



# Against Interpretation and Other Essays

*Susan Sontag*

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## **Against Interpretation and Other Essays** Susan Sontag

First published in 1966, this celebrated book--Sontag's first collection of essays--quickly became a modern classic, and has had an enormous influence in America and abroad on thinking about the arts and contemporary culture. As well as the title essay and the famous "Notes on Camp," *Against Interpretation* includes original and provocative discussions of Sartre, Simone Weil, Godard, Beckett, science-fiction movies, psychoanalysis, and contemporary religious thinking. This edition features a new afterword by Sontag.

## **Against Interpretation and Other Essays Details**

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Author : Susan Sontag

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# From Reader Review Against Interpretation and Other Essays for online ebook

## Jesse says

Here is where I discovered my model, my ideal: I too aspire to be able to discuss and analyze so deftly literature, cinema, music, theater, philosophy, theory and society, and their countless and inevitable intersections. The celebrated "Notes on Camp" and the title essay are the standouts, but everything--even the comparatively weak theater reviews--are worth reading.

*"My idea of a writer: someone who is interested in 'everything.'"*

-from "Afterward: 30 Years Later"

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## Zanna says

None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew what it did. From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art.

I ended up finding 'Against Interpretation' useful. Its central claim is that there is a kind of interpretation that is anti-art in that it diminishes the possibilities for appreciating/enjoying/experiencing the art rather than increasing them, which is what criticism (I would still say interpretation\*) should (probably) do. I have no longer any anxiety on behalf of the author, but I still generally dislike the kind of interpretation that Sontag seems to be talking about; the kind that says one thing is another in a text and tyrannically insists on this translation. She argues that even if the interpretation that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is about the decline of Western civilization rather than this encounter between two interesting characters is 'correct' in the sense of being intended and implicit, this is precisely what is weak and 'contrived' about it. In my review of *To the Lighthouse* I felt the need to criticise both of the introductions, which I suppose is me fighting on behalf of the text or of my experience of the text. I evidently feel that something I want to remain open is being closed down when a psychoanalytic interpretation (for instance) is advanced.

However, I am eager to read interpretation and criticism - this is definitely part of my pleasure in the text (Sontag ends by saying 'we need an erotics of art rather than a hermeneutics'), not only a way to get more pleasure out of it. Considering Zadie Smith's introduction to *Their Eyes were Watching God* I can think of the text as a mountain, which has a nice easy path over it, and Smith's introduction as a kit which contains a map to find the hidden caves and a torch to illuminate their beautiful interiors. So Smith helps me to get more out of reading Hurston, but her intro is art in itself (it is aesthetic; Sontag says the aesthetic is 'that which needs no justification'). I'd say criticism/interpretation helps me rather than hinders/irritates me more than half of the time... I don't think the value of the critic is so low

(((\*I am very keen on the word 'interpretation'. The specific meaning it has in museums (phenomenology!) for me from my background (my mum is a heritage educator and I volunteered with her often for many years) is probably a reason for this; when I go to an exhibition I talk about the interpretation - the British

Museum have a very high standard of interpretation; if you visited the Ice Age Art exhibition you will remember how much interpretation there was, and how much was needed, to enable such a coherent, pungent (can I say that? I could smell blood and salt in that exhibition...) experience out of a small collection of tiny objects which, the interpretation text repeatedly admitted, WE LACK THE ABILITY TO DECODE in terms of what they 'really' meant to the people who made and used them. Conversely, in many museums stuff is heaped up in glass cases with labels like 'brass, c.1500'. Unless an object has overwhelming aesthetic qualities, creative interpretation by people with learning and passion is a necessary bridge for most of us to experience more than a sort of obligatory, intimidated STUDIUM in its presence. Some people find the British Museum's approach overbearing, but I disagree; I think it's ableist and elitist and ethnocentric to insist that the objects should 'speak for themselves'. For most of us, they will remain silent.)))

((I now have a better way to describe my resistance to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: Sontag describes Thomas Mann (who I haven't read) hilariously as 'overcooperative' in that he inserts intimations of the correct interpretation into his texts. This is exactly what Kundera does that I dislike!))

