



BLACK BAG (/) ▼

(/)



(<http://blackbag.gawker.com/1563531073>)

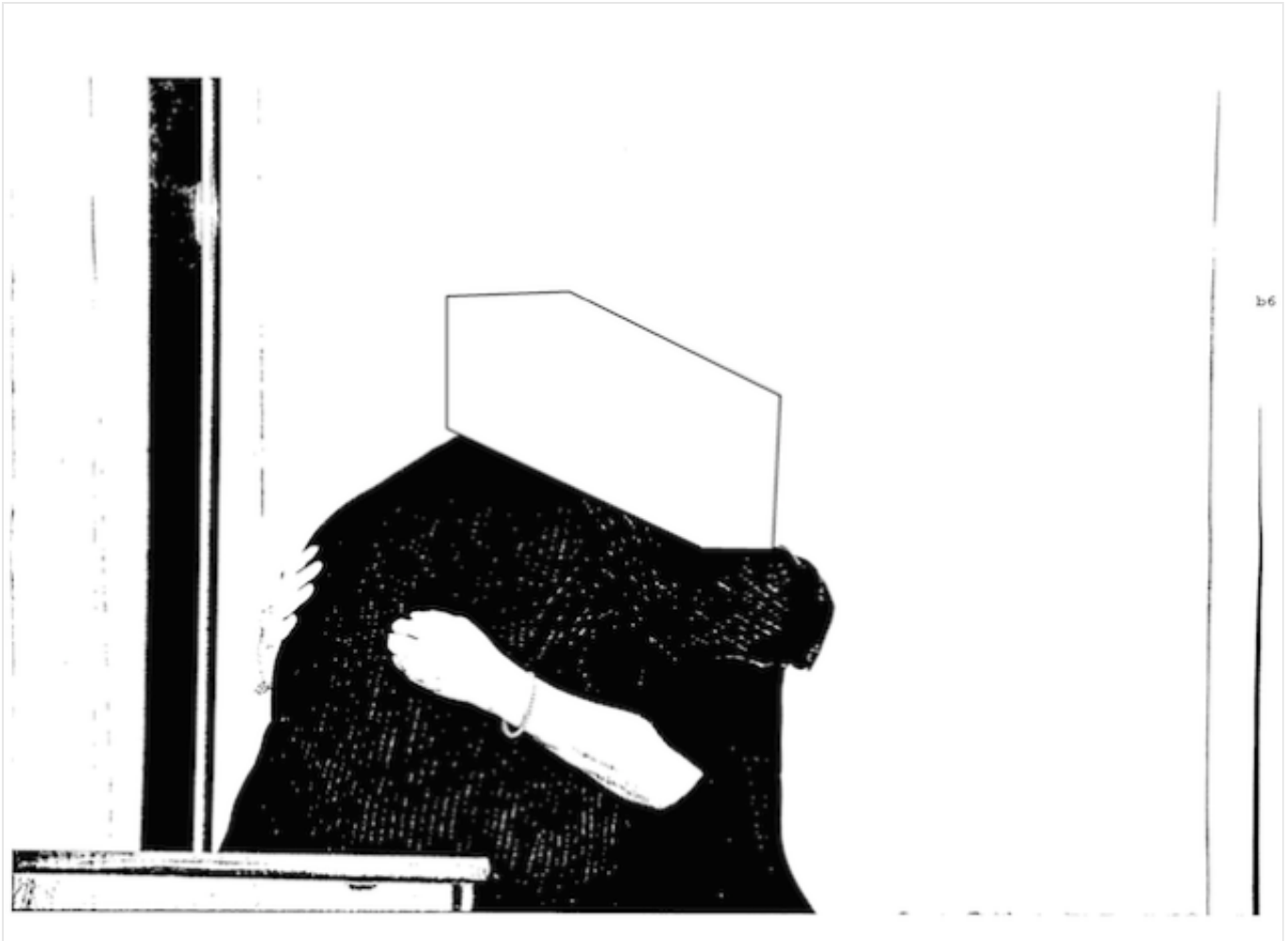


J.K. Trotter (<http://trotter.kinja.com>)

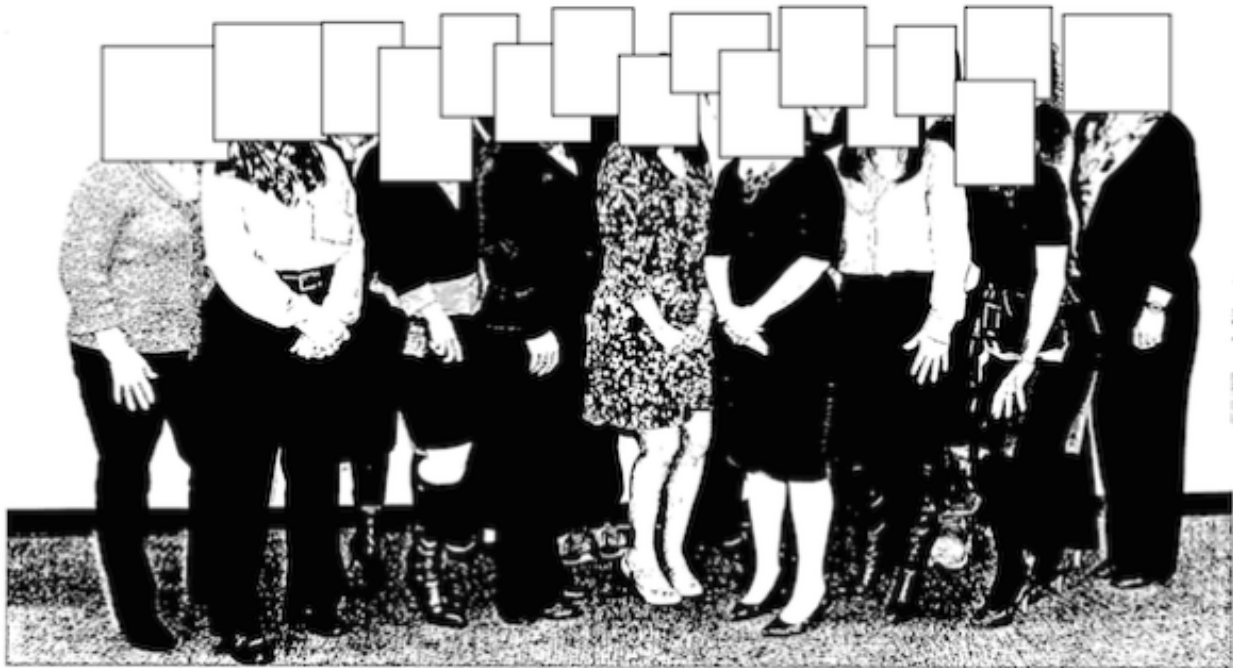
10,362 🔥 17 ★ ▼

(<http://trotter.kinja.com>)

