

LIB 200: Humanism, Science, and Technology **“Representing War and Violence”**

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Essay 2: War, Photography, and Empathy

Paper proposal due: **October 23**

Essay first draft due: **October 30** (bring three copies to class for peer review)

Final essay due date: **November 6**

Format: Your essay should be 4-5 pages in length, in double-spaced Times New Roman, with one-inch margins, and a bibliography in MLA style.

Topic Overview: David Levi Strauss’ articles on post-9/11 photography constitute a response to—and partial refutation of—Martha Rosler and Susan Sontag’s earlier critiques of photography. These critics argued that documentary photography preys on the suffering of its subjects, placating liberal sentiment rather than spurring social or political response.

On the other hand, Levi Straus argues that it is time to move beyond this reflexive critique of documentary photography. He suggests that in the light of iconic images of war from 9/11, Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, and Afghanistan—images which now circulate online with greater speed and reach—photography has taken on renewed importance in shifting public opinion in response to war (the crimes of war especially).

Plan of Writing:

Your essay will take a position on the question, **does photography dull our sensitivity to war violence or awaken it? Can war photography spur the viewer to political action or does it encourage apathy and the status quo?**

Your essay should do the following:

1. Fully explain both sides of the debate (Levi-Strauss vs. Rosler and Sontag);
2. Include one additional critical voice who expands the discussion; and
3. Use at least two case studies to establish and argue your own position on either side of the debate.

Each case study should be comprised of a photograph (or set of photographs) from a military conflict or prison scenario, as well as a discussion of the public reception of these photographs, including the photographer, the place of publication, any commentary accompanying the photographs or resulting from their publication. You should include the image itself in your essay but also describe the image and perform a visual analysis (which we did together in class on Tuesday). In addition to this visual analysis, you build toward an analysis of the photograph’s reception and its effects on public discourse and political action. In doing so, you will also want to establish the historical context for the image, including the history of the military conflict the photograph depicts.

A collection of case studies can be found on the course Blackboard. You can also choose your own case studies, in consultation with me.