The second essay 'On Style' is about the false dichotomy of form and content, and her prescription to critics to think more about the former, because our idea of content, especially as something hidden inside form or style is a hindrance. It makes us think of an art work as a *statement* somehow *packaged*. Sontag tries to explain why there is no distinction between ethics and aesthetics, but somehow I can't get a handle on her treatment of this. Later on in another essay 'One culture and the new sensibility' she says most artists have abandoned the 'Matthew Arnold idea of culture', which is 'art as the criticism of life... understood as the propounding of moral, social and political ideas'. In *Status Anxiety* Alain de Botton explains the view that Arnold sets out in *Culture and Anarchy* like this: "art as a protest against the state of things, an effort to correct our insights or to educate us to perceive beauty, to help us understand pain or to reignite our sensitivities, to nurture our capacity for empathy or to rebalance our moral perspective." I'm not sure who is making mush here, because Sontag argues in 'On Style' that art can teach us to be more ethical because the mode of being needed to contemplate art is a useful rehearsal for the mode required for ethical behaviour, which is just a 'form of acting' or 'code of acts', and goes on to say in many of these essays that art 'educates the feelings', 'nourishes' us, 'sends us out refreshed'. This seems close to de Botton's notes on Arnold, to me at least. It suggests the difference is of degree and there is a sort of continuum between socialist realism at one end and Oscar Wilde at the other, but Sontag seems to be aiming for a more radical reassessment. I'm troubled by Sontag's rejection of art-as-argument, as I'm not satisfied with her account of morality. It remains my obsession to see the political and ethical in everything. If someone can write that 'being a feminist is passe' then I can't trust her.

I enjoyed her comments on the 'arbitrary and unjustifiable' in works of art. She argues that what is inevitable in a work of art is its style, an expression of the author's will. Her main purpose in 'On Style' is, I think, to advise critics to find form in content rather than the converse. The rest of the book is mainly criticism of theatre, film and other works in which she apparently tests her own medicine. It sounds good, if you don't mind being told flatly and frequently that some work is brilliant or vile... I have seen/read little of the material she reviews; I'm unhappy with her negative critique of an exception to that: James Baldwin, and I was unable to get through some of the literature she recommends that I sought out! However, her 'Notes on "Camp"' is rightly famous I think; it shows great sensitivity and acuity that she can delineate it so gracefully.

Writing in the sixties, she found nothing going on in literature. The novel is dead, she would have agreed. Innovations in form were the leading edge, and literature lagged. I wonder if she would say that now.

Despite reservations, I feel a sharp, refreshing breeze blowing on my face; Sontag opened a window.

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## Sketchbook says

A pop fart from an amoralist of the 60s. Amoral in that Susie would say or write or bed anything to promote herself in the marketplace. A collection, which includes her musings on Camp, that seeks to achieve lit'ry orgasm.

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## Greg Brown says

There don't seem to be as many public intellectuals around as there used to be. Sure, there are more commentators than ever—look at the many, many bloggers out there, as well as other individuated voices carving out their own identity, even within larger publications. But the public intellectual in the middle of the 20th century seemed to comprise something different, something a bit larger in scope. These days, criticism tends to be done piecewise, either commenting or reacting incrementally on each new publication or event, or slowly embodying a larger critique through the slow, steady work of embodying it.

Sontag and other writers of her era offer a different model, one with well-polished fusillades and other attacks levied against their contemporaries. The grasp of these essays seem to be more wide-ranging, composed than today's blog posts—not just because they're more formally edited, but because by necessity they have to encompass so much more. There was the electrifying intellectual community in New York that met, discussed, and argued in person, of course. But there wasn't twitter, blogs, anything that could be used for large amounts of smaller pieces. Instead, Sontag and others worked through periodicals like the New York Review of Books, or the Partisan Review. These published maybe bi-weekly or monthly at most, meaning that they could only run so much, and that any reaction had to necessarily stand the test of time more than a snap blog-post that'll be obsolete in days.

This isn't necessarily to bemoan the current condition, only to recognize that a certain sensibility is so hard to find these days, and that you have to really seek it out compared to earlier. The New York Review of Books still exists (and continues to put out superb work), but it isn't the center of the intellectual conversation the way it used to be. They just Wrote Differently back then, in a way that's hard to articulate without reading Didion, Sontag, Wilson, and others.

This, then is to say that Sontag comes across as very refreshing—not just because she's intellectually brilliant (which she is), or that she provides a novel way of looking at art (which she does), but because she writes so damn well that it's hard not to be carried away by her conclusions because they just sound so damn good.