Filed to: REDACTED (/TAG/REDACTED) Yesterday 4:10pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/1563!>)

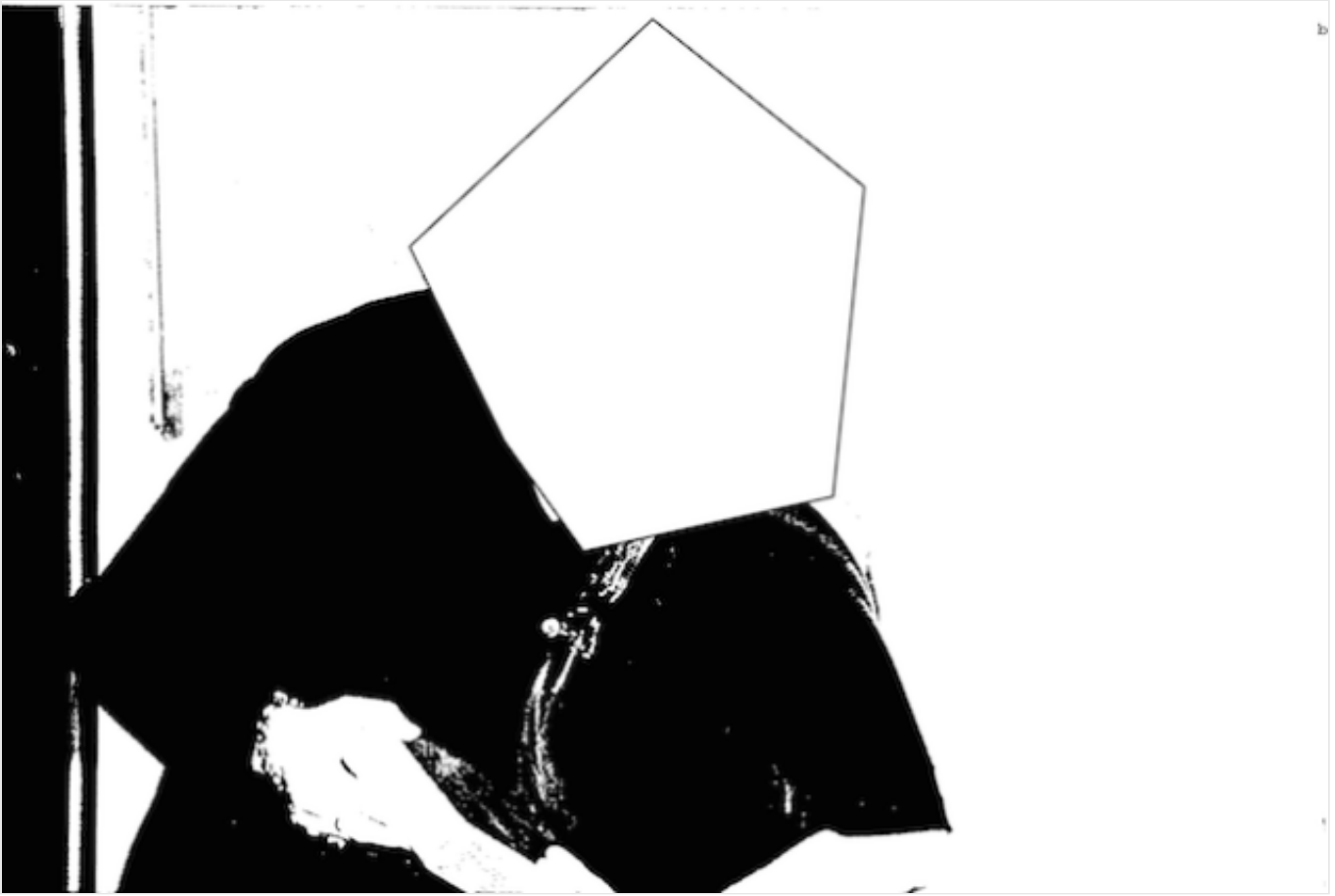


In their most common form, government-sanctioned redactions obscure text: names and code names, dates of birth and Social Security numbers, the classified and top-secret—each a tiny black site housing a discrete, unknowable entity. For all of their apparent precision, each redaction expresses a set of underlying assumptions about identity and recognition, about the way we discipline noise into information.

