

## 16 Ways of Looking at a Photograph

Class Exercise: Chapter 11, Psychic Numbing

Susan Sontag's argument that the more we look at photographs of violence the more we become numbed to the meaning of violence is persuasive. One way to approach the question of what it does to us to look at images of violence is to create a journal of our immediate responses to such images. For this exercise, visit the website of war photographer James Nachtwey

<http://www.jamesnachtwey.com>

As you view his images, keep written notes of your responses. Students can even take notes of physiological as well as psychological responses: is your pulse-rate increased as you look at these images? Then go to the website of photographer John Paul Caponigro

<http://www.johnpaulcaponigro.com/gallery/>

Repeat the exercise: what are your responses to these images? Here I do not mean your analysis of the images, but just your mood, and physical state. For Sontag, looking at any photograph can possibly be an experience of distancing oneself from the real world, so don't assume that looking at Caponigro's images will necessarily be different from viewing Nachtwey's war photographs.

Instead, take notes of your immediate responses and see what you learn.