

Susan Sontag's Readers: Respond, Remember, Re-Read

Colin Burnett

Susan Sontag has left behind a cultural and intellectual legacy that requires a tribute of dynamic breadth and distinction. Towards that goal—in what I knew to be an ambitious gesture—I emailed a group of scholars and critics of distinction, asking them to use *Synoptique* as their forum to elaborate the importance of Susan Sontag to the study of film. I admit that I expected a handful of polite refusals. But to my amazement and delight, I received an outpouring of enthusiastic responses.

I asked the contributors to assess for *Synoptique's* readers Sontag's most lasting/significant/influential contribution to film criticism, whether it be a specific piece, a methodology, a style, or a particular value judgment. The dozen or so reflections here, I happily report, vary greatly in length and approach. There is, however, one constant: the firm belief that Sontag, in her guises as essayist, tastemaker, filmmaker, mentor and regular moviegoer, stands as a significant figure in cinema's first century, and this, if nothing else, because she crusaded like none before her for serious engagement with the art. As befitting its subject, the dialogue created here is an intimate yet critical one, demonstrating that ideological and professional obstacles serve as no serious impediment to the genuine, which is to say serious, exchange of ideas.

I learned an important and encouraging lesson in the pursuit of this remarkable range of personal statements: this world becomes a small and friendly place indeed when the right conversation is on the table. Thus, *Synoptique* presents this tribute: a stellar collection of investigations and musings on the complex manner in

which Sontag's work has intersected with our popular and film culture, with our hearts and our minds. On behalf of the *Synoptique* staff, and all the good people who contributed (as well as those who expressed interest in contributing but were unfortunately unable to do so), I dedicate this collection of reflections, and this edition, to the singular, challenging, and incredibly wide-reaching voice of Susan Sontag.

Colin Burnett, who holds his Master's in Film Studies from Concordia University, Montreal, has written on Bresson in recent editions of *Offscreen* and on *Robert-Bresson.com*, including an interview with L'Argent crewmember Jonathan Hourigan. He can be reached at colinburnett100@yahoo.ca.