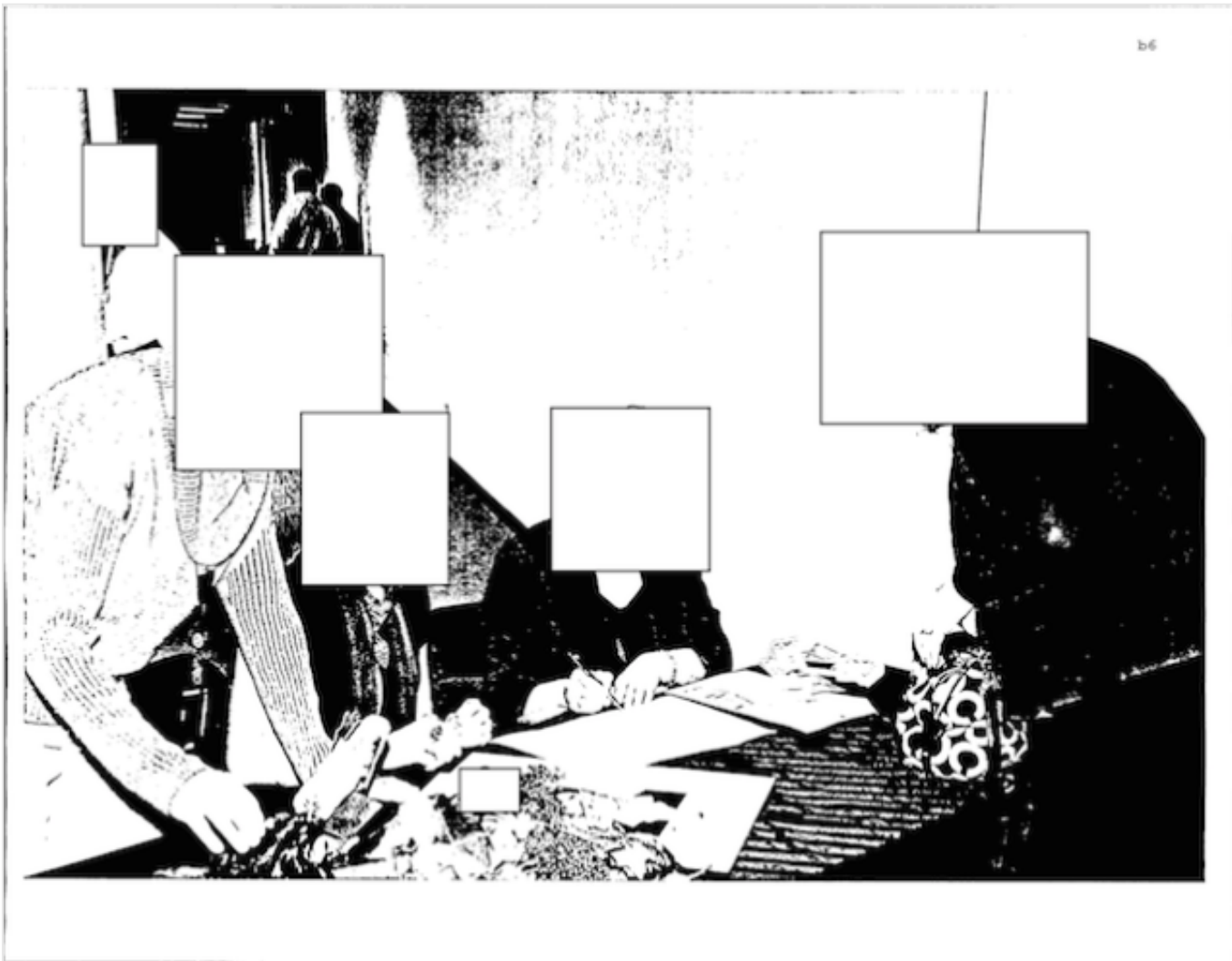


b6

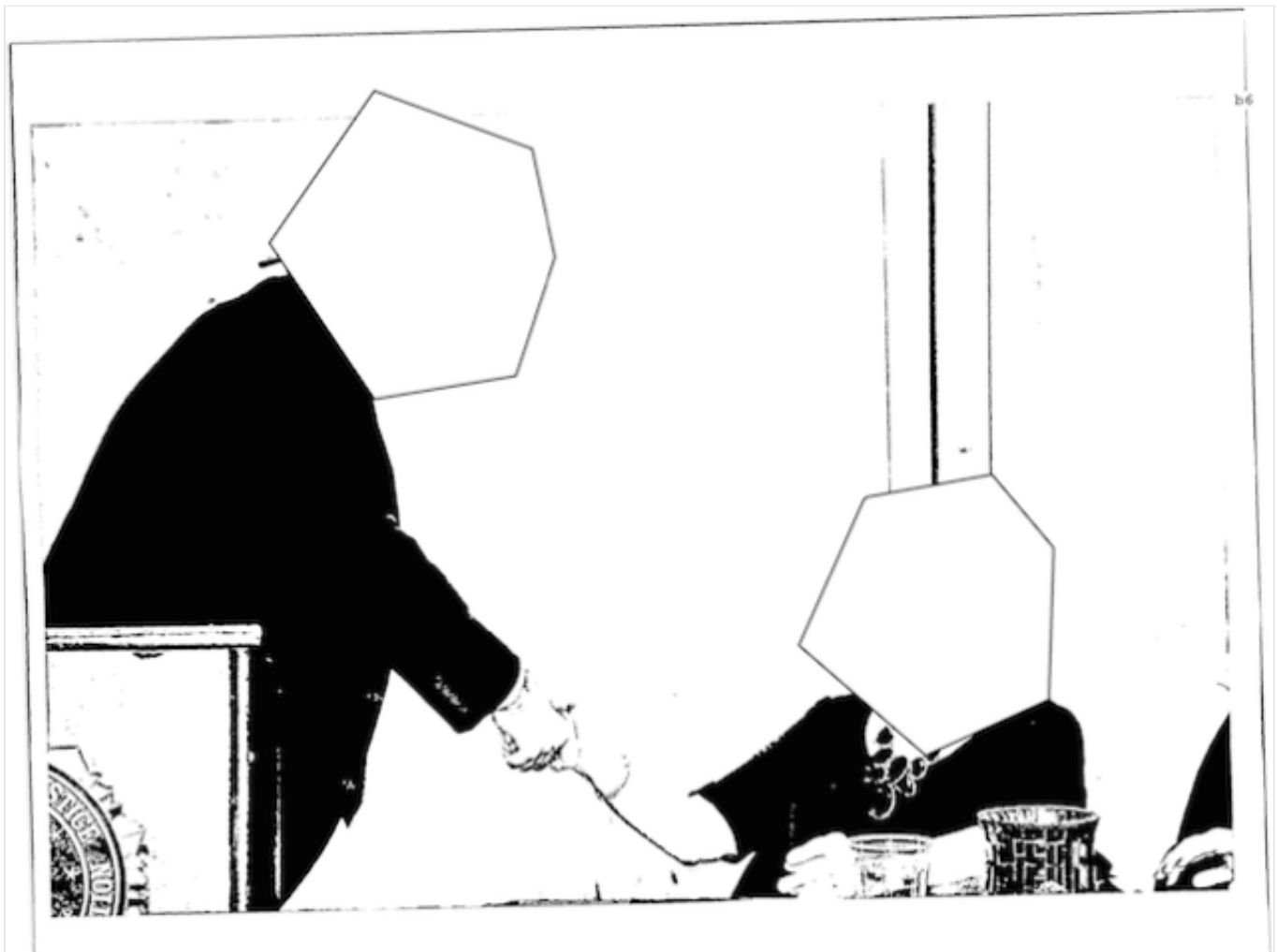
These assumptions become particularly clear when they're applied to the human form: bodies, faces, gestures, postures, clothes. How much of a person can one obscure, using traditional redaction techniques, before the obscured becomes unrecognizable?



