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Atrocity Images and the Audience

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The author deposes that he/her based his/her work only on the sources and literature named in the Acknowledgments and that the Dissertation is original text of his/her own.

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Abstract

From *On photography*(1977) to *Regarding the Pain of Others*(2003), Susan Sontag sorts about how atrocity images, influence the majority of audiences. She criticizes the way how an individual see a suffering image. From her point of view, the audiences constantly consumes others' pain unconsciously if the photographed objects is far away. The surfeit of similar horrendous photographs rendered the audiences into the consumers.

In the present thesis, I would like to examine the relevancy of Sontag's theory, her interests in emotion in charge of atrocity and pain, in respect to controversy documentary photography and contemporary art photography in war / conflicts. To analyse and extent the author's perspective from her last publication *Regarding the Pain of Others*(2003) in tend to apply them to our generation. What is our relations with distant distress and calamities nowadays? Moreover, to use this study building a reference to speculate how to see and talk responsibility to atrocity — which is faraway, in photographs, in our everyday life — in our time.

1. Introduction

You wake up then start browsing your cellphone just next to your bed. News pop up. Horrifying images with dramatic report, another attack/ catastrophe happens again somewhere in the world when you are asleep last night. It's horrible. You slide to another piece of news. It is horrible but the same horrible you encounter more and more often. Half an hour after, you hop up from the bed, pacing to the window to check the weather outside, the view of the street in front of your flat looks just like the same. The transparent shadow of the atrocity images you see earlier seems far away, detaching from your own reality.

This is an ordinary everyday view of our contemporary life. Tremendous atrocity images on different mobile devices' screens appeared everywhere. Those ethical debates about the way how to see an agony photograph become the reflection in the water of our life scenes. At this moment, the horror could not be seen more real than ever but when you stretch out your arm trying to reach the image, the surface of water begin to break, nothing is complete. Does Sontag's arguments all true?

1.1 Preface

When people talk about photography, especially images which represent the pain of others, no one would skip her name. In the earlier 70's in Europe, John Berger also turns his way of seeing from painting to photography. Berger's article *Photographs of Agony*¹ was published on New Society magazine in 1972, three years before the end of the Vietnam War. During Vietnam War, television broadcast initiated to get involved in the war field. Therefore, the standard of ethic and authenticity of war photography were both increased. As a result, the new legitimacy of photography is strengthened. This is the background of the generation when Sontag published *On photography*. "Intellectuals had the obligation to be engaged, as if engagement was consubstantial to the status of intellectual." said Jean-Paul Sartre. In Berger's article, he pointed about the moral inadequacy of the readers who see agony images on the news. Berger concerns about a viewer's realization of his or her own moral inadequacy would make the individuals feel inability to act or only make the instant contribution to

¹ BERGER, John. *Understanding a photograph*. London : Penguin Books, 2013. ISBN: 9780141392028.

get rid of guilt. Both reactions are depoliticised. Sontag's publication was an echo from another continent. Under the context, a photograph could never be a simple object, there have both political and sociological connection behind the frame. While the society encountered images more and more, individuals try to learn how to make essential decision from a photograph, to look for the hidden bloodline within a photo became the responsibility of public intellectuals. Sontag, who is called the consciousness of American, seemed naturally turned her attention to criticise photography and its connection to majority in the mass culture. Hereafter, she focused on the theme till the end of her life, Apparently, it could be seen as a proof that our world only become more and more indivisible to photographs since then. Sontag's first book addresses to images as its title *On Photography* was published in 1977. Her book successfully forms most of our contemporary skeptical points of view toward photography. Adopting these critics from the mid 70s — from Roland Barthes, John Berger and Susan Sontag — photography theorists like Rosalind Krauss and Allan Sekula brings it to a more strict ethic stance. Moreover, influenced by post-modernism, photography is deeply connected to capitalism.²

1.1 At Present

At present, we are living in an era that the audiences mostly doubt authenticity of a photograph before looking at it. "Is this real?" become a common anxiety. Even though, through the military technology developing, it is able to control the battle fields from farer distant than before nowadays, the spectators are pulled closer than ever to disaster. Along with developing of social media fields, an individual's corresponding identities to photograph is intertwined. Whereas, most of discussions on photography are still deeply tied up with those ethical arguments, especially on documentary photography which be given responsibility to record the complex truth of society. Hito Steyerl's, an artist as well as the theorist, perspective from contemporary documentary is quite accurate toward the chaos of contemporary photography. She explains, "Terms like "truth" "reality" "objectivity" apply in photography are lack of

² LINFIELD, Susie. *The cruel radiance: photography and political violence*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2012. ISBN-10: 0-226-48251-0

common valid interpretation and solid standards, most theories of photography are as blurry as the authenticity of documentary.³

With the current dilemma of living conditions and the diversified and dynamically changing media, this study aimed to create new territory of discussions in terms of the relationship of atrocity images and the audiences, I would start from clarifying Sontag's initial perspectives on photography. Firstly, using her latest publication, which specialise in exploring distant pain of others, as a watershed. Tracing back her inspiration, then underlining her major arguments in her two books. Later on, collecting the alternative voice from Judith Butler — norm and frame on photography interpretation and Ariella Azoulay — the civil contract of photography to challenge Sontag's ideas about aesthetic, shocking towards atrocity images and its shortcoming of being an evidence. Stefan Jonsson once proposes that “the field of art could become some sort of alternative CNN, which would elucidate the blind spots of corporate journalism and of globalisation in general.”⁴ After comparing theories from both sides, the last phase is to adopt their concepts on controversy images and contemporary art photography in war and atrocity theme in current generation. As a result, to observe the shifting position of the audiences from Sontag's era to present, and to what extent that her theory still function to see a suffering photograph.

³ STEYERL, Hito. The Uncertainty of Documentarism. *#special issue: Make Film Politically* [online]. Chto Delat, Available from: <https://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-55/the-uncertainty-of-documentarism/>

⁴ STEYERL, Hito. The Uncertainty of Documentarism. *#special issue: Make Film Politically* [online].

2. Regarding Susan Sontag

The second chapter aims to clarify the author's iconic viewpoints about photography and atrocity based on her two monographs — *On photography (1977)* and *Regarding the Pain of Others (2003)*. Firstly, to trace back where is the root of theory Sontag applies on “consuming the pain of others” under the context which each photographs is mostly links to a sociological / ethical usage or intention. By reviewing the author’s two books, and looking her theory in depth from the essence of photography to the connection with atrocity, this chapter is guided by two questions, during the period of her two publications — which position had been shifted? Which concern grows even stronger? Through answering these two questions, a foundation would be established for later arguments on suffering images and catastrophes corresponding to the audiences in our time.

2.1 Commodity Fetichism

“Needing to have reality confirmed and experienced enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted.”⁵ Susan Sontag claims in her first book which addresses to photography that the audiences, viewers of photographs, all become consumers. She focuses on the misleading of the relationship between producers (photographed objects) and consumers (spectators). An “object” which been captured by photographs turn into commodities.

This concept could be traced back from Karl Marx. In 1867, Marx expounded the idea of “commodity fetishism”, and examined, the changes in the relationship between the individual and commodities since Capitalism.

“As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. [...] So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which

⁵ SONTAG, Susan. *On photography*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2005. p.18. ISBN 0-7953-2699-8.

attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”⁶ Once the individuals were no longer being directly in touch with the labourers who produce the products, the individuals became the consumers.

In the 40's, Theodor W. Adorno advanced Marx's concept a step further when he brought commodity fetishism into the realm of culture.

“To be sure, exchange-value exerts its power in a special way in the realm of cultural goods. For in the world of commodities this realm appears to be exempted from the power of exchange, to be in an immediate relationship with the goods, and it is this appearance in turn which alone gives cultural goods their exchange-value. But they nevertheless simultaneously fall completely into the world of commodities, are produced for the market, and are aimed at the market.”⁷

He propounds evidence to support the theory of a “regression in listening”. According to Adorno, the change of music under the Capitalist structure, the changes is Capitalism gradually separates listeners from the essence of the music. As a result, the motives of the audience to buy a concert ticket is no longer to have the music experience, but rather be satisfied by the action of buying the ticket itself. Music becomes the vassal of capitalism; the forerunner to advertising.

