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A writer is someone who pays attention to the world. Susan Sontag said in a 2003 speech at the German Book Trade Peace Prize, and no one has exemplified that definition more than she has. Sontag's astute intellect, expressive brilliance and deep curiosity about art, politics and the writer's responsibility to testify have secured her place as one of the most important thinkers and writers of the twentieth century. At the same time collects sixteen essays and references written in the last years of Sontag's life, when her work was honored on the international scene, which reflect the personally liberating nature of literature, its deepest commitment, and political activism and resistance to injustice as an ethical duty. She examines the works of writers of the little-known Soviet writer Leonid Tsygkin, who struggled and eventually succeeded in publishing his only book a few days before his death; great people like Nadine Gordimer who expand our capacity for moral judgment. Sontag also fearlessly addresses America's post-9/11 dilemmas, from the degradation of our political rhetoric to the horrific torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib. At the same time, which includes the foreword of her son, David Riff, is the passionate, persuasive work of an American writer at the height of his powers who has always seen literature as a passport to enter the greater life, the zone of freedom. Susan Sontag was born on January 16, 1933, in New York City, growing up in Tucson, Arizona, and attended high school in Los Angeles. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago College and did a PhD in philosophy, literature and theology from Harvard University and St. Anne's College, Oxford. 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Culturally predatory young people have always been unbearable and have never been unusual, even if they tend to invest a lot in being different - in aspiring (or pretending) something deeper, higher than a general perspective. Considered with the punishment of hindsight adulthood, their seriousness shows their funny side, but the longing that drives is no joke. This hunger is not so much for knowledge as for the experience of one kind or another. Two kinds, in fact: a specific experience of encountering a book or work of art, as well as future experience, a state of perfectly cultivated being that awaits you at the end of the search. Once you've read everything, then finally you can start. 2 Violent consumption is often described as indiscriminate, but its meaning is always in discrimination. It was on my parents' bookshelves, other emblems of midcentury, middle-class American literary taste and intellectual curiosity that I found a book with a title that seemed to offer what I desperately needed, even if (or precisely because) it went completely above my head. Against interpretation. No subtitles, no how to promise or self-help come on. 95-cent Dell paperback with a photo of the author, Susan Sontag. There is no doubt that the painting was part of the book's appeal - a angular, dark-eyed look, knowing a smile, bobbed hair and a buttoned-up coat - but the charisma of the titles should not be underestimated. It was a statement of the opposition, although I could not say what exactly they were against. Whatever the interpretation was, I was ready to fight it. I still, even if interpretation, in one way or another, was the main way I made my life as an adult. It's not fair to blame Susan Sontag for it, even though I'm doing it. 3 Against Interpretation, a collection of 1960s articles reprinted from various magazines and magazines, mostly dedicated to the moment of texts and artifacts (Jean-Paul Sartre in Saint Genet, *Vivre Sa Vie* by Jack Smith *Flaming Creatures*), modestly presents itself as a matter of research for aesthetic, Sontag's theory. Indeed, however, it is a episodic chronicle of the mind in a passionate struggle with the world and itself. Sontag's signature is ambivalence. Against the interpretation (essay), which states that to interpret this impoverishment, to deplete the world - in order to create a shadowy world of meanings, it is certainly the work of relentlessly analytical, meaning-driven intelligence. In just over 10 pages, it promotes a call for ecstasy capitulation rather than protocols of exegesis made in relentlessly cerebral terms. Her final, mic statement - instead of hermeneutics we need erotic art - unfolds abstraction in the service of density. 