You are looking at a series of images taken or displayed at the December 2012 retirement party of an Atlanta-based special agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They turned up in a cache of records (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/233258474/1258341-0-Photographs-Section-1>) about the party that were requested by *USA Today* reporter Brad Heath, who published (<https://twitter.com/bradheath/status/441339919718289408>) several (<https://twitter.com/bradheath/status/441350738136924160>) of the altered images on Twitter earlier this year.



Before providing the records to Heath, employees of the bureau's information dissemination division carefully outlined, then excised, the heads and faces from every photograph taken at the retirement party, leaving behind stark and often oddly shaped voids.

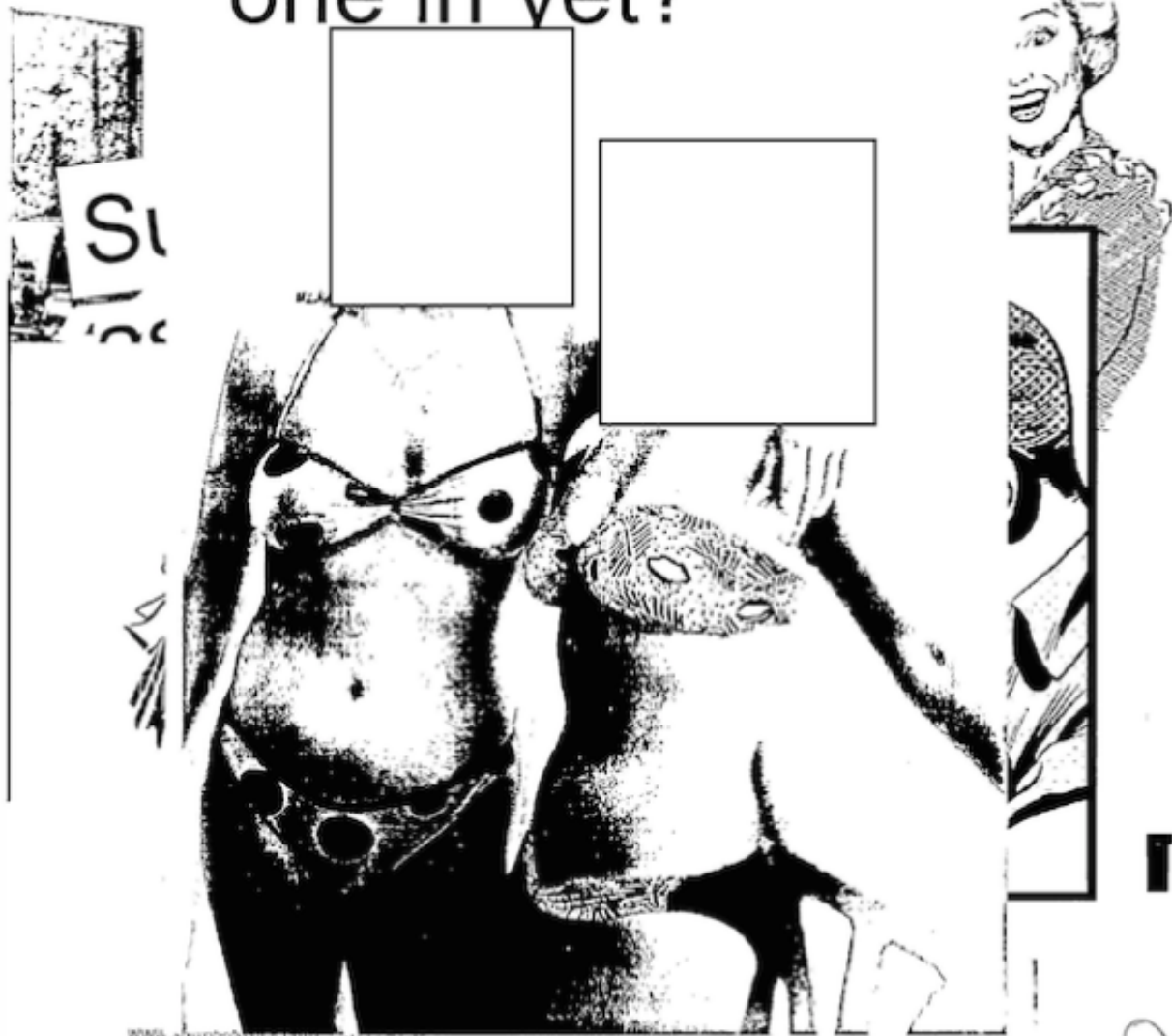


A PowerPoint presentation (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/233260561/1258341-0-Powerpoint-Section-1>) that was apparently shown at the event provides an even eerier trip. Random bits of text—the artifacts, perhaps, of PowerPoint’s rudimentary animation feature—float around context-less images of women posing in bikinis:

The FBI Academy, and the

b6

called Duxbury
hold many imps
Did I put this
And so she
one in yet?



