innocent; and, third, what beliefs about innocence (and violence) animated their conclusions about terrorism. In sum, slowing down helped students identify the symbolic domains circulating in what they added *and* elided as agents of their own evocations, it helped them identify the play of ideologies in their interpretations, and it helped them query those ideologies. One group’s discussion board post illustrates these outcomes.

Focusing on the centrality of Gross’s suffering body in the cropped atrocity image, this group of three examined the figure presented by Gross in depth. They identified as troubling the way in which the body of an attractive young blonde white woman was used as a placeholder—an icon—for the bombing tragedy. In looking at the collocation of details generated in their evocations, the students came to two insights. First, the image reflected the presence of ideological cultural violence; second, the violence affects how Gross’s suffering is perceived and thus acted on. For instance, writing in their discussion board post, the group noted that “the focus on the woman is an example of an *ideal, or worthy victim*—also an example of a *woman-as-object*” (emphasis original). They extended

this interpretation to ideology: “We care about the woman being hurt because of the cultural belief that women are more helpless/vulnerable/weak than men, and therefore need to be protected.” Gross’s body in pain has its particular value because its photographic depiction is circulated in a culture where patriarchal beliefs hold sway: “We also value certain victims (women and children) more than others because they are seen as defenseless/as people who shouldn’t be caught up in direct violence.” In the process of making these connections recursively across the atrocity image, their evocation of the image, and their interpretation of the image, these students uncovered the cultural violence—the ideology of patriarchy—latent within the direct violence of the image content. In so doing, they recognized the impact that cultural violence has on direct violence. The distressed female body combines with white-dominant Western mythos to configure the deaths, the carnage, and the tragedy all as feminine. Violence itself is feminized, an interpretation that holds implications for the choice of venue and the choice of response to a violent act. Moving recursively between image detail and interpretation helped these students look at—audit—the influence of the different values at play in how they see and thus the meaning they ascribe to the image. It invited them to account and be accountable for those interpretations, and, finally, it pointed them to openings where they might intervene in violence, both direct and cultural.

While viewer as agent and viewer as critic are both important positions in rhetorical looking, neither is sufficient for disentangling the dynamic by which violence unites with image and vision. Also essential is viewer as civic participant, one who engages with an atrocity image as a means to alter the conditions giving rise to both the violence depicted and the violence stemming from the production and circulation of the atrocity image itself. The third tactic of rhetorical looking—looking-with, or mapping and remapping relationships—encourages students to become civic participants. An obstacle to redressing violence in act, perception, and image concerns the affective reactions viewers experience. The “dream of photojournalism,” Campbell says, is the belief that an atrocity image will invite a response that leads to a mollification of the atrocity (“Myth” 97). But that dream is all too frequently blunted by a sense of “moral inadequacy” (Berger 43), “compassion fatigue” (Campbell, “Myth” 99), or fear (Sontag 100). Those various affective responses individually and collectively lead to a feeling of malaise, or a disengagement from violence. Because the atrocity image is perceived as a representation of “the general human condition” and, thus accuses “nobody and everybody,” it invites nothing more than a helpless shrug (Berger 44). The tactic of looking-with attends explicitly to students’ affective responses, seeking to connect them with victim, violence, and situation so that, rather than shrug, they are motivated to become civically engaged. Looking-with relies on what

David Michael Levin calls “the body of feeling”: “our vulnerability, our openness to being touched and moved by what we see” (186). Responses grounded in that vulnerability intercede in the violence-image-vision dynamic by joining the viewer to the human suffering depicted in the atrocity image *and* to its alleviation. It creates a covenant between viewer and viewed by emphasizing the intricate web of tightly intertwined human connections circulating through violence (Azoulay 16). For students engaging with the Boston Marathon bombing photograph, an inquiry into point of view and its implications for civic participation provided a generative starting point for mapping and remapping connections.

Point of view is germane to looking-with because it dictates certain relationships that the viewer is predisposed to take up. By training, Western viewers inhabit the point of view of the photographer, subordinating viewer and viewer agency to that point of view. The documentarian photographer’s stance is ostensibly neutral and detached: a conduit for reality, not a constructor of reality. Tlumacki’s own point of view offers a case in point. Although aghast at injuries around him and the blood soaking his shoes, Tlumacki initially defined his role as one who only watches and records, not one who intervenes. Inhabiting the identity of the traditional photojournalist, he separates himself—and by extension the viewer—from the physical carnage. The recursive process of mapping and remapping invites students to identify point of view, assess its affective impact, and, potentially, change it to forge emotional connections that will help them counter violence. To illustrate, in their first foray into the third tactic, a group of three students initially identified Tlumacki’s point of view as their own: “We are the photographer’s POV, looking down (which is a superior/condescending angle) at the blond woman (she’s silent and passive),” a stance that obstructed their civic participation. In an uncanny echo of Tlumacki, they continue: “We have a distant relationship,” an objective one “removed from the events.”