Sontag's larger point that "form" and "content" are often unjustly separated, and the latter elevated above the former, is laid out in the very first title essay, and expounded upon or eliptically mentioned in almost every single other essay. The effect, which would be less noticable in reading each essay individually, is to see her argument substantiated in the richness of its results. In elevating content above form (and I'll dispense with the air quotes, even though Sontag justly uses them throughout), we cut off the ways in which how a work formally functions determines its aim and effect on the audience. In a certain sense, focusing on the content reveals an impoverished vocabulary or schema for understanding a given art-form, a mistake that Sontag dearly wants to correct by foregrounding how a work... well, works!

And to her credit, Sontag's argument has seen an effect in much of the art criticism since. In film, for example, editing is now recognized as one of the (if not THE) attributes that determine the essence of a

movie. In games, we see mechanics-oriented criticism on the rise, though that case is easier to make with the more explicit interaction compared to the way other art-forms will subtly shift our attention around.

While a good chunk of the book is concerned with this kind of meta-criticism, there are some more traditional criticism of specific works—valuable because they instantiate and substantiate her larger program, but still kind of floaty if you haven't experienced the works she's talking about. When she's writing to introduce a body of work to the audience, such as some of the foreign thinkers, or her entertaining essay about the "happenings," she is lively and enjoyable throughout. But when she's writing an apologia for work she expects her intellectual community to already know, it can leave the average reader in the dark.

This weakness is partially a function of time (since contemporary works aren't so contemporary any more) but also of the widening intellectual pluralism that she herself champions in essays like the famous "Notes on Camp." And in that, at least, the drawbacks are to be excused and even celebrated.

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### **Mitch says**

Sontag is right about practically everything. She predicts post-structuralism and post-modernism and warns against them. She was a skeptic about Freud and Marx when it was not fashionable. She was one of the first to see Ozu and Bela Tarr as greater filmmakers than their peers, and last but not least, she defends the aesthetic against the predations of moralists and politicians.

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### **Peter Landau says**

When I'm reading a writer who speaks to me I'll often share quotes that jump out off the pages, and I did that a few times reading AGAINST INTERPRETATION AND OTHER ESSAYS by Susan Sontag. Usually, those quotes are well-received, but not Sontag's. Friends dismissed her as "second-rate cribbing" off of better minds, where I saw a dialogue. But, whatever, this was the first of her works I've read, and her first published collection, and I really enjoyed being in her mind for 300 pages. She mostly dives into art, from happenings to her famous "Notes on Camp," not all of which I agreed with (she takes my favorite Camus down a notch and another fave, Sherwood Anderson, is completely dismissed), but never is her writing less than thoughtful, intelligent, engaging and challenging.

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### **David says**

**"It is time that the novel became what it is not ... a form of art which people with serious and sophisticated taste in the other arts can take seriously."**

and

**"in our own time, art is becoming increasingly the terrain of specialists. The most interesting and creative art of our time is *not* open to the generally educated; it demands special effort; it speaks a specialized language."**

I'm such a sucker for smart people. If all the idiots were liberals and all the right-wingers were arty-types and

brainiacs ... I'd probably be a Brexiteering Trump supporter. Which makes me this biggest fool of all, no doubt.

Susan's really mean to a lot of very smart people in these essays, so I'm working on the assumption she's an intellectual colossus and I absolutely adore her.

Bits:

"The cult of love in the West is an aspect of the cult of suffering - suffering as the supreme token of seriousness (the paradigm of the Cross). We do not find among the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and the Orientals the same value placed on love because we do not find there the same value placed on suffering. Suffering was not the hallmark of seriousness; rather, seriousness was measured by one's ability to evade or transcend the penalty of suffering,"

"it is hardly possible to give credence to ideas uttered in the impersonal tones of sanity. There are certain eras which are too complex, too deafened by contradictory historical and intellectual experiences, to hear the voice of sanity. Sanity becomes compromise, evasion, a lie. Ours is an age which consciously pursues health, and yet only believes in the reality of sickness."

"Perhaps there are certain ages which do not need truth as much as they need a deepening of the sense of reality, a widening of the imagination. I, for one, do not doubt that the sane view of the world is the true one. But is that what is always wanted, truth? The need for truth is not constant; no more than is the need for repose. An idea which is a distortion may have a greater intellectual thrust than the truth; it may better serve the needs of the spirit, which vary. The truth is balance, but the opposite of truth, which is unbalance, may not be a lie."

