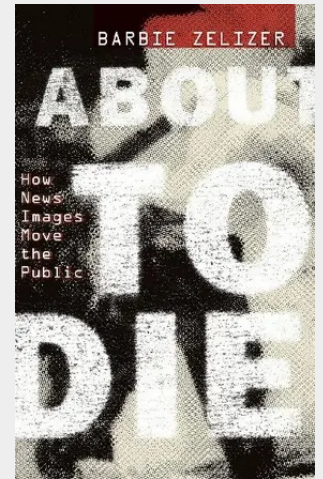


About to Die

Images of people about to die surface repeatedly in the news, particularly around the difficult and unsettled events of war, political revolution, terrorism, natural disaster, and other crises. Their appearance raises questions: What equips an image to deliver the news; how much does the public need to know to make sense of what they see; and what do these images contribute to historical memory? *About To Die* addresses these questions by using images of imminent death as a litmus test for considering news imagery and visual meaning more broadly. The depictions, freezing action at the elemental moment when a person's contribution to history is registered, elicit contemplation and emotion. Used in ways that counter traditional understandings of both journalistic practice and the public's response to news, such images drive the public encounter with important events through impulses of implication, conditionality, hypothesis and contingency, rather than through evidentiary force. These images call on us to rethink both journalism and its public response, and in so doing they suggest both an alternative voice in the news--a subjunctive voice of the visual that pushes the 'as if' of news over its 'as is' dimensions--and an alternative mode of public engagement with journalism--an engagement fueled not by reason and understanding but by imagination and emotion. Tracking events as wide-ranging as the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, Holocaust, Vietnam War, famine, Intifada, 2004 tsunami, and 9/11 and the 'war on terror,' this book suggests that a different kind of news relay, producing a different kind of public response, has settled into our information environment. It is in a development that has profound and under-explored implications for society's collective memory, the full breadth of which are tackled here.

An analysis of about-to-die images in 19th, 20th and 21st century U.S. journalism, with some discussion of news images elsewhere, raises fundamental questions both about how these pictures depict the news, how they figure in collective memory and how they connect with the public at multiple points in time. In so doing, it suggests a refinement of how news images have been thought to function and how the public has been thought to respond.



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