4 I find it difficult, after many years, to explain the impact Against The Interpretation has had on me. It was first published in 1966, the year I was born, which seemed to me an awful omen. He brought news of the books I didn't - not yet! - to read and movies that I had not heard of, and challenged the piety that I had just begun to understand. He was breathing the air of the 60s, a significant time I unforgivably missed. But I kept reading Against the Interpretation - following it with Styles of Radical Will. In Photography and Under the Sign of Saturn, Sontag's book later deprecate as juvenilia - for something else. For style, you might say (she wrote an essay called About Style). For the voice, I think, but it's a tame, banal word. That's because I craved the drama of her ambivalence, the tenacity of her enthusiasm, the sting of her doubts. I read these books because I needed to be with her. It is too much to say I was in love with her? That she, anyway? For five years after I plucked the Anti-Interpretation from the living room shelf, I came across a short Sontag story called Pilgrimage. One of the very few overly autobiographical parts Sontag has ever written, this slightly fictional memoir, set in Southern California in 1947, recalls a teenage age that I somehow suspect of plagiarizing a third of a century later. I felt like I was dozing in my own life, Sontag writes, gently mocking and proudly confirming the serious, insatiable girl she used to be. The pilgrimage in question, taken with a friend named Merrill, was at Thomas Mann's home in Pacific Palisades, where this venerable giant of German Kultur lived preposterously while in exile from Nazi Germany. The funniest and most truthful part of the story is the shame and fear of young Susan in the prospect of paying for the call. Oh, Merrill, how could you? She melodramatically exclaims when she finds out he has arranged for a tea visit to Mann's residence. The second funny and true part of the story is the frustration of Susan trying to fight in the presence of a literary idol who speaks like a book review. The encounter makes a charming anecdote with 40 years in hindsight, but it also proves that youthful instincts were correct. Why do I want to meet him? She asks. I had his books. 6 I've never met Susan Sontag. One day while I was working late answering phones and faxing in the offices of the New York Book Review, I picked up a message for Robert Silvers, one of the magazine's editors. Tell him Susan Sontag is called. He'll know why. (Because it was his birthday.) Another time I saw her sweeping, swan, promenading - or maybe just walking - through the Frick Gallery. Much later, I was commissioned by this magazine to write a profile of her. She was going to publish *Relatively Pain* Others, continuing and correcting her 1977 book *About Photography*. The furor she caused with several paragraphs written for *The New Yorker* after the 9/11 attacks - words that seemed disgustingly rational during horror and grief - has not yet healed. I felt like I had something to say to her, but one thing I couldn't bring myself to do was pick up the phone. Basically I was afraid of disappointment, mine and her. I don't want to not impress her; I didn't want to try. The horror of seeking her approval, and the certainty that, despite my journalistic posture, I will do just that, paralyze. Instead of a profile, I wrote a short text that accompanied Chuck Close's portrait. I didn't want to risk knowing her in any way that could undermine or complicate the relationship we already had, which was a lot fraught. I had her books. 7 After Sontag's death in 2004, attention began to move away from her work and to her face. Not her life so much as her self, her photographic image, her way of being And in the - anywhere, but on the page. Her son, David Riff, wrote a poignant memoir about his mother's illness and death. Annie Leibovitz, a partner at Sontag, from 1989 until her death, has released a portfolio of photos unsparing in their depiction of her cancer-ravaged, 70-year-old body. There were reflections by Wayne Koestenbaum, Philip Spade and Terry Castle about her complex reputation and the thrill, envy and inadequacy she inspired in them. *Sempre Susan*, a short memoir by Sigrid Nunez who lived with Sontag and Riff for a while in the 1970s, is a masterpiece I knew Susan minigener and a farmhouse-rumor companion to Sontag's own Pilgrimage. It's about what can happen when you really get to know a writer, which is that you lose all the feelings of what or who it is you really know, including yourself. 8 In 2008, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, the longtime publisher of Sontag, published *Revival*, the first of two volumes so far taken from nearly 100 Sontag laptops filled from early adolescence to late middle age. Because of their fragmentary nature, these entries in the magazine are not intimidated in how its more formal non-fiction prose can be, or abstruse in the manner of most of its pre-1990s fiction. They seem to offer an unobstructed window into her mind, documenting her intellectual anxieties, existential worries and emotional turmoil, along with an everyday ephemeral that turns out to be almost as fascinating. Lists of books that can be read and films that can be seen sit next to quotes, aphorisms, observations and ideas of history. Lovers are painfully represented by one letter (I, H, K.). You wonder if Sontag hopes if she knew you'd read this ever - an intimate magazine as a literary form is a recurring theme in her essay - and you wonder whether this possibility undermines the guilt of the intimacy of reading these pages or, conversely, explains it. 9 Benjamin Moser's new biography - *Sontag: Her Life and Work*, published last month - squeezes Sontag down to the size of life, even if he also insists on its meaning. What mattered about Susan Sontag was that she symbolized, he concludes, diligently documenting her love affairs, her petty cruelty and her omissions in personal hygiene. I must say that I find the concept appalling. A woman whose great achievements have written