For my gravestone: "Pure Camp is always naive."

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## **El says**

It's a still life water color,  
Of a now late afternoon,  
As the sun shines through the curtained lace  
And shadows wash the room.  
And we sit and drink our coffee  
Couched in our indifference,  
Like shells upon the shore  
You can hear the ocean roar  
In the dangling conversation  
And the superficial sighs,  
The borders of our alliance.

And you read your Emily Dickinson,  
And I my Robert Frost,  
And we note our place with bookmarks  
That measure what we've lost.  
Like a poem poorly written  
We are verses out of rhythm,

Couplets out of rhyme,  
In syncopated time  
And the dangled conversation  
And the superficial sighs,  
Are the borders of our alliance.

Yes, we speak of things that matter,  
With words that must be said,  
"Can analysis be worthwhile?"  
"Is the theater really dead?"  
And how the room is softly faded  
And I only kiss your shadow,  
I cannot feel your hand,  
You're a stranger now unto me  
Lost in the dangling conversation.  
And the superficial sighs,  
In the borders of our alliance.

*The Dangling Conversation*, Simon & Garfunkel (1966)

This collection of essays was published in 1966 when Sontag was 33 years old. *33 years old*. She talked about some incredible things, like aesthetics and intellect and pornography and camp. Sontag's essays, written between 1961 and 1965, are critical writings that blow anything I have ever written out of the water. She was one smart cookie.

It's no surprise that Sontag is one of my favorites. Her writing has inspired me time and again, and I love that I haven't even read that much of it. Like others, Sontag is one of those people I have long admired before ever experiencing her work myself. I wouldn't have it any other way. She was a force to be reckoned with.

While reading this collection, I remembered *The Dangling Conversation* by Simon & Garfunkel which, surprise-surprise, came out the same year that this book was published. Were people more intellectual (either superficially or genuinely) in the late 1960s than they are today? Certainly there was a lot going on in the world in the late 1960s which would lend itself well to that sort of critical thought. But there's also a lot going on in the world today and while there are a lot of great people out there doing great work, it doesn't feel the same to me. Maybe that's because I'm part of it, though, right? Someday people would look back at 2018 as this year of great thinkers and great do-ers. Maybe.

While this collection was more academic, more critical theory, than I had originally expected or hoped for when I picked it up, I reveled in Sontag's deep thoughts and powerful statements. Some essays are better than others, of course, just as in any collection. But she reminded me of some important concepts which of course I had to write down to reflect upon later, while sipping tea with the sunlight pouring in my bedroom window, casting a sepia-toned glow upon my hair. (Just kidding, I hate the sunlight.)

The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences.  
(p36)

You know how there are some people you encounter who have truly great things to say and you want to absorb them all of the time because you find yourself feeling smarter just by being around them? Sontag is one of those people for me. Much of what she wrote in the 1960s works for me today.



Perhaps there are certain ages which do not need truth as much as they need a deepening of the sense of reality, a widening of the imagination.

(p50)

There's something fascinating about looking at critical theory of high and low art, especially of a time in which I was not yet living. Sontag brought that alive for me. And taste! She wrote about the taste of the people, how that can change, and what does it mean:

There is taste in people, visual taste, taste in emotion - and there is taste in acts, taste in morality. Intelligence, as well, is really a kind of taste: taste in ideas. (One of the facts to be reckoned with is that taste tends to develop very unevenly. It is rare that the same person has good visual taste *and* good taste in people *and* taste in ideas.)

(p276)

Some would probably call this (and Sontag) pretentious. I won't admit to understanding everything Sontag wrote because she was operating on a whole different intellectual plane than any of us. But it wasn't boring, which is just as well because Sontag had feelings on boredom as well (because of course she did):

The commonest complaints about the films of Antonioni or the narratives of Beckett or Burroughs is that they are hard to look at or to read, that they are "boring." But the charge of boredom is really hypocritical. There is, in a sense, no such thing as boredom. Boredom is only another name for a certain species of frustration. And the new languages which the most interesting art of our time speaks are frustrating to the sensibilities of most educated people.