“Through photography we also have a consumer's relation to events, both to events which are part of our experience and to those which are not — a distinction between types of experience that such habit-forming consumership blurs.”⁸ Neither shooting is non political, nor is seeing. Sontag absorbs these views and superimposes them upon the mediums in photography; the concert ticket became the images of atrocities. To the audiences, the real experiences of music or atrocity, moreover, anything real are mediated by materialistic alienation, resulting in the marketing of light music and the mass production of news under Capitalism.

⁶ KARL, Marx. *Capital*. London: Penguin Classics, 1990. p.165. ISBN-10: 1453716548

⁷ ADORNO. Theodor W. *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. p.279

The article is also available from : <https://yaleunion.org/secret/Adorno-On-the-Fetish-Character-in-Music-and-the-Regression-of-Listening.pdf>

⁸ SONTAG, 2005. p.121.

2.2 From 1977 to 2003

To analyse the concepts and the changes between the two books, I would like to compare 1) what is the essence of photography according to Sontag, and 2, what does she see in photography which captures atrocity.

On Photography(1987)⁹ starts with the famous Plato fable — men in a cave who are born to see only the shadows from reality. In short, this fable pretty much sums up the whole book in the opening: Reality is the shadow to cavemen, but shadow is never the real thing.

If we consider the Plato fable as a modern prophecy then go further to discover what is the shadow about, we could recognize that the shadow on the cave wall represents photographs. If we go deeper to discuss what is the relation between the cavemen and the shadow, we would reach to the first core of this book — photographic seeing.

- The Essence of Photography

Sontag supposed that photographic seeing is a new way for people to see and judge the reality, moreover, it gradually substitutes the original way how an individual sees the world by his or her own eyes.

- 1) “Photographic seeing means an aptitude for discovering beauty in what everybody sees but neglects as too ordinary [...] they were to create interest, by new visual decisions”¹⁰ This way of seeing enlarges the details, it intentionally looks for the interesting part in the daily repeating scenes. Photography inherits the aesthetic of surrealism completely: this aesthetic leads to an uncompromisingly egalitarian attitude to all themes.¹¹ Also, under photographic seeing, everything is real, at the same time: everything is the same important to another thing. Reality finally gets flatten under this standard.

⁹ SONTAG, Susan. *On photography*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2005. ISBN 0-7953-2699-8.

¹⁰ SONTAG, 2005. p.69.

¹¹ SONTAG, 2005. p.61.

- 2) This viewpoint celebrates particular moments, once a shutter is pressed, the reality is cut in pieces once again. Photography worldview is disconnected and fragmental, hereat, mystery born, fascination starts to talk. More familiar the viewers get to photographic seeing, more vague the boundary between the “real” reality and the photographic reality become.

These two essential characteristics of photography leads to a phenomenon: a photograph could be more real than the reality per se. Sontag quotes Émile Zola in the chapter *Heroism of Vision* “you can not claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it.” Photographs now not only record the real world, but become the powerful authority which forces reality to follow.¹² Reality has to wait for be verified by images. The power structure between two sides inevitably reversed. We have all tied up in this contemporary cave, the shadows have shrouded our field of vision long ago. According to this new norm, the power of viewers own experiences worth less and less. A viewer can easily purchase the experience which he or she never encounters in person. For instance, to possess a piece of warfare simply by buying a one dollar postcard in a modern museum gift shop. Most of our human experiences become secondhand. Therefore, when the viewer finally had a chance to be on site, the first time experience is already a de-deja-vu. Likewise, when experiences of events are available to be placed in viewers’ shopping carts, the viewers unconsciously become the consumers. The subjects in photographs are degraded to commodities.¹³ Since then, photographic aesthetic consumerism is well established. (habit-forming)

- Photography Echo Atrocity

The concept of photographic seeing could also be applied on examining atrocity pictures.

- 1) “Beauty will be convulsive, or it will not be at all.” quoted by Sontag from André Breton.¹⁴ One of the strength in photography is to find the beauty in the rusted, trashy, banal scenes. An atrocity image would always have to struggle in between the aesthetic of surrealism and the demand to be the evidence of some important

¹² SONTAG, 2005. p.67.

¹³ SONTAG, 2005. p.91.

¹⁴ SONTAG, 2005. p.87.

events. Photography is constantly decorating the real events, even though horror and suffering are both included within the picture. To some extent, an atrocity photograph could also look fascinating. As a result, the pleasant which the audiences could receive from the aesthetic charm of atrocity images would eventually neutralise the shocking power of distress. "Cameras miniaturise experience, transform history into spectacle. As much as they create sympathy, photographs cut sympathy, distance the emotions."¹⁵ Tremendous of horror images also helps this tendency of emotional detachment. One could argue that the viewers of atrocity photographs are unconsciously consuming the pain of others.

- 2) One might claim that a photograph is a solid object, the event which was captured by it was already happened when a viewer sees it. Accordingly, this understanding cultivates the passiveness of the audience. All in all, Photographic seeing is a dissociating way to look at the world, even it raises some conscience, it is unable to simulate the viewer to act or to leave deep footprints in either ethical or political understanding.
- 3) Meanwhile, the viewers are feeling exempt from the calamities. The audiences are not the one who is suffering by misfortune, they are outside the frame. This secret feeling of taboo even simulates viewers to see more. Yet more you encounter these genre of photographs, more you feel dissociated.

After three decades¹⁶, Sontag's last book *Regarding the Pain of Others*(2003)¹⁷ was published. This book extended the discussion between photography and war / atrocity/ disaster. "There is no wars without photography"¹⁸, photography and war are tightly bonded together, none of them could exist without each other. During Vietnam War (1955 - 1975), the legitimate of photography raises higher and higher (*On photography* was published right before the war ended.). The majority of people attempted to looking for the truth in photographs without realising that they were only

¹⁵ SONTAG, 2005. p.85.

¹⁶ *On photography* was published in 1977. Whereas, the articles inside the book were written during 1973 -1977 and issued on New York Review of Books first.

¹⁷ SONTAG, Susan. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York : Picador, 2010. ISBN 0-31242219-9.

¹⁸ SONTAG, 2010. p.66.

mimicking the reality. The second book is finished three years after September 11 attacks in 2000.

- Aesthetic and Atrocity Images

“To find beauty in war photography seems heartless¹⁹” wrote by Sontag. Within *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the September 11 attacks is used as an example to emphasize the aesthetic consumerism and the contradictory effect photography. The audiences are not dare enough to call those photographs of calamities ; the surviving scenes after heart-breaking attacks, beautiful. However, they described it with the terms “surreal” or “movie-like”.²⁰ The artistic tendency of photography constantly battles with the expectation of documentation.

- 1) As a consequence, using the aesthetic way of seeing in misery photographs gives the impression that it could possibly hurt the expression of the distress per se. Polished and exquisite images also have better chance to be accused as being manipulated, in spite of beautifying is the most expectable operation of camera. By contrast, to uglify the scenes has more power to convey the authenticity. “Showing something at its worst, is a more modern function: didactic, it invites an active response.”²¹ Accordingly, aesthetic might not only weaken audiences’ sensation but also paralyze their action.
- 2) Another possible factor to alter the viewers in photography is: shocking. For instance, the warning images on the cigarette boxes. Whereas, Sontag also mentions “shocking” can be used to and the audiences can also choose to not look. “No Committee of Guardians is going to ration horror, to keep fresh its ability to shock.”²² Effect of shocking could be “used up”. Shocking is as well as deeply connects to the photographic enterprise. Horror gets attraction and sells. This fact relates to human’s nature of prurient interest. Calamities and horrors fulfilling the journalism fields everyday, people all have secret needs in mischievous and cruelty.²³

¹⁹ SONTAG, 2010. p.75.

²⁰ Sontag quotes the exact same line how André Breton defines beauty again in the second book.

²¹ SONTAG, 2010. p.81.

²² SONTAG, 2010. p.108.

²³ SONTAG, 2010. p.98.