millions of words and readings, who knows how many millions more - no exercise in Sontagiana can't help but mention the 15,000 book library in her Chelsea apartment - has finally been resolutely captured by what she called an image-world fake reality that threatens to destroy our real world fears. You can argue about philosophical coherence, political implications or the modern relevance of this idea (one of the central claims about photography), but it's hard to deny that Sontag now belongs more to than to the words. Perhaps it is inevitable that after Sontag's death, the literary persona persona spent a lifetime of building - that strict, serious, impersonal self - was cleared, revealing the man hiding behind the words. Unhappy daughter, Mercury mother. Differently needing and overbearing lover. A faithful, sometimes impossible friend. In the age of prestige television, we may have lost our appetite for difficult books, but we enjoy difficult characters, and Sontag's biographical - brave and imperious, insecure and unpredictable - certainly fits the bill. 10 Interpretation, according to Sontag, is revenge of the intellect of art. More than that. It's the revenge of intelligence on the world. And the biography, to the same extent, is the revenge of research on intelligence. The whole life of the mind has turned into a life, a coffin full of rattlesling facts and spectral assumptions, less inviting to read or re-read than a convenient, cumbersome excuse not to. The point of this essay, which turns out not to be as easy as I thought it would be, is to counter this trend. I can't deny the reality of the image or the symbolic cache of the name. I don't want to devalue the way Sontag serves as a mascot and a hero of culture. All I really want to say is that Susan Sontag matters because of what she wrote. 11 Or maybe I should just say that's why it matters to me. In Susan's *Sempre*, Sigrid Nunez describes Sontag as: ... the opposite of Thomas Bernhard's comic possessive thinker, which feeds on the fantasy that every book or painting or piece of music he loves was created solely for and belongs exclusively to him, and whose art selfishness makes the thought of those who love or appreciate the works of genius he reveres unbearable. She wanted her passions to be shared by all, and to respond with the same intensity to any work she loved to give her one of her greatest pleasures. I'm the opposite of that. I don't like to share my passions, even if the work of a film critic makes me do it. I cling to the immature (and perhaps also usually male) self-investment in the work I care about most. My devotion to Sontag has often always been a mystery. She was never assigned to any course I took in college, and if her name ever came up when I was in graduate school, it was with a certain indulgence. She was not a theorist or scholar, but an essayist and popularizer, and as such did not fit well into the desperate careerism that dominated the academy at the time. In the world of cultural journalism, she is often dismissed as an egghed and snob. Don't talk, and so I mostly don't talk about it. 12 However, I continued to read, with an ambivalence that reflected it. Perhaps her most famous essay - by far one of the most controversial - is *Notes on Camp*, which is a thoroughly phenomenon defined by the spirit of extravagance with scrupulous sobriety. The investigation comes from mixed feelings . . . drawn to the camp, and almost as much offended by it -- which amplified rather than not and that curl through 58 20d sections of the *Notes*, like whiskers in art nouveau printing. In writing about a way of expression that is overloaded, artificial, frivolous and theatrical, Sontag adopts a style that is the opposite of all these things. If some types of camp represent a seriousness that fails, then *Notes about Camp* takes a seriousness that succeeds. The essay is dedicated to Oscar Wilde, whose most high-profile remarks gave voice to his deepest thoughts. Sontag changes this wild current, so her serious utterances sparkle with almost invisible evil. The essay is delightful because it seems to betray any sense of pleasure at all, because his jokes are buried so deeply that they are, in fact, secrets. 13 In a chapter against interpretation called *Camus' Laptops* - originally published in the *New York Review of Books* - Sontag divides great writers into husbands and lovers, quietly, a sexual renewal of old dichotomies (e.g., between Apollo and Dionysian, classical and romantic, pale and red-skinned). Albert Camus, while starting his posthumous origins from the Nobel laureate and existentialist martyr in the high school curriculum (which is where I found him), is named the perfect husband of modern letters. It's not exactly a compliment: Some writers deliver the firm virtues of a husband: reliability, intelligibility, generosity, decency. There are other writers who value the gift of a lover, the gifts of temperament, not moral kindness. It is noteworthy that women tolerate the qualities of a lover - sullenness, selfishness, unreliability, cruelty - that they will never face in a husband, in exchange for excitement, an infusion of intense feeling. In the same way readers put up with incomprehension, obsession, painful truths, lies, bad grammar - if, as compensation, the writer allows