



## ***A Brand New End: Survival and its Pictures***

Carmen Winant

*What matters is to reveal the emancipatory core in all forms that one has experienced.*

Jacques Rancière

You don't need to be forced to drive hundreds of miles for a legal abortion to realize it's been a brutal year for women in the United States. But if you thought the Dobbs decision ending the constitutional right to an abortion was about a single issue, you'd be wrong. As many experts predicted, the lack of accessible abortion has led to a dramatic increase in domestic violence against women. The National Domestic Violence Hotline reports a 100% increase in calls since Dobbs, almost 3,000 per day, the highest number of calls on record. I can't think of a better historical moment to spend time with *A Brand New End: Survival and its Pictures*, a book by Carmen Winant, published by the Print Center in Philadelphia.

Aside from the accompanying short essays, the book is made up entirely of material from the archives of the artist, The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and Women in Transition, Philadelphia. Split into sections reflecting the various types of documentation in these archives, the first and final sections of the book are composed of approximately 100 clippings detailing the beatings and murders of spouses, girlfriends, and children. It takes real commitment to read through and digest the density and scope of this material, great swaths of which are gruesome descriptions of beatings, strangulations, beheadings, gun violence, knife attacks, and women's bodies buried, dumped alongside the road, and thrown into dumpsters.

Story by story, assault by assault, murder by murder, *A Brand New End* creates a visceral understanding of the reality of violence in women's lives.

But if Winant's depiction of the scale and violence of patriarchal oppression makes the life-and-death stakes of domestic violence tangible, its recounting of the opposition to that violence is both vivid and moving. Unfolding over several distinct sections, the "brand new end" in this book takes up the story the newspapers rarely cover, the story of survivors. These are the women who escaped, found help, worked through their trauma, and saw a better future, no matter how brutal their past physical abuse. Most importantly, women formed groups: organizations dedicated to ending the cycle of violence and to holding out the possibility of life after abuse. *A Brand New End* illuminates the importance of these organizations, whether it be to provide safe space or trained therapeutic staff or hotline volunteers.

Organizations are also important because they save stuff. Boxes and boxes of stuff. *A Brand New End* makes a convincing argument that archives can be dynamic sites of resistance as they accumulate documentation of the social and political activities of women's organizations. But just because an archive exists, doesn't mean it makes any kind of sense. There are newspaper clippings, but there are also budget reports, minutes from Board meetings, staff evaluations. Creating something meaningful from this massive amount of documentation depends on finding the needle of meaning in the haystack of boxes and then patiently stitching together something that is both purposeful and coherent. In the case of *A Brand New End*, the needle was provided by two seascape snapshots, talismans of joy and beauty. As the book's keystone images they play an important role in *A Brand New End*. But they are two snapshots surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of other visual documents, the bits and pieces that Winant shapes into a panoramic view, not of individual women or even of organizations, but of their immense struggle to wrestle emancipation from power.

Reconstituting the struggle on the terrain of representation reveals the deep cultural differences embodied by each side. The faded clippings with their justified columns and lurid headlines begin to feel like oppression itself: obsessed with order, dependent on violence, addicted to spectacle and celebrity. Opposing this order, led by the "emancipatory core" of the

seascapes, is a visual resistance made up t-shirts, snapshots, slide-show presentations, photographic games, and pins, materials marked by make-do creativity and aesthetic freedom. Somewhere in between is a difficult and moving testimonial by Donna Ferrato, who photographed victims of abuse for decades, and eventually published the first magazine cover to feature an actual battered woman. Winant treats all this material with deep respect and ingenuity. Different source materials are printed on different papers, different texts are given different type treatments, every document category intensified by its particular method of reproduction. The result is a triumph of archival activation, representational resistance, and contemporary bookmaking that encompasses decades of struggle and distills them into a complex yet coherent visual statement. Despite the variety of source materials and treatments, everything feels essential to visualizing the wide array of political and life forces involved in the fight for emancipation: from the heartbreaking specificity of the violence itself to the operational malfeasance of law enforcement to the sadistic spectacle of media to the grass roots activities involved in creating something new and enduring. It's all here, an entire messy world between two covers.

Besides revealing the representational forms used to aid survival, Winant's presentation of women's artifacts exemplifies what she describes as "pictures at work," the capacity of representations to accomplish purposeful goals. In some ways, *A Brand New End* is just that: a collection of representations put to work. The particular work *A Brand New End* undertakes is to recreate a field of conflict, reminding us that there was and is more to the story than victims: there are survivors, there is opposition, and there is the resilience of dedicated groups of women in the face of overwhelming odds. These women haven't gone away. They haven't given up. And they refuse to be silenced. Winant and her team—from the curators at the Print Center to the writers who contributed texts, from the graphic designers at Common Name to the printers at die Keure—have created a testament to the courage, tenacity, and visual creativity of these women, managing to transform boxes full of paper into a valiant work of art that is also an eloquent act of political speech.

*This piece of writing covers the book created in conjunction with the exhibition by the same name held at The Print Center. It is not a review of the exhibition.*

<https://www.vinceleo.net/a-brand-new-end>