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Disregarding the Pain of Others

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004), Susan Sontag explores the relationship between photography and human suffering. Against her valorization of the photographic medium she highlights an ethical paradox: though photography encourages protracted contemplation that might engender some sort of political affect, separable images lend themselves to exploitative recasting by narrative coalescence.

“Photography is truth,” Jean-Luc Godard once pursued a similar line, only to add: “Cinema is truth twenty-four times per second.” At that speed and unlike photography the cinematic medium denies lengthy meditation on each inseparable image. While this might imply a *disregard* for pain in its cinematically mediated form, I suggest that the horrific imagery of Godard’s cinema generates its own cross-referential narrative and advances beyond a record of suffering into a very deliberate media ethic.

This paper compares the photography regarded by Sontag with Godard’s short film, *De l’origine du XXIe siècle* (2000), taking that comparison as a point of departure to reconsider the mutually affective and ethically freighted positions held by pain and media within cultural studies’ critical methodologies.

(*De l’origine du XXIe siècle*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMboaf7TwRY>)