These three students also went beyond the traditional point of view by mapping the influence of their own physical position as viewers: the academic classroom. By factoring in their spatial context and the impact of this context on their affective connections, these students made the alarming discovery that the setting of the English classroom reinforces the detachment fostered by the documentarian’s point of view. The classroom as the locale of viewing truncates rather than encourages civic participation because it imposes an analytical distance between students and the atrocity photograph. “We’re outside the frame,” they reported in a discussion board post; “we’re protected.” Because they identified with the “academic situation,” “We’ve turned to analyze the image vs. being moved by it.” The group expressed their dismay with this insight, fearing that such disengagement blinds them to the “emotional value” of the atrocity image and the devastation of the terrorist event. Victims, they worried, ceased to exist

for them as people, becoming only “images of iconic specificity.” So they engaged in remapping through the risky endeavor of “self-extension” (Hariman 202).

Robert Hariman contends that an atrocity image, “by placing strangers into the silent visual space of face-to-face interaction,” enables a viewer to “activate the imagination to extend oneself into the world of the other” (202). This is exactly what the students did. They ignored the voice of the critic, they explained, and, instead of removing themselves from the tragedy, they plunged into what they called the “*moment of this violence*” (emphasis original) to experience, even if only through the imagination, “the colors, the gaze, the patriarchy” in “a drastically different way.” As a result, this small cadre of students found common emotional ground with Gross as a silenced woman and as an American targeted for no reason other than nationality and availability. Vulnerable and open to being touched and moved, the students moved toward civic participation by imagining themselves in the frame. Their practice of looking-with situated them for the fourth and final tactic of rhetorical looking: looking-into to determine answerable actions.

The final contribution of rhetorical looking to disrupting the violence-image-vision dynamic concerns the need to act. While rhetorical looking bids students to *look* responsibly, it also bids students to *act* responsibly. Viewers, Sontag says, have a duty to move beyond merely reading or responding to an atrocity image; they have a duty to act. Without action, she says, any compassion elicited by an image “withers” (101), resulting in the continuation, even the multiplication, of violence (102). Looking-into helps viewers determine *answerable action*, in which action exists not as a discrete operation, isolated in space and time, but, instead, as part of a “conversation” of deeds. Answerable actions of diverse agents reply to each other in an unceasing exchange of deeds. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains, every thought, utterance, and feeling is “an act or deed” that humans perform (*Toward 6*), and each is answerable to the constellation from which it emerges and the subsequent cascade of responses it evokes. No act—regardless of its nature—exists as a singularity, accountable to nothing except itself. Instead, it is ethically bound to the complex web that gives it birth. Bakhtin emphasizes this ethical dimension of any act, claiming that answerability entails “guilt, or liability to blame”: “It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume but also mutual liability” (“Art and Answerability”).

Dialogue and its ethicality are at the heart of rhetorical looking. The difficulty presented by answerable action lies not just with the act, but also in its quality of answerability: to what past action does the act respond and what future actions does it invite? In other words, within what constellation of deeds—past and future—is the action nested? The goal of looking-into is to answer those questions, and, to do so, it returns recursively to rhetorical looking’s three companion tactics. Looking-into invites students to imagine and assess an answerable

act, first, by looking back at the insights derived from their practices as agents, critics, and civic participants, and, second, by looking forward to imagine the ensuing actions an act might propagate. One intriguing example from a group of two students illuminates both the recursiveness and the potential of looking-into. This group is especially interesting because, as a result of the dissonance they experienced with looking-into, the two students voluntarily re-enacted rhetorical looking, focusing both performances on Tlumacki's image of the Gross and Bannock.

In their initial engagement with rhetorical looking, the two students provisionally identified retaliation as their answerable action: punish the Tsarnaev brother who remained alive after the search as a deterrent for future acts of terrorism. However, when they practiced looking-into, they were frustrated by what they determined was a mismatch between retaliation and the results of their work as agent, critic, and civic participant. For example, they reported in a full-class discussion that they had consistently focused on the presence of the civilians who aided the victims rather than the victims themselves. So, in looking-through, the two students collaboratively described these male workers as "working class (not professional) men." In looking-at, they extended those details to designate those giving aid as "salt of the earth," "sturdy," and "knights in shining armor" who displayed the "resilience of the American spirit." Interrogating these interpretations, they found reinforcing ideologies involving patriotism, service, and masculinity in their perception of the atrocity image. Then, in looking-with, they sought to inhabit the point of view of one aid worker, crouched over the body of Erika Bannock, attempting to map a relationship of hope and endurance rather than victimization and despair. Finally, when looking-into the atrocity image, they offered retaliation—defined as the pursuit, capture, and punishment of the perpetrators—as their answerable action. However, as they explained to the class, retaliation did not "fit" their engagement as viewers: it was not answerable to their rhetorical looking. As the class responded to this group, other students suggested that the problem might be the invisibility of perpetrators in the atrocity image and in the group's practice of rhetorical looking. That observation motivated the two students to re-initiate rhetorical looking in its entirety.