- Alteration from 1997 to 2003

- 1) In *On Photography*, the author claims that “As much as photographs create sympathy, it shrivel sympathy.”²⁴ After thirty years, she softens her judgment, there might not be such evidence to prove photographs have the absolute impacts to diminish ethics. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the author attributes the problem on media, especially the news on the televisions. On one hand, Sontag criticises television as a medium that creates passive audiences. “Images shown on television are by definition images of which, sooner or later, one tires.”²⁵ In her assumption, television watchers need to be simulated all the time, instead, they will easily switch to another channel in the next second. In another hand, if the audiences repeatedly encounter miseries often, it gives the impression that calamities and war is totally impossible to end one day. “An image is drained of its force by the way it is used, where and how often it is seen”.²⁶ Media is the keyword. Being the container of atrocity images, it should have taken more responsibility than the camera.
- 2) Secondly, the writer confirms that photographs covers and substitutes the reality in the previous book. However, she disagrees “society of spectacle” could totally replace the real world in the second book. Sontag went to Sarajevo during the Bosnian war (1992 - 1995), she directed the play “Waiting for Godot” with Sarajevans actors and actresses who were trapped in the city at the moment. Jean Baudrillard criticised Sontag’s move was an illusion of a self-indulgent intellectual with privilege. She fought back and said that he was a postmodern moral idiot.²⁷ Educated cosmopolitans treat news as an effect of entertainment and assume everybody has the same luxury to choose to be a spectator. According to Sontag, the truth is — none of the distresses are the same.

2.3 Summary

²⁴ SONTAG, 2010. p.82.

²⁵ SONTAG, 2010. p.82.

²⁶ SONTAG, 2010. p.82.

²⁷ CHAN, Evan. Against Postmodernism, etcetera--A Conversation with Susan Sontag. Postmodern Culture [online]. [Accessed 23 March 2017]. Available from: <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.901/12.1chan.txt>

In short, photographs still in need to convey the truth from the atrocity on site, as an evidence of reality. At the same time, there is always a human's perspective behind the frame: these "evidences" are never machinery or neutral. The compassion which is arose by atrocity image are unstable. Media, especially television, creates a vulnerable circumstance. It tries to attract the audiences by shocking them constantly which led the consequence that the audiences' sensation were numbed. When television watchers can reach the calamities by the screen in front to them, the distant between them and the photographed ones who suffered are blurred. Television watchers forget the causality links two sides. To see an image includes distant pain is already an costumer action. It creates the frustration for the audiences, warfare is endless and becoming globalize. The audiences feels, they have nothing to do to help.

By contrast, Sontag tends to believe the power of narrative could help the audiences have better understanding of reality and urge them to think it with depth. Strength of photography stays on the surface, photographer's intention could not decide the fate of an image. Photographs require captions to explain. The affectation of an suffering image becomes completely unpredictable in our consumerism society.

However, is it all true? A photograph really has no power to generate a strong enough visual perspective to speak out the "truth". If an image is believed to have power lying to the audience, in fact, it might also have the same strength in didacticizing them. Do photography only misleading us from reality all the time? Sontag depicts her first personal experience reading a book includes atrocity images when she was twelve. She describes it as a watershed, a firm line which have drew strictly in the middle of her life before she encounters those photographs. Can one argue that Sontag becomes an activist and intellectual who criticize photography all her life was in some extent inspired by this first encounter with atrocity image? It might as well be that an photography still has some strength to intervene a spectator's decision.

3. The Alternative Voice

In the third chapter, the aim is to bring forward the alternative voice of atrocity images in respect to Sontag. In order to provide the comparisons to her theory in the previous chapter. The argument will focus on, 1) How the authors elaborate photograph, and 2) the relation between atrocity images and the audiences then 3) Compare with Susan Sontag's. Moreover, use these perspectives from different said as a standard to initiate the discussions and examine contemporary art photography and iconic photojournalist example on the atrocity theme in the next chapter.

3.1 Frame and Norm, When is life grievable? — Judith Butler

In *Frames of War : When is Life Grievable?*²⁸ Judith Butler examines how distant misery is presented in The United States. Besides, what is the audiences' reaction relate to certain presentation of disaster and misery. According to Butler the key point of atrocity images is to understand the various norms beyond specific circumstance and see photography through its own frame reality to adapt the "visual interpretation" in the photograph.

- Narrative Coherence versus Visual Interpretation

From *Regarding the Pain of others*, Sontag emphasizes the different functions between narrative and photography. First of all, due to lacking narrative coherence, a photograph could only stir the emotion surface momentarily but without leaving a thoughtful imprint, not even to mention about changing personal political commentary. Without any caption or text to speak up for an image, the audiences will lose the chance to understand the atrocity theme within the photograph. If photographs do still have the strength to deliver the distant suffering and motivate the audiences to change their political judgment effectively.²⁹ Sontag firmly believes that narrative is more active to simulate the action by its continuity storyline (narrative coherence). Somehow, her lack of confidence toward visual interpretation never generates the same concern in literature / caption. Narrative does not "worn out"

²⁸ BUTLER, Judith. *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* London : Verso, 2016. ISBN 978-1-78478-247-4.

²⁹ BUTLER, 2016. p.68

while conveying the distant pain of others, furthermore, it is more possible to mobilize the audiences. (Although, she quotes Baudelaire's diary to against bourgeois in her time. "It is impossible to glance through any newspaper [...] an orgy of universal atrocity. And it is with this loathsome appetizer that civilized man daily washes down his morning report."³⁰. In Baudelaire's generation, newspaper had not included photographs yet.) In short, Sontag proposes a photograph does not allow the audiences to build up an interpretation on it. Butler doubts the proposition, on one hands, she points out that when Sontag outcries "Let the atrocity images haunt us!" in the end of her second book, it already demonstrate that photography do invoke some kind of reaction from the viewers. In fact, photography intimidates the only medium that Sontag believes in.³¹ In another hand, Butler argues compare to narrative coherence, photography already built its own visual interpretation trough the framing reality - the light, the angle, the focus...etc.³²

One could argues that, Sontag also mentions about the same frame reality in photography from a different understanding. She tries to call the attention from the audiences that they should not forget there is always a personal perspective behind the camera, those frames do not make from a machine with objective action (For instance, especially be shown in Abu Ghraib pictures, we can easily see the trace of the photo makers). Whereas, even if both of them are talking about the frame reality toward photography, the decisive argument between these two aspects is about how visual interpretation work through a frame. Butler indicates how interpretative a photograph could be is in respect to the understanding of the "frame". Every images are framed with particular intention. Visual interpretation is to decoded this intention hidden behind a photograph through its frame. When it comes to interpretation, Butler advocates that "it is not just that the photographer and/or the viewer actively and deliberately interpret, but that the photograph itself becomes a structuring scene of interpretation and one that may unsettle both maker and viewer in its turn."³³ A photograph carries what reality registers in it alone.

³⁰ SONTAG, 2010. p.83.

³¹ BUTLER, 2016. p.69.

³² BUTLER, 2016. p.67.

³³ BUTLER, 2016. p.67.

- Photograph as a Evidence of Contemporary Catastrophe

The second debate is that although Sontag asserts narrative is more capable to urge action and deeply understating, yet she acknowledges that for contemporary calamities, the atrocity photographs are required to be shown as an evidence to proof the existence of the disaster. In another word, before narrative explanation, photograph is in need to be there first. The image is in a sufficient and necessary condition to confirm atrocity. In this case, the sequence is merely than important, the evidential quality from photography is further than its claim — to claim how our reality should be looked like. Butler intents to break the suspicious of the unidirectional relation which only photograph interprets our world. According to that, if war photography is created within the truth-proofing of the atrocity, the (evidential) appearance of photography itself is obligatory to present the distress. If literary or verbal models are able to interpret photograph as their evidence, it means that the photographs already be framed with that purpose and implementing it through the frame. Wether narrative or verbal from, they are both transmitting what is already contain within the frame of a photograph.

3.1.1 Brief Summery

All in all, the anxiety between narrative and photography from Sontag is that when photograph simulates the viewers feeling, simultaneously, it could forestall thinking. Narrative or our own understanding from the event would be completely overwhelmed by it. Eventually, memories could be structured by its false. Sontag not more than once underline that even the most sympathetic photographers could not express themselves through the tricky characters of photography, at the same time, the audiences are mostly passive and unable to arise “political consciousness” actively in her theory. Whereas, the audiences don’t need a caption to be informed that “a political background is being explicitly formulated and renewed through”³⁴ by the frame. Perhaps, frame could be the shackles but also create the new structure to be seen within the image. If photography no longer have its power to bend the audience’s political view then there will be no restrict in embedding war photography. “The photograph is not merely a visual image awaiting interpretation; it is itself

³⁴ BUTLER, 2016. p.71.

actively interpreting, sometimes forcibly so.”³⁵ Can one argue that this insecurity about photography is unable to interpret itself, to what extent, is relatively confirming that image might have more strength than narratives.