them to enjoy rare emotions and dangerous sensations. The sexual politics of this formulation is quite something. Reading is a woman's writing of a man. The lady reader exists to seduce or contemplate, ravished or served, a person who is either a scamp or a solid citizen. Camus, despite his movie star appearance (as Sontag, he was good at photographing), is doomed to the status of husband. He's a fellow reader will settle for, who won't ask too many questions when she returns from her throws with Kafka, Celine or Guide. He is also someone who, more than any of them, inspires love. 14 After her marriage to sociologist Philip Riff ended in 1959, most of Sontag's serious romantic relationships were with women. The writers whose company she kept on the page were overwhelmingly male (and almost exclusively European). With the exception of a short piece about Simone Vale and another about Natalie Sarrahl's Against Interpretation and the extensive dismantling of Leni Riefenstahl's Under saturn's sign, Sontag's main criticism is all about men. She was a kind of husband herself, letter letter conscientious, thorough, patient and helpful. Authoritative, but not scolding. Strict, orderly and clear, even when venturing into landscapes of savagery, disturbance and rebellion. She begins her investigation into Pornographic Imagination with a warning that no one should discuss pornography before admitting pornography - there are at least three - and before taking them one at a time. The extravagant, self-destructive seriousness of this sentence makes it the perfect camp gesture. There is also something strange about setting up rules and procedures, an implied scenario of disruption and punishment that is unmistakably erotic. Should I be ashamed of what I think? Of course! Humiliation is one of the most intense and pleasant effects of Sontag's masterful prose. She's the boss. 15 But the rules of the game do not just dictate silence or obedience on the part of the reader. What supports bonds - slavery, if you let it - is its volatility. The dominant party is always vulnerable, the submissive party is always capable of rebellion, resistance or outright rejection. I often read her work in a spirit of defiance, defiance, as if hoping to provoke a reaction. For a while, I thought she was wrong about everything. Against the interpretation was a sentimental and self-defeating polemic against criticism, the very thing it taught me to believe. The photo was a sentimental defense of a worn-out aesthetic ideology wrapped around superstitious horror in technology. And who cared about Elias Canetti and Walter Benjamin anyway? Or about E.M. Choran, Antonin Artaud or other Euro-miracles in her pantheon? Not me! And yet. . . . Over the years I've bought at least three copies under Saturn's sign - if pressed to choose Sontag's favorite volume, I'd pick that one - and in every essay about Canetti, Mind, as a passion, is the most dog-eared. Why? Not so that I can recommend it to someone who wants

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It was on my parents' bookshelves, other emblems of midcentury, middle-class American literary taste and intellectual curiosity that I found a book with a title that seemed to offer what I desperately needed, even if (or precisely because) it went completely above my head. Against interpretation. No subtitles, no how to promise or self-help come on. 95-cent Dell paperback with a photo of the author, Susan Sontag. There is no doubt that the painting was part of the book's appeal - a angular, dark-eyed look, knowing a smile, bobbed hair and a buttoned-up coat - but the charisma of the titles should not be underestimated. It was a statement of the opposition, although I could not say what exactly they were against. Whatever the interpretation was, I was ready to fight it. I still, even if interpretation, in one way or another, was the main way I made my life as an adult. It's not fair to blame Susan Sontag for it, even though I'm doing it. 3 Against Interpretation, a collection of 1960s articles reprinted from various magazines and magazines, mostly dedicated to the moment of texts and artifacts (Jean-Paul Sartre in Saint Genet, *Vivre Sa Vie* by Jack Smith *Flaming Creatures*), modestly presents itself as a matter of research for aesthetic, Sontag's theory. Indeed, however, it is a episodic chronicle of the mind in a passionate struggle with the world and itself. Sontag's signature is ambivalence. Against the interpretation (essay), which states that to interpret this impoverishment, to deplete the world - in order to create a shadowy world of meanings, it is certainly the work of relentlessly analytical, meaning-driven intelligence. In just over 10 pages, it promotes a call for ecstasy capitulation rather than protocols of exegesis made in relentlessly cerebral terms. Her final, mic statement - instead of hermeneutics we need erotic art - unfolds abstraction in the service of density. 