Someone sleeping in a bed (near a superimposed *Playboy* magazine cover):

Its raining

mm Lots of

can explain
oil at the

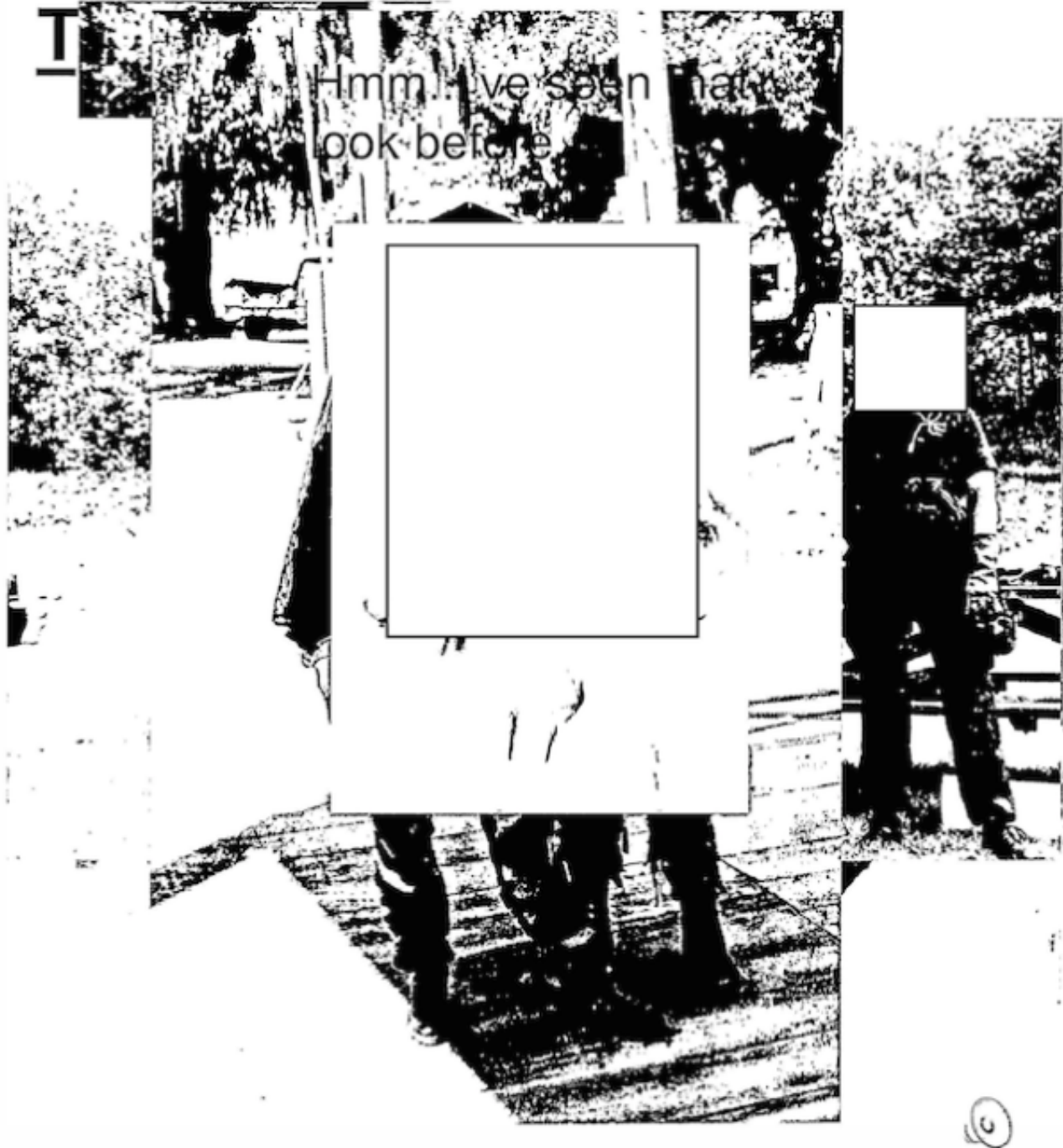


And whatever this is:

FBI

b6

~~SWAT~~ Ante Women Ante



If you study these images carefully, certain meanings seem to bubble up—the special agent being honored, for example, appears to be a woman, and married to another agent:

I would like to
present

this

The Attorney General's
49th Annual Awards

and

are the only

FBI Married
Agents to both
receive the

Attorney

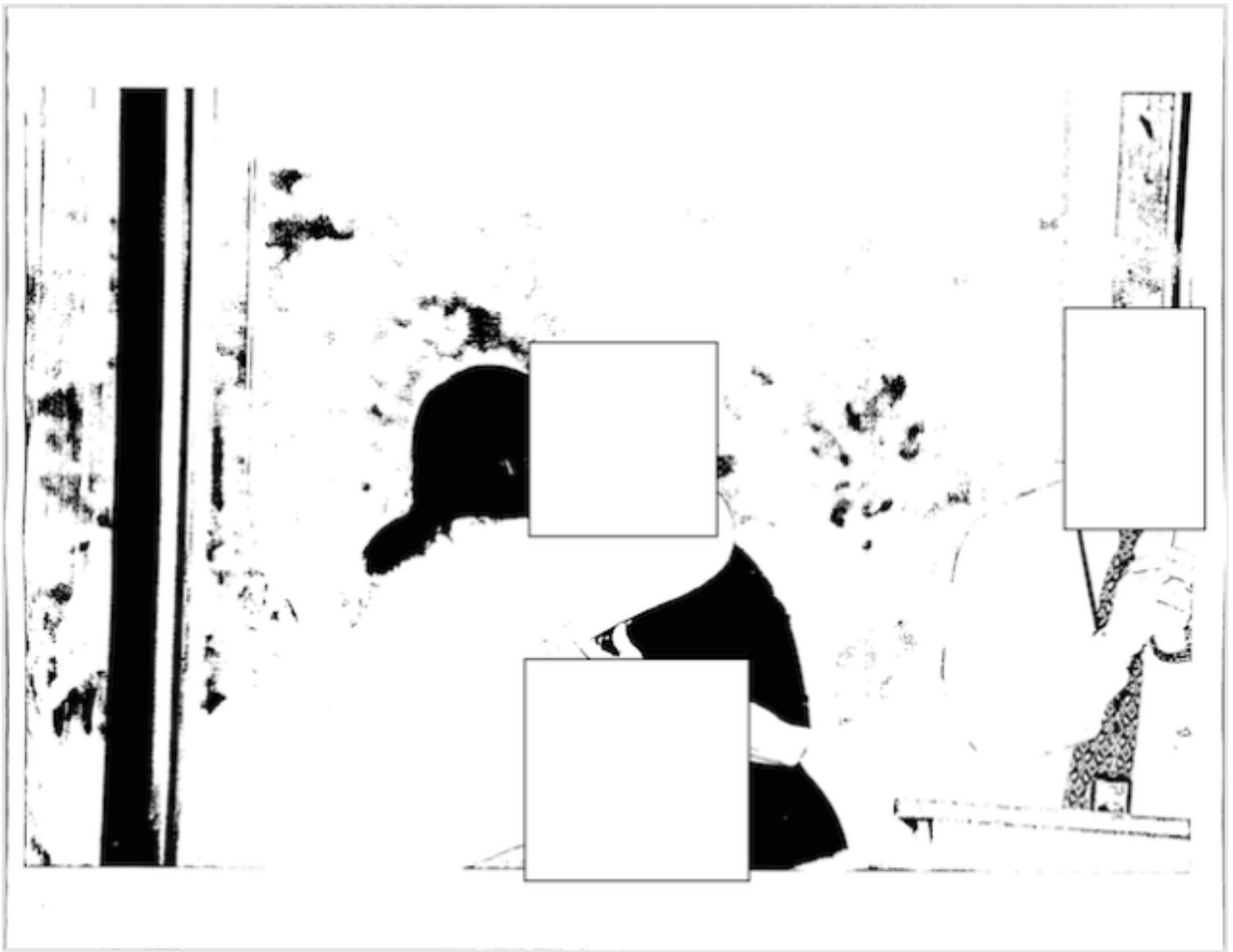
General's Award

From Case Agents to Assistant Directors,

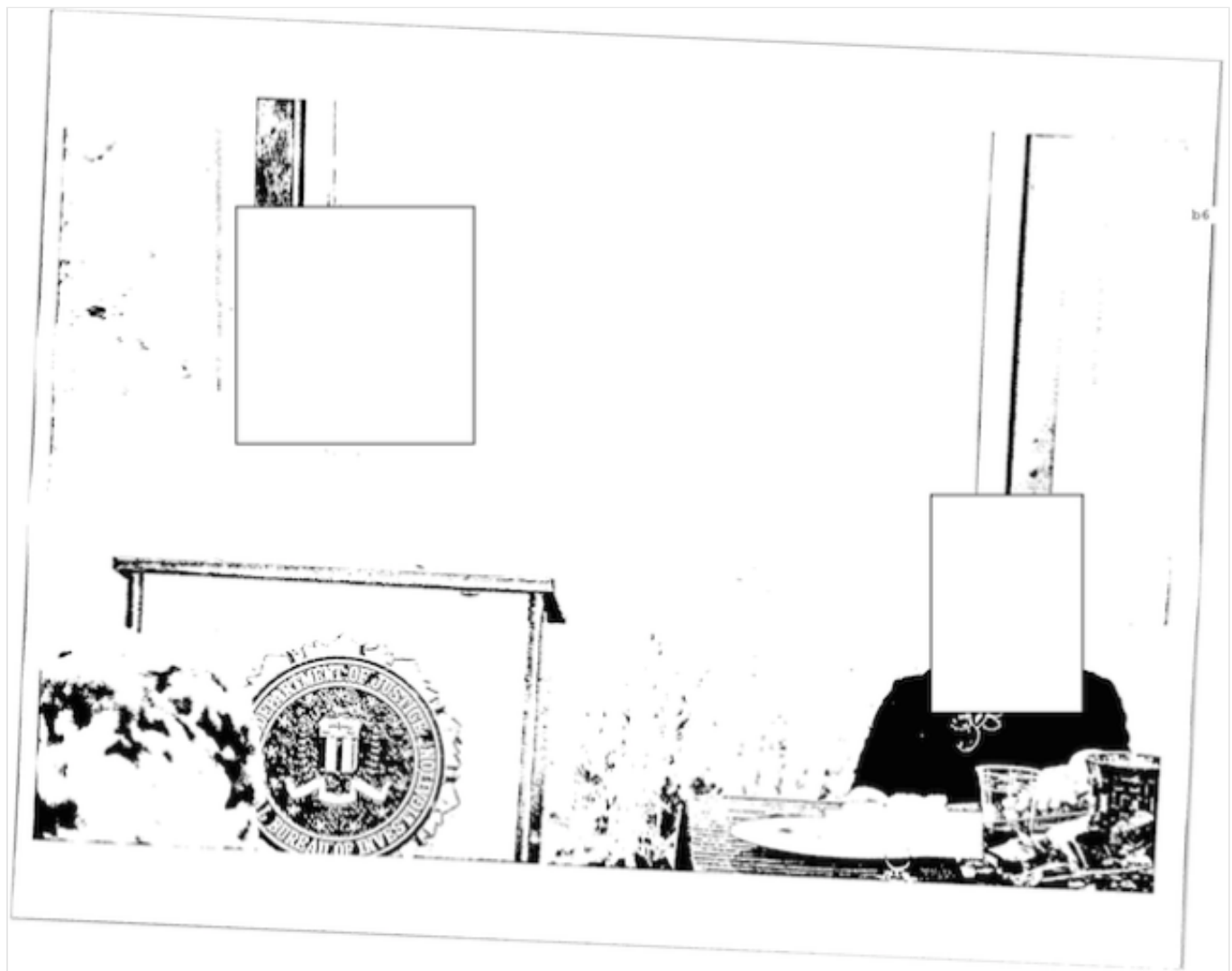
~~for Excellence~~

in
his car

In others, however, it's impossible to tell what's supposed to be redacted in the first place:



(What's that lowermost rectangle there for?)



It's risky, of course, to ascribe any essential meaning to images that have been deliberately wiped of it. But these pictures retain just enough definition and significance to make the project seem not entirely worthless. There's still something there.