In light of the above, narrative and photography both have their own norms and frames to gain the responses. The solution is neither rely on the strength of text nor being total skeptical on photography capacity will eventually misleading the reality. The idea is to understand the norms and take it into the frames then built the communication to the responsiveness.

3.2 Participants and the Civil Contract in Photography — Ariella Azoulay

In the introduction of *The Civil Contract of Photography*³⁶, Ariella Azoulay initials from her personal encounter to atrocity images. As a contemporary photography theorists, she is one of the most picky critics on Sontag’s perspective. In this book, the author generates a fresh concept called “civil contract of photography” as an attempt to pull the individuals out off their rusty position, to think out of the frame. Azouley claims that even the most talented photographer has no ownership of what appears in the photographs.³⁷ Therefore, who owns it nowadays? Does the author try to say that photographs are incapable to belong to any individuals either forestall by one particular interpretation? Photograph should be seen as tools applying from its participants to create a civil political space.

- **Participants in Photography**

In Sontag’s theory, the audience are the absolute consumers; the photographer frames the image of suffering by his or her own irresistible aesthetic; The photographed subject is sold out by their own photograph. The suffering others stay passive by his or her victim position under the calamities; the audiences as well react passively under aesthetic consumerism created by photography and media. The

³⁵ BUTLER, 2016. p.72.

³⁶ AZOULAY, Ariella. *The civil contract of photography*. New York : Zone Books, 2014. ISBN 978-1-89051-89-4 (pbk.).

³⁷ AZOULAY, 2014. p.11.

photographers are the only authority but could not control the fate of his or her own images. Consuming the pain of others is a one-way relationship with no exits.

Azoulay breaks this chain and creates new contract for the photographer, the photographed subject and the spectator — she reauthorise them all in participants of photography. The citizens are on the same side to against the sovereign. The author's proposition is that photograph bear witness of an encounter between participants and cameras.³⁸ As a consequence, the meaning of a photograph could not be determined or blocked by any of the participants. Hereat, citizen real photography could initiate. If citizens consider their relation to photography from this point of view, most of the conventional aspects of the atrocity images could be rewritten. Thereafter, some hidden rooms relate to photography finally get a chance to be shown.

- an Atrocity Image

In the first place, conventional definition of atrocity image is doubted by Azoulay in various aspects. The main contest is built on the frame of photography. Sontag problematizes the frame as a entanglement which fragmenting the reality into photographic pieces. Azoulay contests the concept and point out the real problem is the frame truing into the boundary blocking the discussion of what is not contained inside a photograph. "Since the photograph does not always meet one's expectation of presence-ing the atrocity to others' gaze, the failure of function of photography is predictable."³⁹ Butler confronts her suspicion by clarify that the viewers should "read through the frame which enable photography". Whereas, in Azoulay's theory, either ways do not extricate from the perspective of the frame. She argues that the atrocity could leave a trace in the middle of the frame or completely outside the frame.

The traditional concept of atrocity image is only reducible by those in certain visual-alike, this vintage definition narrows down how to identify atrocity and the following

³⁸ AZOULAY, Ariella. Ariella Azoulay On her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*. *Rorotoko* [online]. 23 January 2009. [Accessed 31 March 2017]. Available from: http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/?page=1

³⁹ BATCHEN, Geoffrey, GIDLEY, Mike, MILLER, Nancy K and PROSSER, Jay (eds.). *Picturing atrocity: photography in crisis*. London : Reaktion Books, 2014. ISBN 978 1 86189 872 2. p.251.

discussion. Atrocity images are not only those which involves the obvious visual attribution of suffering; which captures the moments when the violence happened; which looks extremely horrifying that makes one unable to confront straight to it. From this new standing point, the common anxiety about photography is gradually losing its strength to incite the audiences by shocking content disappears. “The atrocity is not present in the photograph itself, alone, and cannot be captured in it.” stated by Azoulay “regardless of what it captures, even when no visible trace of the atrocity is actually left in it.”⁴⁰ Indeed, If the traces of atrocity could be totally excluded from the frame, horror is missing. Photographs which are created under disaster condition are functioning as atrocity image.

- Regime-made Disaster

From Azoulay’s perspective, any discussions on photography which starts from aesthetic value, authenticity (real/ false) or horrifying function demonstrate the ignorance of responsibility in the way of seeing. In addition, those photographs which contain the pain of others are not “image of horror” but “emergency claim”⁴¹. The numbness of compassion which claims to be overwhelmed by either photograph or media is a careless conclusion. The essential problem is the power structure existing inside the audiences’ mind which have been shaped from regime invisibly. This structure influences how viewers looking at atrocity and disaster. Sovereign demonstrates in two ways, first, a disaster be translated to a non-disaster, second, a disaster is transformed under the regime which presents itself on the position of the victim of the disaster. The reason why spectators are disturbed while looking at the disaster is because of the atrocity are governed by their own democratic regime who generate it.⁴²

3.2.1 Brief Summery

⁴⁰ BATCHEN, Geoffrey, GIDLEY, Mike, MILLER, Nancy K and PROSSER, Jay (eds.), 2014. p.251.

⁴¹ AZOULAY, 2014. p.132.

⁴² *What is Visual Citizenship?* [online]. 20 June 2011. [Accessed 31 March 2017]. Institute for Public Knowledge New York University. Available from: <https://ipk.nyu.edu>
The interview is from Visual Citizenship Conference at NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge.

In light of the above, Azoulay advocates that the original question “Did the atrocity leave its trace in the photograph?” should be replaced by “What trace did the atrocity leave in the photograph?”⁴³. As a participant in civil real photography, the spectators has the responsibility to understand what they have seen. Afterwards, the following question should be “Why emergency claim disfunction under some specific circumstances?” “Which part goes wrong?”. Photography is capable to create a civil political space and restore visual citizenship. In Sontag’s perspective, The audience has no power, sitting in the couch, receiving distant pain of others through the screens. They either frozen by the fact everything happened in photographs already happened or seeing atrocity as a “lucky” voyeur. A spectator with higher or lower ethic is no different, both are anesthetize by atrocity images, both react passively. “The civil contract of photography assumes that, at least in principle, the users of photography, possess a certain power to suspend the gesture of the sovereign power”⁴⁴ The relationship between the users of photography should not be resemble to empathy or mercy, not be divided to citizen or non-citizen by regime, whereas, to rewrite the visual citizenship. To eliminate the barrier between traditional position, even victims, as a photographed subject could regain their citizenry power by having themselves be photographed as a accuse. If one could apply these perspective, then in particular photography civil space, the users of photography could be able to create a new citizenship and gains its own strength against the sovereign. In this case, the audiences would not be only passive while stand next to a atrocity image, participants could act among it, start with “watch” the picture not only “see”.

⁴³ BATCHEN, Geoffrey, GIDLEY, Mike, MILLER, Nancy K and PROSSER, Jay (eds.), 2014. p.252.

⁴⁴ AZOULAY, Ariella. Ariella Azoulay On her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*. *Rorotoko* [online]. 23 January 2009. [Accessed 31 March 2017]. Available from: http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/?page=1

4. Example of Atrocity in Controversy Image and Contemporary Art Photography

This chapter is aim to apply the viewpoints from the previous two chapters, from Susan Sontag's perspective and the alternative points of view by Judith Butler and Ariella Azoulay, to examine the iconic images and contemporary art photography in atrocity theme. On one hand, to examine if Sontag's foundational theory still operate, on another hand, to try to gather a reference on how to watch the atrocity images in our time as photographers, photographed and all the spectators/ viewers/ audience.