During their second performance of rhetorical looking, these two students revisited the four tactics, but they focused on neither victims nor respondents. Instead, they focused on the absent terrorists—the Tsarnaev brothers, one living and one deceased—going beyond the boundaries of the atrocity image itself to research the two men and integrate that research into their practice of looking-through, looking-at, and looking-with. This new approach influenced them to revise their answerable action, a move they again shared with the full class.

While they retained retaliation, the scope of retaliation changed and thus the scope of their intervention into the violence changed. First, the group explained, they adhered to their commitment to pursuit-capture-punish as an answerable action, claiming that it “answered” the victims’ and the viewers’ need to know “who did this” and it answered the victims’ and viewers’ need for reassurance that the threat embodied by the Tsarnaevs had been eliminated. Thus, future acts of terrorism from these two were stymied.

For these two students, pursuit-capture-punish interceded in a past violent act by identifying the “who,” and it interceded in a future violent act by capturing and punishing the “who.” Second, the group expanded the scope of retaliation as deterrence to include unknown perpetrators and unknown future acts of terrorism. In other words, they revised their action so that it invited actions from others that would forestall future violence. Limiting retaliation to only the Tsarnaev brothers, to only the Boston Marathon bombing, they claimed in class, limited intervention to a single act. It “ended the conversation” of actions. To keep the dialogue of deeds going, the group said, retaliation had to deal with the “why” of terrorism and self-radicalization. To be answerable, retaliation needed to include this less well-defined component, signaling the group’s sensitivity to multiple aspects of violence at multiple points and their desire to intervene in such acts. The recursive nature of looking-into, as well as this group’s willingness to re-engage voluntarily with rhetorical looking as a whole, helped them configure themselves as viewers with an ethical responsibility to act in ways they construed to be answerable.

#### INTERVENING IN VIOLENCE

As the photograph of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev under a sniper’s scope reveals, as the photograph of Nicole Gross—stunned on a Boston street with her sister bleeding and broken behind her—testifies, an atrocity image exists as more than a two-dimensional visual record of human suffering. It exists as perceptual event, a process, and an absent presence that holds violence within it and propels violence beyond its edges. Even more, it is an opportunity for action, for intervention. How people see, what they see, and how they act in response to that seeing are all implicated in the range and scope of human violence. The visual practices—the ways of looking—a viewer draws on to perceive images of violence make a difference in supporting or undermining violence and violent political regimes (Hochberg 6). Therefore, to rectify violence even in a small way, it is essential to generate “*new ways of seeing*”; such a visual transformation is a “precondition” for overcoming violence (6, emphasis original). This is the goal rhetorical looking embraces. As James Crosswhite justly points out, “a great deal is at stake in

understanding the complexities of the relation of rhetoric and violence” (134). We agree. But we also contend that a great deal is at stake in understanding the complexities of the relationships wedding violence to vision and image. Through its recursive tactics of looking-through, looking-at, looking-with, and looking-into, rhetorical looking presents a new way of looking that slows down perception in the hopes of disentangling the threads binding violence with image and vision. In so doing, rhetorical looking constitutes not only a new way of seeing but also “*a new way of thinking* about preventing violence” and a new way of acting in response to violence (Gilligan 11, emphasis original). But changing visual habits and practicing a new way of seeing are not easy; thus, the need for a *pedagogy* of rhetorical looking that works to support both change and practice.

The work of “creating new perspectives and new modes of looking” as a means of undoing violence challenges deeply ingrained habits, and these habits are difficult to change (Hochberg 6). A pedagogy of rhetorical looking reflects both the difficulty of learning a new mode of looking and its necessity. Teaching rhetorical looking with its four nonlinear tactics is a painstaking process, one requiring patience and commitment from both students and teachers. But the cost of a pedagogy of rhetorical looking as well as the cost of practicing rhetorical looking is merited by the need for both. We and our students swim in a sea of violence. From microaggressions to corporeal injury, from the power differentials that impoverish a person’s potential to the all but invisible juggernaut of cultural violence that justifies such impoverishment, each and every day we experience, participate in, ignore, accept, and resist violence in its myriad forms. A pedagogy of rhetorical looking supports resistance by focusing on the intersection of violence with vision and image. Here, in this liminal space, a young man, just twenty-one, lingers on death row. Here, in this space with him are two women whose lives he so brutally altered. A pedagogy of rhetorical looking bids us to look so that we might act in ways answerable both to the young man waiting to die and the young women struggling to live.

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#### NOTES

1. Tamerlan Tsarnaev was apprehended and later died of injuries sustained during his capture.
2. See Wolfson for leaked photographs.

3. See, for example, the April 16, 2013, front cover of the *New York Post*, available at <http://nypost.com/cover/post-covers-on-april-16th-2013/>.

4. The participants were members of an upper division undergraduate rhetorical theory class taught by one of the coauthors. This course focused on the relationship between (non)violence and visual-discursive rhetoric. Materials are used with permission.

5. We borrow the term *evocation* from Louise Rosenblatt's work on transactional reading in which she explains that a reader responds not to the text per se but to the reader's evocation, his or her "lived-through experience" of the text (270). Responses react to those evocations, and what is evoked shifts with each reading experience.

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