(p303)

While I say that I am working on writing essays this semester, this is not the sort of work I am planning on writing. Because I'm not this s-m-r-t. But Sontag still managed to give me plenty to think about just in the sense of pace and depth of writing. These are important details too, and maybe I won't be as literary or deeply intellectual in my own essays as Sontag was, I thank her for paving the road before me and reminding me, if nothing else, the importance of a writer's notebook:

Of course, a writer's journal must not be judged by the standards of a diary. The notebooks of a writer have a very special function: in them he builds up, piece by piece, the identity of a writer to himself. Typically, writers' notebooks are crammed with statements about the will: the will to write, the will to love, the will to renounce love, the will to go on living. The journal is where a writer is heroic to himself. In it he exists solely as a perceiving, suffering, struggling being.

(p59)

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## Edward says

*A note and some acknowledgments*

I

--Against interpretation

--On style

## II

- The artist as exemplary sufferer
- Simone Weil
- Camus' *Notebooks*
- Michel Leiris' *Manhood*
- The anthropologist as hero
- The literary criticism of Georg Lukács
- Sartre's *Saint Genet*
- Nathalie Sarraute and the novel

## III

- Ionesco
- Reflections on *The Deputy*
- The death of tragedy
- Going to theater, etc.
- Marat / Sade / Artaud

## IV

- Spiritual style in the films of Robert Bresson
- Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*
- The imagination of disaster
- Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*
- Resnais' *Muriel*
- A note on novels and films

## V

- Piety without content
- Psychoanalysis and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*
- Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition
- Notes on "Camp"
- One culture and the new sensibility

*Afterword: Thirty Years Later*

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## Michael says

### Notizen

#### 1. Gegen Interpretation

Das Primat des Inhalts über die Form führt zur Erklärbarkeit dessen, was das Kunstwerk uns "sagen will" (solchen Fragen hat sich Beckett entschieden widersetzt), dass es auf den Inhalt reduziert wird. Damit wird es interpretierbar; Interpretation ist die Rache des Intellekts an der Kunst, an der Welt. "Interpretation heißt, die Welt arm und leer machen", um eine Schattenwelt der Bedeutungen zu errichten; Eine philsterhafte Weigerung, die Finger von der Kunst zu lassen.

Kunst wird so manipulierbar und bequem. Selbst den "Selbstaussagen" der Schriftsteller ist nicht zu trauen, Sontag zitiert Lawrence:

"Traue nie dem Erzähler, traue der Erzählung."

Statt einer Hermeneutik brauchen wir eine Erotik der Kunst.  
Bedenkenserwerter, mir sehr sympathischer Aufsatz!

Gerade (27.01.17) bei Marcus Steinweg einen schönen Satz zum Thema Primat des Inhalts oder der Form gelesen:

„Man denkt den Primat der Form durch irgendeinen Inhalt (...) ersetzt zu haben. Wie immer, wenn das Halbdenken über das Denken triumphiert, erschöpft es sich in Substitutionslogik. Man ersetzt den (angeblichen) Primat der Form durch den des Inhalts und merkt nicht, dass man der Komplexität ihrer Interdependenz ausweicht.“ (SPLITTER9

## Tosh says

The famous essay on camp is in this edition as well as wonderful essays on Godard and Beckett. Sontag was an amazing essayist, a really great cultural critic. A walking and breathing treasure of knowledge and clear thinking. One would think she would have loved Goodreads -- but then maybe not. For sure she would be arguing with everyone on this site. What fun!

But seriously even if one disagrees with her work, she is important just for her taste in literature among other things.

## Callum McAllister says

"Saint Genet is a cancer of a book, grotesquely verbose, its cargo of brilliant ideas borne aloft by a tone of viscous solemnity and by ghastly repetitiveness." - a great sentence, or The Greatest sentence.

## Salma says

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

Against Interpretation and Other Essays, Susan Sontag

Against Interpretation is a collection of essays by Susan Sontag published in 1966. It includes some of Sontag's best-known works, including "On Style," and the eponymous essay "Against Interpretation." In the last, Sontag argues that in the new approach to aesthetics the spiritual importance of art is being replaced by the emphasis on the intellect. Rather than recognizing great creative works as possible sources of energy, she argues, contemporary critics were all too often taking art's transcendental power for granted, and focusing instead on their own intellectually constructed abstractions like "form" and "content." In effect, she wrote, interpretation had become "the intellect's revenge upon art." The essay famously finishes with the words, "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art". The book was a finalist for the Arts and Letters category of the National Book Award.