To contact the author of this post, email trotter@gawker.com (<mailto:trotter@gawker.com>)



snow (<http://snow1.kinja.com>) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:21pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/there-is-something-very-artful-and-somehow-evocative-a-160258810>:

<http://snow1.kinja.com>)

There is something very artful, and somehow evocative about these pictures. I suppose it's very lib arts of me, but I kinda like them. Arty, even if it doesn't attempt to be so. Perhaps *because* it doesn't attempt to be so. As I said, I like them. So sue me.

2 ★ [Reply](#)



Jerry-Netherland (<http://jerry-netherland.kinja.com>) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:26pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/these-remind-me-of-early-80s-low-res-xerox-art-i-co-16025>:

<http://jerry-netherland.kinja.com>)

These remind me of early-80s low-res "Xerox Art". I could easily see them well matted and framed on a wall. As for their purpose to the journalist, well, so much for FOIA.

8 ★ [Reply](#)



squidgod2000 (<http://squidgod2000.kinja.com>) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:27pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/nothing-says-enjoy-your-retirement-like-a-powerpoint-16025>:

<http://squidgod2000.kinja.com>)

Nothing says "Enjoy your retirement" like a PowerPoint briefing.

1 ★ [Reply](#)



Eugene Galton (<http://eugen-galton.kinja.com>) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:38pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/1602599082>)

<http://eugen-galton.kinja.com>)



5 ★ [Reply](#)



(<http://caekislove.kinja.com>)

[caekislove \(http://caekislove.kinja.com\)](http://caekislove.kinja.com) ▸ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:50pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/you-know-i-usually-hate-on-new-gawker-spinoff-sites-b-160260>)

You know, I usually hate on new Gawker spinoff sites, but this one is all right.

4 ★ [Reply](#)



(<http://clowncone.kinja.com>)

[clowncone \(http://clowncone.kinja.com\)](http://clowncone.kinja.com) ▸ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 6:32pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-always-said-the-fbi-was-a-bunch-of-blockheads-il-1602670707>)

I always said the FBI was a bunch of blockheads.

...

I'll show myself out.

1 ★ [Reply](#)



(<http://raincoaster5.kinja.com>)

[raincoaster \(http://raincoaster5.kinja.com\)](http://raincoaster5.kinja.com) ▸ J.K. Trotter

Today 1:28am (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/this-is-easily-the-most-fascinating-article-ive-seen-on-1602834908>)

This is easily the most fascinating article I've seen on Gawker Media this year, and beautifully written besides.



[minto \(http://minto.kinja.com\)](http://minto.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Today 5:03am (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/this-is-a-beautiful-post-1602866616>)

(<http://minto.kinja.com>)

this is a beautiful post.



[see you in rach-hell \(http://seeyouinrachel.kinja.com\)](http://seeyouinrachel.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Today 10:03am (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/these-are-evocative-and-creepy-theyre-identityless-but-16029>)

(<http://seeyouinrachel.kinja.com>)

These are evocative and creepy. They're identityless but we can't help but wonder exactly who they are. I like them.



[Andy Cush \(http://cushac.kinja.com\)](http://cushac.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:30pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/man-these-are-really-beautiful-kinda-reminds-me-of-ra-1602594156>)

(<http://cushac.kinja.com>)

Man, these are really beautiful. Kinda reminds me of Raymond Pettibon. I especially like the ones where they take pains to redact each face individually (with overlapping squares!) rather than one big bar.



[J.K. Trotter \(http://trotter.kinja.com\)](http://trotter.kinja.com), Host ▶ Andy Cush

Yesterday 4:35pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/enjoy-the-world-1602596848>)

(<http://trotter.kinja.com>)

Enjoy the world



[Max Read \(http://maxread.kinja.com\)](http://maxread.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

Yesterday 4:26pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/1602591266>)

(<http://maxread.kinja.com>)

This is what these images remind me of more than anything. The hood is a weird, powerful image in surveillance and intelligence culture.



10 ★ [Reply](#)



Max Read (<http://maxread.kinja.com>) ▸ Max Read

Yesterday 4:28pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/the-hood-is-a-weird-powerful-image-in-surveillance-and-1602592>)

(<http://maxread.kinja.com>)

Something about obscuring the face as a way of turning people into objects of surveillance and non-human repositories of information and intelligence.

4 ★ 1 [Reply](#)



EatTheCheeseNicholson (<http://eatthecheesenicholson.kinja.com>) ▸ Max Read

Yesterday 4:46pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/foucault-would-be-proud-of-you-1602605079>)

(<http://eatthecheesenicholson.kinja.com>)

Foucault would be proud of you

2 ★ [Reply](#)



snow (<http://snow1.kinja.com>) ▸ Max Read

Yesterday 4:52pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/but-dont-you-think-that-in-these-anonymised-photocopie-160260855>)

(<http://snow1.kinja.com>)

But don't you think that in these anonymised, photocopied images the act of censorship, that has been distinct of the persons depicted and has happened after the pictures have been taken (unlike in the image you linked, where one can easily argue that the hiding of the face, the act of actually placing such a hood over someone's head, is something that is intended to debase and dehumanise, as well as terrorise, the subject and in a way also the viewer) rather turns the persons depicted into a sort of depiction of everyman, and the situations depicted into something somewhat universal? That there is a fundamental difference in the atmosphere of these images?

I would argue that here the act of hiding the faces of people in these (banal) circumstances is not about "turning people into objects of surveillance and non-human repositories of information and intelligence", but rather of - whilst supposedly done in order to protect their identities of the persons depicted from unwanted attention - (perhaps accidentally) turning them into representations of us all.