4.1 Perpetrator / Spectator : What can we see in the images from Abu Ghraib

Abu Ghraib torture photographs states an iconic example of how atrocity images could convey and transform in our time. Photographer mainly played the role of a saviour, in the case, the saviour characteristic is overlapped with the American soldier role-play. Whereas, from Abu Ghraib, Perpetrator is the photographer, furthermore, sometimes they are also included themselves in the frame. This makes spectator to realize easily the transitional photographer's identity is shifted — something is wrong— it knocks the alarm even before audiences realize why. Abu Ghraib torturing is also the last topic Sontag last published on New York Times, *Regarding the torture of others*⁴⁵ released in the same year she passed away. In the article, Sontag more than once accuses that photographs manipulates the reality. In the opening, she speaks how photographs decide the way conflicts are seen then evaluate by audiences for decades since Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, "Photographs have an insuperable power to determine what we recall of events"⁴⁶. It seems like the author has no choice but have to agree that photography do has its power. Whereas, where does this power go? It seems like according to the author, photography "replaces" our reality, there's no way back. She approves photography function to a certain extent, but at the same time, her takes both photography pre se and the responsibility of the audience both act passively. In her last article, Sontag

⁴⁵ SONTAG, Susan. Regarding The Torture Of Others. *The New York Times* [online]. 22 May 2004. [Accessed 1 April 2017]. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html?pagewanted=all>

⁴⁶ SONTAG, Susan. Regarding The Torture Of Others. *The New York Times* [online]. 22 May 2004.

intents to focus on the relation between Abu Ghraib leak-out photographs and the power structure behind the sovereign. In spite of that, she mainly sees dysfunctions in photography during the event. On one hand, she points out that politicians's made their public statements force by the appearing of torture images. However, in the other hands, she blames 1) it is not right to separate that camera functions as a essential factor which conducts those "performances" by the perpetrators in front of the lens 2) photographs are still not qualified as a real evidence, they lie.

To answer the accuse of being dysfunction as qualified evidences, Azoulay and Butler both have very similar opinion which is that a photograph may not be able to present the whole truth that audiences want to know, but it does include partly trace of the atrocity. The problem is not if the photographs are "real" or not, they record something actually happened. In fact, "even they speaks falsely, it also speaks the truth." A photograph captures the encounter of the photographer and the photographed with camera. "It is the evidence of the social relations which made it possible, and these cannot be removed from the visible "content" that it discloses to spectators who can agree or disagree on its actual content."⁴⁷ If we apply Azoulay's theory further, photographs of tortures not only shock the spectators by its horror, whereas, these photographs successfully prompt the spectators to notice the shape of regime as a perpetrator within its frames. Their anxiety come from realization that these horrifying scenes are made by their own government. It was not reasonable to reverse the sequence which declares by Butler "First, the photograph builds the evidence and, so, the claim."⁴⁸ then blaming photography monopolize the reality but requiring it as evidence to acknowledge the distress at the same time. The way how Sontag separates the audiences and photographed ones is even exaggerate the sovereign power which stands behind the suffering scenes. Audience and the photographed one should be both on the same side against the power of regime, not be parted as citizen and non-citizen, which makes the spectators have no room to act.

For Azoulay, this argument lead to the discussion of what is the actual important question to ask in front of a atrocity photograph — What is the trace atrocity leaves in

⁴⁷ AZOULAY, 2014. p.126.

⁴⁸ BUTLER, 2016. p.70.

this photographs? In these pictures of torture, we see the sexual mischiefs, we see the actions from the perpetrators who present themselves shamelessly as a perpetrator because the regime backs them up. According to Butler, these photographs from Abu Ghraib prison do not numb the sensation or asking for specific respond, they were transferred over and over under countless contexts, breaking the original idea of torture.⁴⁹ For instance, the art project, *Riley and His Story: Me and My Outrage, You and Us* by Artist Monica Haller.⁵⁰ This is an art book/ object which is created from materials of a veteran nurse from the same place, Riley's Abu Ghraib's photographs. In our time, the identity of an individual to engage in photographs could be highly multiple. In this case, Riley could be seen as a soldier, a military nurse, a spectator of his own military movement and the "distant" pain of others onsite. The "pain", in his case, are nearer, when he was there in Iraq, but farer, in his own photographs when he came back to home. There are lots of horrifying scenes with blood and injury presents in Riley's own images, accompany by some plain daily pictures. If we apply Sontag here, she would probably argues that this work is claiming the pain by the shocking images and could not be completed with its narrative. Whereas, even we go trough the whole story, viewers can barely get a coherence narrative. As a reader, you realize Riley worked in the Abu Ghraib prison(by the visual) as a nurse(by the text). Through the reading process, the "spectators" encounter that it was painful for him to even remember the details of his own story there. Which influence the audience the most? If we read from Sontag's predictive, audiences could blame that these photographs are still not "strong" enough to manifest its own voice. For Azoulay, she declares that because everyone has the right to take pictures with camera in the same moments, a photograph can not be possessed or interpreted by one definition, so no one can claims an ownership of any image. Hereat, what is the trace that atrocity leaves in these images even from the boring every life scenes? In those photographs which Riley took on his way to somewhere with his comrades, the frames are slightly interrupted by a little barrel which extend outward from their vehicle, it appears in the bottom of the frame.⁵¹ Apply on Azoulay, one could argue that those barrel could be seen as a

⁴⁹ BUTLER, 2016. p.78.

⁵⁰ SHARBONNO, Riley and HALLER, Monica. *Riley and his story, me and my outrage, you and us*. Paris : Onestar Press, 2009.

⁵¹ Picture 1. SHARBONNO, Riley and HALLER, Monica. *Riley and his story, me and my outrage, you and us*. Paris : Onestar Press, 2009.

a symbol of sovereignty appears in most of the scenes in Iraq when these soldiers even not fully notices. Haller's editing especially prompt out the perspective as an spectator. Through this way of seeing and the participation like Riley, as a photographer, Haller, as a spectator, citizen and artist, the users of photography create a civil space through the images. Haller creates a project after worked with Riley, to cooperate with other veterans who also want to make their own book. This process of how photography become more and more easy to be made and convey creates a impossible monopoly surrounding, even some photographs look like expression the scene included in the picture, it could easily be diminished by next action, be covered by another meaning. Photography circulates endlessly.

Moreover, what if we consider about the context behind Riley's images with those Abu Ghraib prison leak-out photographs together. Then as a citizen/ participant of photography, we can clearly recognize how regime power apply on it, who is the real perpetrator making the disaster a non-disaster. It is clear that it's the regime power that let these soldier were able to make the torture photographs as a souvenirs. Regime changes itself as a victim, and politicians underlines that people should not eliminate what American soldiers did for protecting the country by these images. *Riley and His Story: Me and My Outrage, You and Us* contrasts a civil political space against the sovereign. The soldiers could be also suffering by the same disaster which made by the regime - it overwhelms both the soldiers and the prisoners. In this way, the users of photography could point out the atrocity within the photographs in different direction. For Azoulay, this gaze itself already has power.

If Sontag were right about the photograph no longer having the power to excite and enrage us in the way that audience might change their political views and conducts, then Donald Rumsfeld will not made his statement about how release all this photographs could effect America identity.⁵² Abu Ghraib prison photographs shows that, using Sontag's word, it have not "worn out" yet. They surely creates some depth understanding to change the political decision and influence the position of American in the middle east nowadays. Abu Ghraib torture photographs also transforms into various representation, for instance, the photographer which capture the Abu Ghraib

⁵² BUTLER, 2016. p.40.

image graffiti on the wall in Iranian capital Tehran⁵³. It shows again the essence of photograph is not allowed to be possessed by anyone, even the photographer. When a interpretation be established, another one could cover with another meaning in the next minute. If one can argue that actually the debating process based on these photographs do create a civil political space. If a spectator could consider in this way, apply from Azoulay, we could no longer be the passive audience but seeing the photographs as a citizen and using it to against the sovereign. These photographs finally reverse the positions between the photographed one and the perpetrators/ regime which hides behind. Can we said that photographs of the torture finally enlighten the photographed one the voice and possible weapon to against the distress which been made by regime.

4.2 What is an Atrocity Images in Our Time?

The common definition of an atrocity images are usually based on its horrifying visual. The photographed objects in the photographs are mostly in pain, bleeding, disable with miserable facial expression behind the background of landscapes which are dramatically changed after calamities, sometimes, it could also be the decisive moment of a dying soldier falling down to the ground. These are our impression of suffering others. From Sontag's era, photography critics are mainly judging how audiences consume these faces by how various aesthetic aspects influence their sensation. Whereas, apply from Azoulay's argument, participants of photography have to see outside the frame, an atrocity images does not necessarily to be looked like one.