Contents: Against interpretation; On style; The artist as exemplary sufferer; Simone Weil

Camus' Notebooks; Michel Leiris' Manhood; The anthropologist as hero; The literary criticism of Georg Lukacs; Sartre's Saint Genet; Nathalie Sarraute and the novel; Ionesco; Reflections on The Deputy; The death of tragedy; Going to theater, etc.; Marat/Sade/Artaud; Spiritual style in the films of Robert Bresson; Godard's Vivre Sa Vie; The imagination of disaster; Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures; Resnais' Muriel; A note on novels and films; Piety without content; Psychoanalysis and Norman Brown's Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History; Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition; Notes on "Camp"; One culture and the new sensibility; Afterword: Thirty Years Later.

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## Matt says

"Instead of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."

Yes...

But what the hell does that mean?

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## **Gabriel says**

The strange thing about this criticism is that it has already become outmoded. Not that Sontag's critiques are themselves inadequate, but that the ground beneath them has shifted in very predictable (given her own theses) ways. And in some way, these (I hesitate to call them essays, as the great majority of this book is given over to reviews) critiques lead the reader to the conclusion that Sontag's reviews are ephemeral where they should have been permanent. But perhaps that is the nature of the review, of the critique.

I rarely disagreed with Sontag in matters of taste (though her apparent dislike of large swathes of Bunuel's and Resnais's oeuvre was somewhat surprising; Bunuel perhaps less so, but she is clearly conflicted as to the aims and effects of the Nouveau Roman, and finds those same effects (quite understandably) at work in Resnais), but her appraisals often seemed dated.

For instance, I very much appreciate her defense of "the cold" in (then-)contemporary art, addressed best in her essay on Bresson. But here, forty years later, Sontag's review reveals that the ground upon which it is made is itself open to critique. She has somehow not placed herself far enough away from the fulcrum to operate her lever. She gets sucked into her own reviews, into her own criticism. Because it is clear that she, too, despite her sympathy, even exuberance, over the "alienating" and "the cold" in art, subscribes to the view that there is such a thing at all, that there is somehow a dichotomy, or at the very least a scale, in art, of the "hot" and the "cold" which is, on the face of it (and certainly in the language used to express it) absurd.

(N.B. A redeeming willingness to identify prose as the backwater of the art world does manage to bring her up to date, though. After all, where else does this ultimately ridiculous debate still exist but in precisely that arena? Where else are works routinely described as "cold" or "cerebral"? Prose writers must look with envy to the other arts, where the degree of artifice, presupposing a "content" that is somehow buried underneath all of that artifice (as Sontag hammers home in her first two essays here), is no longer (or much more rarely) a subject for the critics. And Sontag also openly calls for prose writers to acknowledge this and to remedy it-- sadly, wave after wave of reactionaries retards any such progress, either on the part of the critic or on that of the writer.)

But of course, this is only an illustration of one of Sontag's main themes in this collection-- transience, the disposable, the rehabilitation through distance of junk, of the outmoded or otherwise superseded. The best of these essays are hardly junk, and the true "essays," the two that begin the collection, and the three that end it, have not been superseded (at least at their foundations). Which, to my mind anyway, separates them from criticism and places them in the realm of the essay, of the open-ended prose form that Sontag herself defines here.

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## **DoctorM says**

There was a time, long ago and in another age, when anyone at university who wanted to be well-read or conversant with things intellectual read this book. I'm one of them. I sat in Cross Campus at New Haven and devoured "Against Interpretation" one autumn afternoon. Needless to say, I had a deep intellectual crush on Susan Sontag--- ah, I thought, if only I'd been able to court her in some alternate New York where we were

both eighteen or nineteen! I still love this book, all these years later. It brings up an age when ideas mattered, when there was passion in the air about sweeping away old thoughts and discovering and valorising the new. The title essay and "Notes on Camp" remain...well...brilliant. A classic book, then--- more than just a reminder of the world of my Lost Youth. Sontag was fierce and infuriating and witty and opinionated and razor-sharp and often wrongheaded and deeply engaged in art and politics and culture--- someone whose voice was there shaping debates and offering up alternatives. I miss that kind of passion in the intellectual world. And I do recommend this book--- read it and learn how to love the clash of ideas.

## Amirsaman says

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