4 I find it difficult, after many years, to explain the impact Against The Interpretation has had on me. It was first published in 1966, the year I was born, which seemed to me an awful omen. He brought news of the books I didn't - not yet! - to read and movies that I had not heard of, and challenged the piety that I had just begun to understand. He was breathing the air of the 60s, a significant time I unforgivably missed. But I kept reading Against the Interpretation - following it with Styles of Radical Will. In Photography and Under the Sign of Saturn, Sontag's book later deprecate as juvenilia - for something else. For style, you might say (she wrote an essay called About Style). For the voice, I think, but it's a tame, banal word. That's because I craved the drama of her ambivalence, the tenacity of her enthusiasm, the sting of her doubts. I read these books because I needed to be with her. It is too much to say I was in love with her? That she, anyway? For five years after I plucked the Anti-Interpretation from the living room shelf, I came across a short Sontag story called Pilgrimage. One of the very few overly autobiographical parts Sontag has ever written, this slightly fictional memoir, set in Southern California in 1947, recalls a teenage age that I somehow suspect of plagiarizing a third of a century later. I felt like I was dozing in my own life, Sontag writes, gently mocking and proudly confirming the serious, insatiable girl she used to be. The pilgrimage in question, taken with a friend named Merrill, was at Thomas Mann's home in Pacific Palisades, where this venerable giant of German Kultur lived preposterously while in exile from Nazi Germany. The funniest and most truthful part of the story is the shame and fear of young Susan in the prospect of paying for the call. Oh, Merrill, how could you? She melodramatically exclaims when she finds out he has arranged for a tea visit to Mann's residence. The second funny and true part of the story is the frustration of Susan trying to fight in the presence of a literary idol who speaks like a book review. The encounter makes a charming anecdote with 40 years in hindsight, but it also proves that youthful instincts were correct. Why do I want to meet him? She asks. I had his books. 6 I've never met Susan Sontag. One day while I was working late answering phones and faxing in the offices of the New York Book Review, I picked up a message for Robert Silvers, one of the magazine's editors. Tell him Susan Sontag is called. He'll know why. (Because it was his birthday.) Another time I saw her sweeping, swan, promenading - or maybe just walking - through the Frick Gallery. Much later, I was commissioned by this magazine to write a profile of her. She was going to publish *Relatively Pain* Others, continuing and correcting her 1977 book *About Photography*. The furor she caused with several paragraphs written for *The New Yorker* after the 9/11 attacks - words that seemed disgustingly rational during horror and grief - has not yet healed. I felt like I had something to say to her, but one thing I couldn't bring myself to do was pick up the phone. Basically I was afraid of disappointment, mine and her. I don't want to not impress her; I didn't want to try. The horror of seeking her approval, and the certainty that, despite my journalistic posture, I will do just that, paralyze. Instead of a profile, I wrote a short text that accompanied Chuck Close's portrait. I didn't want to risk knowing her in any way that could undermine or complicate the relationship we already had, which was a lot fraught. I had her books. 7 After Sontag's death in 2004, attention began to move away from her work and to her face. Not her life so much as her self, her photographic image, her way of being And in the - anywhere, but on the page. Her son, David Riff, wrote a poignant memoir about his mother's illness and death. Annie Leibovitz, a partner at Sontag, from 1989 until her death, has released a portfolio of photos unsparing in their depiction of her cancer-ravaged, 70-year-old body. There were reflections by Wayne Koestenbaum, Philip Spade and Terry Castle about her complex reputation and the thrill, envy and inadequacy she inspired in them. *Sempre Susan*, a short memoir by Sigrid Nunez who lived with Sontag and Riff for a while in the 1970s, is a masterpiece I knew Susan minigener and a farmhouse-rumor companion to Sontag's own Pilgrimage. It's about what can happen when you really get to know a writer, which is that you lose all the feelings of what or who it is you really know, including yourself. 8 In 2008, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, the longtime publisher of Sontag, published *Revival*, the first of two volumes so far taken from nearly 100 Sontag laptops filled from early adolescence to late middle age. Because of their fragmentary nature, these entries in the magazine are not intimidated in how its more formal non-fiction prose can be, or abstruse in the manner of most of its pre-1990s fiction. They seem to offer an unobstructed window into her mind, documenting her intellectual anxieties, existential worries and emotional turmoil, along with an everyday ephemeral that turns out to be almost as fascinating. Lists of books that can be read and films that can be seen sit next to quotes, aphorisms, observations and ideas of history. Lovers are painfully represented by one letter (I, H, K.). You wonder if Sontag hopes if she knew you'd read this ever - an intimate magazine as a literary form is a recurring theme in her essay - and you wonder whether this possibility undermines the guilt of the intimacy of reading these pages or, conversely, explains it. 