



Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis

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Ever since the landmark publication of Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, it has been impossible to look at photographs, particularly those of violence and suffering, without questioning our role as photographic voyeur. Are we desensitized by the proliferation of these images, and does this make it easier to be passive and uninvolved? Or do the images immediately stir our own sense of justice and act as a call to arms? Are we consuming the suffering of others as a form of intrigue? Or is it an act of empathy?

To answer these questions, *Picturing Atrocity* brings together essays from some of the foremost writers and critics on photography today, including Rebecca Solnit, Alfredo Jaar, Ariella Azoulay, Shahidul Alam, John Lucaites, Robert Hariman, and Susan Meiselas, to offer close readings of images that reveal the realities behind the photographs, the subjects, and the photographers. From the massacre of the Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee to the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, from famine in China to apartheid in South Africa, *Picturing Atrocity* examines a broad spectrum of photographs. Each of the essays focuses specifically on an iconic image, offering a distinct approach and context, in order to enable us to look again—and this time more closely—at the picture. In addition, four photo-essays showcase the work of photographers involved in the making of photographs of brutality as well as the artists' own reflections on these images.

Together these essays cover the historical and geographical range of atrocity photographs and respond to current concerns about such disturbing images; they probe why we as viewers feel compelled to look even when our instinct might be to look away. *Picturing Atrocity* is an important read, not just for insights into photography, but for its reflections on human injustice and suffering. In keeping with that aim, all royalties from the book will be donated to Amnesty International.

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