4.2.1 The Controversy One

One of the iconic image from Bosnian War by photographer Ron Haviv captures a Serbian soldier kicking the dying Muslim woman in the head.⁵⁴ Sontag takes it as a model of photography to proof that a image could not speak itself visually. She

⁵³ Picture 2. Behrouz Mehri, An Iranian couple walk past mural paintings depicting scenes from the torture of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, on a major highway in the Iranian capital Tehran, June 1, 2004. © Behrouz Mehri/AFP/Getty Images

disagrees with John Kifner — It tells you everything you need to know — an image could not sum up Bosnian war. She accuses that in this particular photograph, mostly of the decisive informations are not told by its visual appearance. A photograph has no ability to tell what an audience need to know. Another iconic photograph by Spencer Platt, caption “Affluent Lebanese drive down the street to look at a destroyed neighbourhood August 15, 2006 in southern Beirut, Lebanon.”⁵⁵ As the United Nations-brokered cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah enters its first day, thousands of Lebanese returned to their homes and villages.”. The photograph include some rich looking young people in a red Roadster on the street driving through the piece of ruin after bombard. The passengers on the car were taking photographs by their cell phones and shock by the scene. It seems like the perfect photography to address to concept of “disaster site tourism” by Sontag. Whereas, following from the controversy debate on this photograph, BBC found those young passengers, as photographed subjects, in the car and interviewed all of them. In fact, they turned out to be also the victims of the bombard who went back to see their home and neighbourhood.⁵⁶ Photograph and caption of this photograph both could not describe the “true” story in the context. Whereas, this kind of controversy cause the discussion and trigger the action of BBC. It breaks the stereotype of how are victims from atrocity should looks like. This is what Azoulay proposes how should participants use a photograph to achieve — to generate a citizen space outside the regime. Accordingly, what is “real” can be seen in a different way. No one possesses the ownership of this photograph but in the end it overture the impression of victim in our common sense. If we apply Azoulay thesis on these two iconic photograph, we sees the responsibility “not only to produce the photo but to make them speak”. We should not take the atrocity images “literally” and limits the discussion by its frame.

4.2.2 Atrocity Outside the Frame

⁵⁵ Picture 3. Spencer Platt, “Affluent Lebanese drive down the street to look at a destroyed neighborhood August 15, 2006 in southern Beirut, Lebanon. As the United Nations-brokered cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah enters its first day, thousands of Lebanese returned to their homes and villages.” © Spencer Platt/Getty Images

⁵⁶ JURICH, Joscelyn. You Could Get Used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, and Photography’s Sensus Communis. *Afterimage* [online]. Vol. 42, no. 5p. 10–15. DOI 10.5040/9781770915862.00000004. Available from: <http://vsw.org/afterimage/issues/afterimage-vol-42-no-5/>
The article is also available from : <https://www.academia.edu/>

From *Execution Portrait*, the portrait of a photographed subject, Palestinian Zacaria Zbeide⁵⁷, who was titled “wanted” by Israel's government does not look like an atrocity image from the first sight. It is a photograph without any horrifying effects, only the gaze from the man, who knew he would be dead soon looking at the viewers. For Azoulay, this is completely a atrocity image. A photograph which been taken under condition of disasters is an atrocity image. It is not only a “image of horror” but the “emergency claims”. The man was executed. Azoulay tries to ask, why it did not work? She then talks about the testimony from Israeli soldier who confessed about how they killed the Palestinians from the order he could not fully understand but have to follow and shot other Palestinians under specific circumstance. Azoulay assumes if spectator could see these two viewpoints together, spectators could realize how regime separate them as citizen and non-citizen.

We could try to apply this concept to define what is an atrocity image with the artist Trevor Pagan’s project *Untitled (Drones)*, Pagan’s work are mostly focus on surveillance, hidden military bases and the power structure which generate these scenes. The project includes mostly abstraction visual of drone as a tiny spot in different conditions with telescopic camera lens. It is worth noticing that, in this project, the artist cooperate with a amateur photographer, Noor Behram, who takes photographs after Drone bombard in North Waziristan, Pakistan. Behram lives in the region whole his life and keep documenting the aftermath scenes for more than five years. These atrocity photographs can be found on online in a interview.⁵⁸ The website warns their viewers, there are lots of images are disturbing (i.e. Dead child purple lips, catastrophe after bombard) but why there are very less strength from these “shocking” photographs. For Sontag, this is exactly how photographs try to shock their audience but get less and less efficient. Whereas, if we could apply on Azoulay, she will points out the question is “civil malfunction”, the “emergency alarm” does not function as it should be. Again, regime changes the disaster to non-disaster. The individuals of the misery are divided to American as citizen and Pakistanis as non-citizens, which blocks the spectators view of atrocity. When we come back to the

⁵⁷ Picture 4. Miki Kratsman, Zacaria Zbeide, 1st Exposure, Jenin Refugee Camp, 2003 (original in color).

⁵⁸ ACKERMAN, Spencer. Rare Photographs Show Ground Zero of the Drone War. *Wired* [online]. 12 December 2011. [Accessed 15 April 2017]. Available from: <https://www.wired.com/2011/12/photos-pakistan-drone-war/>

artwork, the artist only selects one photograph from Behram's atrocity images archive which is a photograph of a drone flying over the sky, an image without horror ("That day it was in the morning and I was at my home playing with my children. I spotted the drone and started filming it with my camera and then I followed it a bit on a bike."⁵⁹). Pagan links this particular image with others abstract photographs and a video intercepted from a communication satellite of a drone vision by an amateur "satellite hacker" to point out the invisible surveillance and militarisation from the regime, an application of visual citizenship. The artist reveals that this is the same regime which governs us, at the same time, creates the disaster and atrocity there. "Things that are so everyday and so banal became indistinct and abstract in a different kind of way. This abstraction of everyday life comes from learning how to notice the way which everyday objects in environment have become militarised and weaponised and the meanings of everyday objects in the visible world have become suspect." advocates by the artist on a speech called "Art as Evidence" in 2014.⁶⁰ If participants of photography could apply on this concept and look at atrocity images in this way, then the Drone flying over the sky images could be counted as an atrocity image for sure. We clearly see the trace of the atrocity in the photograph without visual shocks.

4.3 Aesthetic of Atrocity Image in Contemporary Art

A enormous part of Sontag's argument is focus on how aesthetic is able to influence audiences on photography. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* She, the author becomes more ambivalent to this theory. Instead of asserting that visual aesthetic distracts their audiences to focus on real distress, she addresses the common static of photography to evoke their audience could only be made by shocking them. Moreover, shocking become habituation, numbing political action.

⁵⁹ Picture 5. PAGLEN, Trevor . American Predator (Collaboration with Noor Behram) Billboard 2011. *Trevor Paglen :: WORK :: DRONES* [online]. [Accessed 18 April 2017]. Available from: <http://www.paglen.com/?l=work&s=drones&i=9>.

⁶⁰ transmediale. *Trevor Paglen -- transmediale 2014 keynote: Art as Evidence* [online]. 31 January 2014. [Accessed 15 April 2017]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDxue3jGAug>
Art as Evidence. Moderated by Tatiana Bazzichelli. Friday January 30, 2014, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

Shocking, which is also connected to photography aesthetic. By contrary, Azoulay strongly advocates spectators should not see photographs in this way, "According to Sontag, the picture's fate as good or bad is sealed as soon as it is printed on photographic paper[...]Her "ethics of seeing" is based on an aesthetic judgment [...] Her ethics of seeing, in effect, reifies the new visual field created with the appearance of photography, leaving the photograph in possession of a special "grammar" that allows it to remain independent of its spectator."⁶¹ For Azoulay, to discuss aesthetic as an issue of suffering dismiss the responsibility of seeing from the spectators.

Deep down of Sontag's concern, photography is losing its strength on changing political decision, viewers gets bored or exhausted by its aesthetic demonstration. Recently at Whitney Museum of American Art, a painting become controversy. *Open Casket* by Dana Schutz represents the photograph of Emmett Till, a black boy who be disfigured and died in violence by white supremacists. The controversy initials from a black artist stood in front of the painting with "Black Death Spectacle" on the back of his T-shirt. It goes viral on social media immediately and raise the discussion if the painting should move out from the museum. The photograph of Emmett Till in his casket is the typical example of horrifying image, aesthetically shocking the viewers. Back then, Till's mother insisted on a open casket for the same reason. To show the torture through its appearance to accuse the violence. Schutz, as a painter, is also intrigue by in this photograph for same reason. To the extent, it shows that majority are not numb yet by horrifying factor showing in aesthetic appearance. It might ease this anxiety of aesthetic fatigue, from 1955 till now, audiences still could not turn their eyes from suffering image with its shocking appearance.

