

## The Effect of Sontag's Work on Other Scholars

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Scholars acknowledge the significance of Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and its ideas on a broad range of topics from religion to cancer. Scholars also use Sontag's ideas towards their own work and have different points of view and uses of her thoughts. Scholars use Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* as a source of reference to religion, women's studies, and even cancer.

From the book, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces between*, James E. Young uses Sontag as a source of homage. Young dedicates a chapter to Sontag, "Regarding the Pain of Women", in which he elaborates on her ideas on how we view photos of war. Young alludes to the concept of objectification of women, specifically during the Holocaust. Young explores the idea of voyeurism in the chapter as he discusses the idea of viewing from afar. He states that it "converts their suffering into cultural, even psychological objects"<sup>1</sup> Young uses Sontag's idea of objectification in images to explain the images of women during the Holocaust.

The journal article, "Biting the Bullet: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Violence" by Jonathan Allen, uses Sontag as a source of comparison but also a way to continue elaboration and questioning of her ideas. Allen uses Sontag's example of how images of atrocity or destruction can evoke many different responses, dependent upon the viewer. This similarity relates to Young and his idea of women in the arts of Holocaust memory. Young's idea that women become dehumanized by these photos conveys a problematic reaction. The problem of people overlooking the actual experiences and stories of these women. Allen elaborates on this idea by asking the question of what moral power do these images possess. When he asks this

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Young, "Regarding the Pain of Women:: Gender and the Arts of Holocaust Memory," in *The Stages of Memory*, Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 107–25.

question he uses Sontag's ideas but also uses his ideas. He states, "one might think that Sontag is confident of photography's power to dispel the allure of violence, but this is not so."<sup>2</sup> While Sontag believes that it is impossible for us to feel complete empathy, Allen believes that there is a way and continues his article finding the answer.

Allen uses Sontag and elaborates on her ideas on how images of atrocity can evoke different emotions. Similarly in the journal, *Cancer Narratives and an Ethics of Commemoration: Susan Sontag, Annie Leibovitz, and David Rieff* by Mary K. DeShazer, she elaborates on the ideas on images of cancer victims which convey emotions that dehumanize the victim. DeShazer's article is also similar to Young's in that both the cancer victims and women in photos are remembered more for the victimization rather than their personal stories and lives. DeShazer talks about the ethics and stories of cancer and uses *Regarding the Pain of Others* in a way to explain Sontag's personal experience with cancer. DeShazer recognizes that *Regarding the Pain of Others* was written in response to war, and genocide, from the Holocaust to Bosnia to Abu Ghraib, and not in light of death from disease.<sup>3</sup> DeShazer uses Sontag's idea of "the iconography of suffering has a long pedigree. The sufferings most often deemed worthy of representation are those understood to be the product of wrath, divine or human."<sup>4</sup> By connecting cancer patients and the burden these images carry, she describes the emotional magnitude. DeShazer also elaborates on the idea of why private images should be made public. Young would disagree with DeShazer due to the dehumanization women experienced from images of

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<sup>2</sup> James E. Young, "Regarding the Pain of Women: Gender and the Arts of Holocaust Memory," in *The Stages of Memory, Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 107–25.

<sup>3</sup> Mary K. DeShazer, "Cancer Narratives and an Ethics of Commemoration: Susan Sontag, Annie Leibovitz, and David Rieff," *Literature and Medicine; Baltimore* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 215–36.

<sup>4</sup> Mary K. DeShazer, "Cancer Narratives and an Ethics of Commemoration: Susan Sontag, Annie Leibovitz, and David Rieff," *Literature and Medicine; Baltimore* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 215–36.

the Holocaust. Deshazer uses one of Sontag's ideas to question photos of illness from cancer. In a different article, "The Sontag factor: Why do we get sick? Just because the late essayist taught us" by Shelley Page, also speaks on Sontag's experience with cancer and how her writing spoke much more than just war images but personally suffering. Shelley references Sontag's idea of how life allows us opportunities to see atrocities.<sup>5</sup> Shelley uses Sontag in references to her views of her reality and she gives an example of how she was reading the news about Ellen Degeneres being lured away from her girlfriend by Portia De Rossi. This thought connects to how reality can be eroded by certain daily barriers.

Sontag is used in scholarly sources such as books and journals but also in theses, such as "The Effects of the Digital Revolution on Photography" by Elizabeth McNamara for her master's thesis at Fordham University. McNamara uses Sontag more as a social critic and image expert. McNamara uses *Regarding the Pain of Others* to support her thesis, yet also uses it as a source to show Sontag's progression in thought throughout her years as an author. *Regarding the Pain of Others* was Susan Sontag's last book after passing away in 2004. She states, "Sontag freely admits that her ideas in *Regarding the Pain of Others* contradict views of the ethics of photography presented in her earlier work, *On Photography*."<sup>6</sup> McNamara uses *Regarding the Pain of Others* in her thesis to explain how Sontag's writing has developed with her beliefs. Similarly most scholarly sources also reference her other novels, and McNamara uses Sontag differently than the other sources because she bridges Sontag's thoughts throughout her life in a timeline.

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<sup>5</sup> Shelley Page, "The Sontag Factor: Why Do We Get Sick? Just Because, the Late Essayist Taught Us: [Final Edition]," *The Ottawa Citizen; Ottawa, Ont.*, January 15, 2005, sec. Style Weekly.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth McNamara, "The Effects of the Digital Revolution on Photography" (M.A., Fordham University, 2003).

Similarly other authors also use *Regarding the Pain of Others* in reference to religion. In the journal article, *Regarding the Pain of Christ: Susan Sontag at the Foot of the Cross*, Kent L. Brintnall talks about how Christians see the suffering of Christ as a tool. Brintnall somewhat criticises Sontag on her lack of her use of christian examples and how the references that she uses are infrequent. The source is used to show that Sontag's points are clearly flawed and weak in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In this article Brintnall tries to modify Sontag's analysis through the use of Christian images of suffering. He uses *Regarding the Pain of Others* to show how the interrogation of the moral terrain of images of suffering can serve as a bridge to Christianity. Brintnall dives deep into Sontag's worry on "how images of suffering may not be able to stimulate the appropriate ethical or political consciousness relates to the proliferation of such images."<sup>7</sup> Brintnall is also different because he criticized Sontag, yet uses her similarly to Young and DeShazer in the way that these images of suffering convey different emotions.

Even though these scholars disagree on ideas, they use Sontag as an overarching source to answer their different questions. All of these difference source pull from Sontag's persuasive presents mainly as a way to evoke an emotional description of photography.

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<sup>7</sup> Kent L. Brintnall, "Regarding the Pain of Christ: Susan Sontag at the Foot of the Cross," *Discourse* 27, no. 1 (2005): 119–40.

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