1 ★ [Reply](#)



J.K. Trotter (<http://trotter.kinja.com>), Host ▶ Max Read

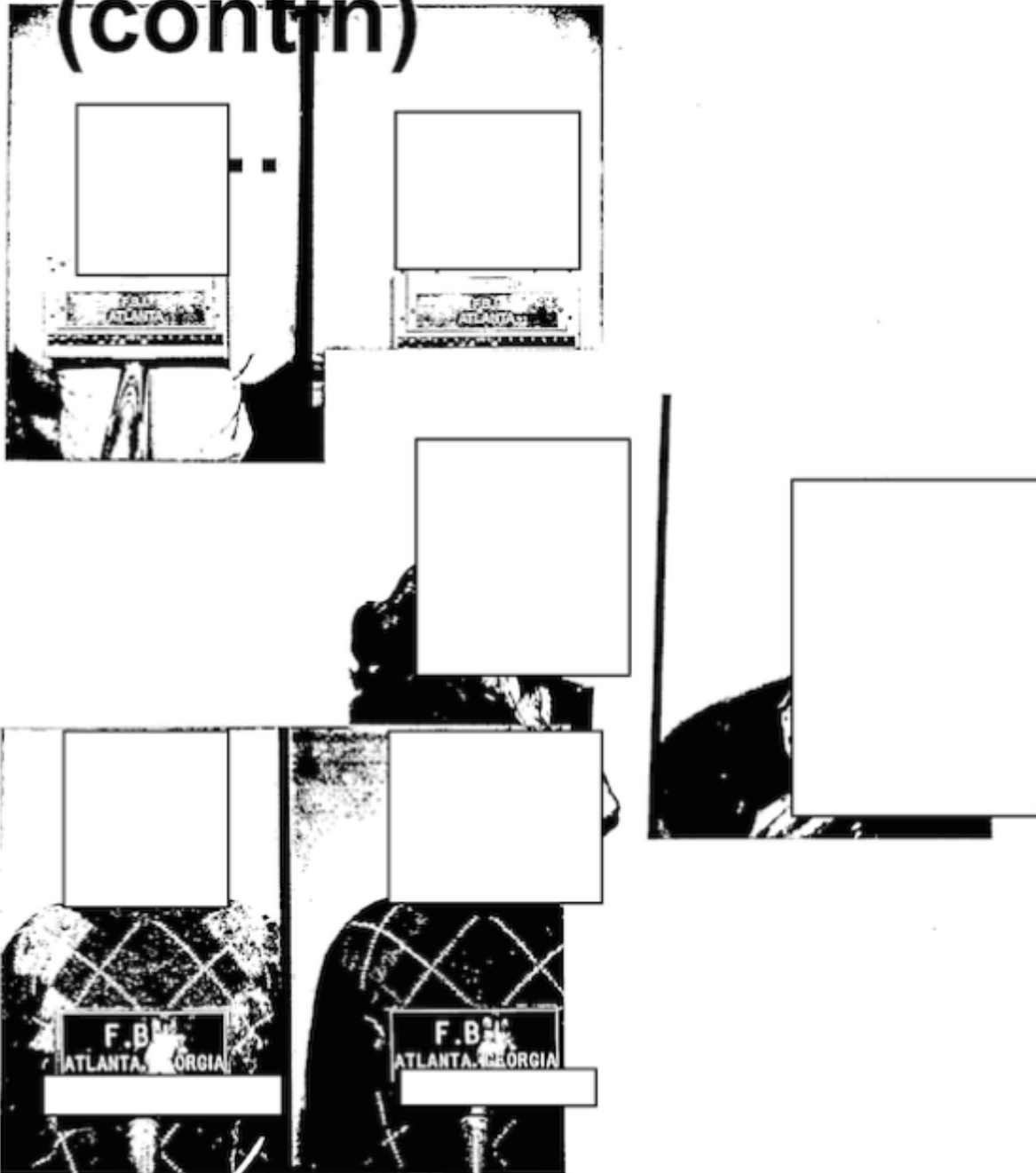
Yesterday 4:56pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/one-of-the-slides-in-the-powerpoint-actually-featured-m-1602611469>)

(<http://trotter.kinja.com>)

One of the slides in the PowerPoint actually featured mugshots of people detained in the Atlantic FBI office (as some kind of gag?):

The Subjects (contin)

b6



This redaction must have been especially awkward to perform. After all, the mugshot is a photographic technique designed to maximize the recognizability of the captured subject—essentially a triptych consisting of left, right, and center shots of the face and chest.

Now that I think about it, I don't recall ever seeing a redacted mugshot. Their entire appeal, after all, is about how much they show, not how little.

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[Max Read \(http://maxread.kinja.com\)](http://maxread.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

[Yesterday 4:57pm \(http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-wonder-the-redactions-were-performed-by-face-recognit-160261](http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-wonder-the-redactions-were-performed-by-face-recognit-160261)

[http://maxread.kinja.com\)](http://maxread.kinja.com)

I wonder the redactions were performed by face-recognition software.

2 ★ [Reply](#)



[J.K. Trotter \(http://trotter.kinja.com\)](http://trotter.kinja.com), Host ▶ Max Read

[Yesterday 5:03pm \(http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-feel-like-i-ve-had-to-identify-whether-a-picture-cont-1602615771\)](http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-feel-like-i-ve-had-to-identify-whether-a-picture-cont-1602615771)

[http://trotter.kinja.com\)](http://trotter.kinja.com)

I feel like I've had to identify whether a picture contains a face as part of some weirdo CAPTCHA login dingus. It was a lot easier than identifying the letters of fucked-up text.

★ [Reply](#)



[Matthew Phelan \(http://matthew-phelan.kinja.com\)](http://matthew-phelan.kinja.com) ▶ J.K. Trotter

[Yesterday 7:06pm \(http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-often-think-about-how-not-long-ago-only-eyes-needed-1602615771\)](http://blackbag.gawker.com/i-often-think-about-how-not-long-ago-only-eyes-needed-1602615771)

[http://matthew-phelan.kinja.com\)](http://matthew-phelan.kinja.com)

I often think about how, not long ago, only eyes needed redacting to meet community standards of anonymity. The exact reasons for that no longer being true are complex, but my favorite is "an ecological and culture monoculture of human faces, seen frequently at close range, day in, day out."

[I am also, incidentally, so happy that this photo essay exists and is here today.]

AC/DC



Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap

4 ★ [Reply](#)



J.K. Trotter (<http://trotter.kinja.com>), Host ▸ Matthew Phelan

Yesterday 7:12pm (<http://blackbag.gawker.com/yes-1602689768>)

(<http://trotter.kinja.com>)

Yes!

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