If we apply the similar argument precisely on photography, we could go on with the recent exhibition and book *Incoming* by Richard Mosse. The controversy is very similar to Emmett Till painting. Conceptual documentary photographer Richard Mosse often focuses on the conflict themes, *Incoming* is latest project by artist using a rare technic, a military-grade camera to represent atrocity(i.e. refugees). "This thermal camera, which is produced in the EU by a multi-national weapons company,

⁶¹ Azoulay, 2008. p.130.

can detect body heat from a distance of 30.3 km, day or night.”⁶², Mosses describes. The installation of his work in London’s Barbican Centre shows spectacular aesthetic of disaster. Through this special camera, audiences can only recognize the hot spot of objects, all the figures appears in it looks alien-like in black and white. According to the artist, he intends to apply this military technology, which could be used as a weapon, to against itself. He chooses to use this particular visual expression to record refugees to create humanist art form. The controversy also initial from the aesthetic. For instance, a review on ASX — “The baseline theoretical strategy of any conceptual artist making political work should be one of complete and utter rejection of the following things: emotional transformation, unique visuality, the novel use of technology, dramatic strategies of display and installation, and awe-inspiring visual or aural effects [...] the aesthetic concerns of art under late capitalism [...] is forced to align itself with the commodification of all culture at any cost.”⁶³ Distinctive but intriguing aesthetic expression in these images, which should depicts suffering and calamity, worries spectators ethically. It is not so difficult to find where is the roots of this aesthetic suspicions on photography from. “Spectacularity blocks the viewers to see atrocity” “Shocking is the only affect that photography could use on blackmailing their audiences”, these sort of concerns are very similar to what Sontag believes.

If we try to apply Azoulay’s concept on it, even audiences could not see the horrifying factors so precisely under it’s visual aesthetic in the first sight, after a while. they could spot the trace of atrocity in it. Mosses precisely choose to use the camera aesthetically as a metaphor to echo the text in the art book from Giorgio Agamben’s ‘bare life’. Can one argue that It is an attempt to emphasis the non-citizen status from refugees and using the images to create a citizenry space against the sovereign’s distinction of citizenry between them and us? Agamben suggests the audience to renew their concept of human right under the structure of global refugees crisis, and stop dissociating refugees from their own citizenry identities. Both echoing Hannah Arendt, Azoulay has very similar approach to rebuilt a civil contract of photograph. If we apply both of their theory, Mosses work could be a try to eliminates the distinction

⁶² MOSSE, Richard. Incoming. *Richard Mosse Photography* [online]. [Accessed 12 April 2017]. Available from: <http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming>

⁶³ BLIGHT, Daniel C. Incoming: Photography, Contemporary Art, Whiteness I #ASX. *AMERICAN SUBURB X* [online]. 23 March 2017. [Accessed 12 April 2017]. Available from: <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2017/03/incoming-photography-contemporary-art-whiteness.html>

by visualizing refugees and others appear in front of the thermal lens. For Sontag, this case could be a bit similar to Sebastião Salgado, even there is a humanity reason behind the photographer, what remains longer is till the aesthetic achievement. For Azoulay, seeing photographs aesthetically under distress is not the key point. As an spectator, we has responsibility to figure which space does these photographs create and use it to against sovereignty. For Butler, in the case, the aesthetic even provide a frame for photographs/ film to speak.

From these two artworks, one might claim, the problem is based on the witness and lacking of “representational self-reflexivity.” from artists.⁶⁴ Whereas, to some extent, the spectacular visual aesthetic does evoke the panic of skin color identity. In light of this, one should not tide up the aesthetic elements with atrocity contents.

The possible argument could built on the false of the usage of this thermal technic expression. Does it achieve what artist intents to generate? To make the viewers really neutralise these two sided people, citizen and non-citizen, outsiders and insiders. The audience do not need the caption to understand what is the content in the photograph, said Azoulay, the audiences do not need the color photograph to recognize who is the refugees. Does Mosses really achieve Agamben’s ‘bare life’ by it’s visual setting. Atrocity does not have to be within the frame. Whereas, an aesthetic power could go to what extent for an artist could be another kind of question. The interesting fact is, in the artist’s very early work engage with conflict in the video *Intifada*⁶⁵ in 2005, he focuses on the meaning of the word “Intifada”. From the narrative, the artist switches to explore why is the reaction of aesthetic on atrocity images and guilt could trigger the audience to think about it more. No matter this artwork function to what extent, can one claim that the aesthetic appealing in an atrocity topic is still not worn out since *On photography?* After all, could we assume, the aesthetic is not the key we should concern in atrocity images but something else — the sovereignty behind it — it truly influences if a “horror image” could successfully become a “emergency alarm”.

⁶⁴ SHAH, Sunil. Bare Life, Bare Tech: Richard Mosse's Incoming I #ASX. *AMERICAN SUBURB X* [online]. 7 April 2017. [Accessed 15 April 2017]. Available from: <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2017/04/bare-life-bare-tech-richard-mosses-incoming.html>

⁶⁵ MOSSE, Richard. *Intifada*. Vimeo [online]. 13 April 2017. [Accessed 18 April 2017]. Available from: <https://vimeo.com/2147831>

5. Conclusion

— from passiveness to participation

Since Susan Sontag published her last article *Regarding the Tortures of Others* in 2004, has been over a decade. From Crimean War(1853-1856), Spanish Civil War(1936-1939) to Vietnam War(1955-1975), Gulf War(1990-1991) and to Iraq War(2003-2011), war photography keeps evolving in technical and medium aspects. It might as well be shown on the relationship between atrocity images and the audiences. Under extreme international situation, reality only becomes more complex. Individuals could simply have multiple identities to a photograph. With all these floating truths and cumulative suspicious, the initial idea of this thesis is an attempt to observe a constantly transforming position in the everyday life — what is being an audience in our time about? From previous chapters, through alternative voice and examples in both reportage and contemporary art, I would like to point out which concepts from Sontag may not be able to apply in nowadays situations.

First of all, the assumption that photography monopolies reality is deconstructed. Sontag accuses photography mimic reality and not able to be written.⁶⁶ Twisted and partial reality is cropped by its frame. Photography forestalls reality without qualify as an evidence of suffering. Though photograph could tell the false, they also include the truth. For instance, the controversy photograph from Spencer Platt is one of the proofs. As a writer, Sontag tends to empower narrative to fulfill her insecurity on photograph. In fact, not only narrative has its only language, so does photography through its norms and frame⁶⁷. At the same time, caption could be a misleading, the truth is already be in place within the photograph not awaiting to be interpreted verbally or in narrative. Spectators has the responsibility to make it speaks. No one has the ownership to interpret a photograph. A photograph could be conveyed, used, transformed or interpreted in various ways, since no one could possess a photograph, photography lose its authority to forestall reality. Under this endless circulation, Abu Ghraib torture image adapted various interpretation, overturn common understanding of torture.

⁶⁶ BUTLER, 2016. p. 33-63.

⁶⁷ BUTLER, 2016. p. 33-63.

Secondly, aesthetic judgments are not the priority on examining a photograph. In Sontag's worldview on photography, the relation between the audiences and the photographed are strictly separated. Photographs are the one to blame if they blur the line in the middle of the reality and the photographed objects. Aesthetic consumerism make audiences become passive. Shocking are not reliable by times. "Beautifying is one classic operation of the camera, and it tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown. Uglifying, showing something at its worst, is a more modern function: didactic, it invites an active response. For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock."⁶⁸

If we lie this concept under documentary in the field of art, can we really argue that the work which using horrifying, low-quality image materials, for instance, *Incommensurable Banner* by Thomas Hirschhorn or *Taliban Soldier* by Luc Delahaye will be more didactic or efficient on urging political actions or forming ideology than *Fait* by Sophie Ristelhueber or *Incoming* by Richard Mosses? Besides, "Though we feel shock at these photographs, it is not the shock that finally informs us."⁶⁹ Butler argues.

For Azoulay, aesthetic judgments restrict photographs, downplay spectators responsibility to civil contract. As a spectator, we should ask our self what atrocity leaves in a photograph. Furthermore, atrocity not only appears within the frame. Azoulay brings a breaking thought about how to see a photograph, photography is a tool for its participants to reconstruct a civil political space to against regime-made disaster and distinction of citizen and non-citizen by sovereignty. Redevelop "What is an atrocity image?" is a civil practice. Consumers could be its own producers in the social media, especially in the era that the conventional producer - consumer relationship did not exist any longer, consumer could be its own producer in the social media. At the same time, the suffering others could also produce they own images to be seen. "The civil contract of photography assumes that, at least in principle, the users

⁶⁸ SONTAG, 2010. p.64.