9 Benjamin Moser's new biography - *Sontag: Her Life and Work*, published last month - squeezes Sontag down to the size of life, even if he also insists on its meaning. What mattered about Susan Sontag was that she symbolized, he concludes, diligently documenting her love affairs, her petty cruelty and her omissions in personal hygiene. I must say that I find the concept appalling. A woman whose great achievements have written millions of words and readings, who knows how many millions more - no exercise in Sontagiana can't help but mention the 15,000 book library in her Chelsea apartment - has finally been resolutely captured by what she called an image-world fake reality that threatens to destroy our real world fears. You can argue about philosophical coherence, political implications or the modern relevance of this idea (one of the central claims about photography), but it's hard to deny that Sontag now belongs more to than to the words. Perhaps it is inevitable that after Sontag's death, the literary persona persona spent a lifetime of building - that strict, serious, impersonal self - was cleared, revealing the man hiding behind the words. Unhappy daughter, Mercury mother. Differently needing and overbearing lover. A faithful, sometimes impossible friend. In the age of prestige television, we may have lost our appetite for difficult books, but we enjoy difficult characters, and Sontag's biographical - brave and imperious, insecure and unpredictable - certainly fits the bill. 10 Interpretation, according to Sontag, is revenge of the intellect of art. More than that. It's the revenge of intelligence on the world. And the biography, to the same extent, is the revenge of research on intelligence. The whole life of the mind has turned into a life, a coffin full of rattlesling facts and spectral assumptions, less inviting to read or re-read than a convenient, cumbersome excuse not to. The point of this essay, which turns out not to be as easy as I thought it would be, is to counter this trend. I can't deny the reality of the image or the symbolic cache of the name. I don't want to devalue the way Sontag serves as a mascot and a hero of culture. All I really want to say is that Susan Sontag matters because of what she wrote. 11 Or maybe I should just say that's why it matters to me. In Susan's *Sempre*, Sigrid Nunez describes Sontag as: ... the opposite of Thomas Bernhard's comic possessive thinker, which feeds on the fantasy that every book or painting or piece of music he loves was created solely for and belongs exclusively to him, and whose art selfishness makes the thought of those who love or appreciate the works of genius he reveres unbearable. She wanted her passions to be shared by all, and to respond with the same intensity to any work she loved to give her one of her greatest pleasures. I'm the opposite of that. I don't like to share my passions, even if the work of a film critic makes me do it. I cling to the immature (and perhaps also usually male) self-investment in the work I care about most. My devotion to Sontag has often always been a mystery. She was never assigned to any course I took in college, and if her name ever came up when I was in graduate school, it was with a certain indulgence. She was not a theorist or scholar, but an essayist and popularizer, and as such did not fit well into the desperate careerism that dominated the academy at the time. In the world of cultural journalism, she is often dismissed as an egghed and snob. Don't talk, and so I mostly don't talk about it. 12 However, I continued to read, with an ambivalence that reflected it. Perhaps her most famous essay - by far one of the most controversial - is *Notes on Camp*, which is a thoroughly phenomenon defined by the spirit of extravagance with scrupulous sobriety. The investigation comes from mixed feelings . . . drawn to the camp, and almost as much offended by it -- which amplified rather than not and that curl through 58 20d sections of the *Notes*, like whiskers in art nouveau printing. In writing about a way of expression that is overloaded, artificial, frivolous and theatrical, Sontag adopts a style that is the opposite of all these things. If some types of camp represent a seriousness that fails, then *Notes about Camp* takes a seriousness that succeeds. The essay is dedicated to Oscar Wilde, whose most high-profile remarks gave voice to his deepest thoughts. Sontag changes this wild current, so her serious utterances sparkle with almost invisible evil. The essay is delightful because it seems to betray any sense of pleasure at all, because his jokes are buried so deeply that they are, in fact, secrets. 