⁶⁹ BUTLER, 2016. p.96.

of photography, possess a certain power to suspend the gesture of the sovereign power”⁷⁰

Last but not the last, the major concern of Sontag — if photography still owns the power to change the audiences politically — the answer is positive. In her case, image always fails to fulfill her expectation and gets more and more fragile in the complex world. Whereas, which made her shifts her viewpoint of atrocity images is still from the image. For instance, the image of a crying Vietnam girl running after napalm attack in 1972 makes her acknowledgement of the influence of photograph.⁷¹ Besides, she also agrees with the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison forces politicians to make statement. If Sontag’s worry is true, then the debate to prohibit all Abu Ghraib prison photographs to be seen would not seem so pivotal. If we talk in general, North Korea has an infamous rule that taking photographs outside the consent regions is highly prohibited. The photograph of tank man in Tiananmen Square protests still could not be found in any websites if users search in China. If a totalitarianism sovereign still afraid to be altered by photographs, the answer seems more than visible. These vintage examples could go on and on. If we focus on more recent time, the photography of drowned Alan Kurdi on the beach during European refugee crisis goes viral and initiates tremendous discussions which influences Canada’s refugee politics. A negative example could be Daesh (also known as ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) propaganda photographs and video. The execution videos were widely spread, become iconic also influential, successfully form enormous horror all over western world. To some extent, it fundamentally changed the political composition in the whole EU continent and evokes right-wing populism and xenophobia. What a well operate of “visual interpretation”. The similar examples continue.

Could we say that photography does not lose its possibility to change the point of views from its spectators, but instead, sometimes a photograph does not work as an emergency alarm not because of its not shocking or bloody enough? It’s a civil malfunction. Twenty years later, Haviv’s photograph have been used as evidence at

⁷⁰ AZOULAY, Ariella. Ariella Azoulay On her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*. *Rorotoko* [online]. 23 January 2009. [Accessed 31 March 2017].

⁷¹ BUTLER, 2016. p.69.

the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic and Serb paramilitary leader Arkan are both charged by his photographs as the evidence in trials.⁷² Bosnian war could be address as a turning points to Sontag's way of seeing on photojournalism, at that time, this "iconic" photograph is able to stop the crucial war instantly.

In light of the concept from Azoulay, the audience is not passive but a participant through seeing a photograph. A certain gaze is already a type of revolution act. By looking at these images, the participants of photography gains their power. "Azoulay's assumption is that if our ways of seeing and making photographs "speak" change, the configuration of power relations and collective responsibility will also shift."⁷³

Without a choice, standing on the opposite side which Sontag outcries in the end of *Regarding the Pain of Others*: Let the atrocity images "hunts us". It has already been everywhere. We are all living in the town with the ghosts even with our eyes close. However, instead of floating on the shadows, we should keep acknowledging ourself where is the keystone of the cave, regarding photography, regarding atrocity, regarding being a spectator living in this time. Making a room through photography to see where we can step on next.

⁷² JURICH, Joscelyn. You Could Get Used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, and Photography's Sensus Communis. *Afterimage* [online]. Vol. 42, no. 5p. 10–15. DOI 10.5040/9781770915862.00000004. Available from: <http://vsw.org/afterimage/issues/afterimage-vol-42-no-5/>

The article is also available from : <https://www.academia.edu/>.

⁷³ JURICH, Joscelyn. You Could Get Used to It: Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, and Photography's Sensus Communis. *Afterimage* [online]. Vol. 42, no. 5p. 10–15. DOI

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7. Illustration



Picture 1.

SHARBONNO, Riley and HALLER, Monica. Riley and his story, me and my outrage, you and us. Paris : Onestar Press, 2009.



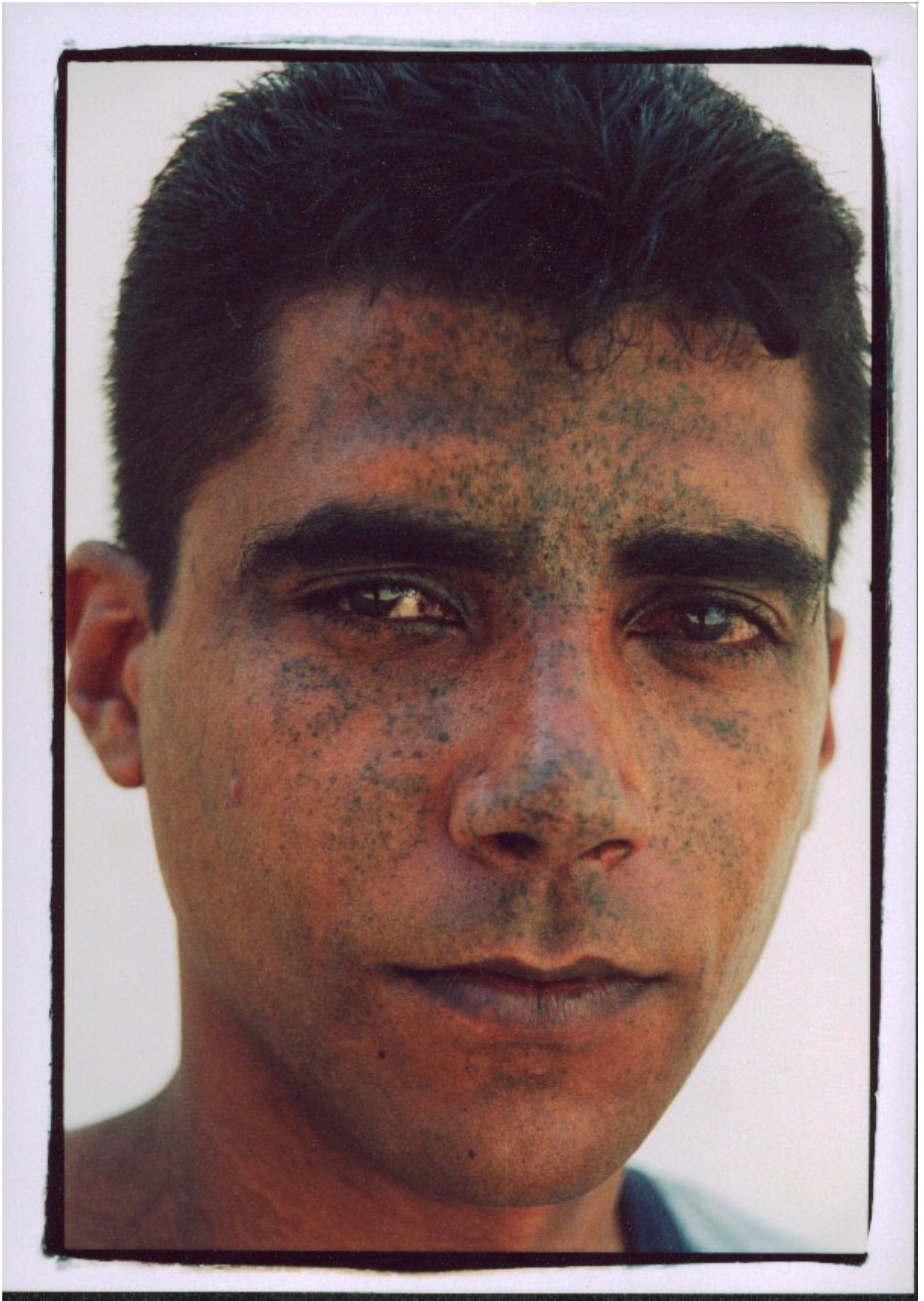
Picture 2.

Behrouz Mehri, An Iranian couple walk past mural paintings depicting scenes from the torture of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, on a major highway in the Iranian capital Tehran, June 1, 2004. © Behrouz Mehri/AFP/Getty Images



Picture 3.

Spencer Platt, "Affluent Lebanese drive down the street to look at a destroyed neighborhood August 15, 2006 in southern Beirut, Lebanon. As the United Nations-brokered cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah enters its first day, thousands of Lebanese returned to their homes and villages." © Spencer Platt/Getty Images



Picture 4.

Miki Kratsman, Zacaria Zbeide, 1st Exposure, Jenin Refugee Camp, 2003 (original in color).



Picture 5.

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