13 In a chapter against interpretation called *Camus' Laptops* - originally published in the *New York Review of Books* - Sontag divides great writers into husbands and lovers, quietly, a sexual renewal of old dichotomies (e.g., between Apollo and Dionysian, classical and romantic, pale and red-skinned). Albert Camus, while starting his posthumous origins from the Nobel laureate and existentialist martyr in the high school curriculum (which is where I found him), is named the perfect husband of modern letters. It's not exactly a compliment: Some writers deliver the firm virtues of a husband: reliability, intelligibility, generosity, decency. There are other writers who value the gift of a lover, the gifts of temperament, not moral kindness. It is noteworthy that women tolerate the qualities of a lover - sullenness, selfishness, unreliability, cruelty - that they will never face in a husband, in exchange for excitement, an infusion of intense feeling. In the same way readers put up with incomprehension, obsession, painful truths, lies, bad grammar - if, as compensation, the writer allows them to enjoy rare emotions and dangerous sensations. The sexual politics of this formulation is quite something. Reading is a woman's writing of a man. The lady reader exists to seduce or contemplate, ravished or served, a person who is either a scamp or a solid citizen. Camus, despite his movie star appearance (as Sontag, he was good at photographing), is doomed to the status of husband. He's a fellow reader will settle for, who won't ask too many questions when she returns from her throws with Kafka, Celine or Guide. He is also someone who, more than any of them, inspires love. 14 After her marriage to sociologist Philip Riff ended in 1959, most of Sontag's serious romantic relationships were with women. The writers whose company she kept on the page were overwhelmingly male (and almost exclusively European). With the exception of a short piece about Simone Vale and another about Natalie Sarrahl's Against Interpretation and the extensive dismantling of Leni Riefenstahl's Under saturn's sign, Sontag's main criticism is all about men. She was a kind of husband herself, letter letter conscientious, thorough, patient and helpful. Authoritative, but not scolding. Strict, orderly and clear, even when venturing into landscapes of savagery, disturbance and rebellion. She begins her investigation into Pornographic Imagination with a warning that no one should discuss pornography before admitting pornography - there are at least three - and before taking them one at a time. The extravagant, self-destructive seriousness of this sentence makes it the perfect camp gesture. There is also something strange about setting up rules and procedures, an implied scenario of disruption and punishment that is unmistakably erotic. Should I be ashamed of what I think? Of course! Humiliation is one of the most intense and pleasant effects of Sontag's masterful prose. She's the boss. 15 But the rules of the game do not just dictate silence or obedience on the part of the reader. What supports bonds - slavery, if you let it - is its volatility. The dominant party is always vulnerable, the submissive party is always capable of rebellion, resistance or outright rejection. I often read her work in a spirit of defiance, defiance, as if hoping to provoke a reaction. For a while, I thought she was wrong about everything. Against the interpretation was a sentimental and self-defeating polemic against criticism, the very thing it taught me to believe. The photo was a sentimental defense of a worn-out aesthetic ideology wrapped around superstitious horror in technology. And who cared about Elias Canetti and Walter Benjamin anyway? Or about E.M. Choran, Antonin Artaud or other Euro-miracles in her pantheon? Not me! And yet. . . . Over the years I've bought at least three copies under Saturn's sign - if pressed to choose Sontag's favorite volume, I'd pick that one - and in every essay about Canetti, Mind, as a passion, is the most dog-eared. Why? Not so that I can recommend it to someone who wants

to know about the first Native Bulgarian who won the Nobel Prize for Literature, because I have never met such a person. Mind as a passion is the best I've ever read about the emotional dynamics of literary admiration, about how a great writer teaches us to breathe, about how readership is a form of self-creation. 16 In very few cases, the people Sontag wrote about were people she knew: Roland Barth and Paul Goodman, for example, whose deaths were inspired by brief assessments reprinted under the sign of Saturn. Even in these elegy, the basic intimacy is recorded by one between the writer and the reader, and the reader - who is also, of course, the writer - in memory and holds a form of knowledge that lies somewhere between the brain and the biblical. As intimacy extends to the reader of Sontag, the love story becomes an implicit muna and trois. Each essay takes effort - the dialectic of struggle, doubt, ecstasy and - know another writer, and make you know him too. And, more deeply, albeit more restrained, to know her. 17 A version of this essay that I least want to write - the one that continues to push against my resistance to it - is one that uses Sontag as a baton against intellectual flaws and the insufficient intellectuals of the present. It's almost comically easy to build a vector of decline ever since. Why don't the kids read Canetti? Why don't trade publishers print collections of essays about European writers and avant-garde artists? Sontag herself was not immune from such sets. In 1995, she mourned the death of the movie. In 1996, she was concerned that the very idea of serious (and honorable) seemed fanciful, unrealistic to most people. Worse, there are ideas and assumptions abroad in the digital land that look like humiliated, parody versions of positions that she staked half a century ago. New Sensibility, which she heralded in the 1960s, dedicated to both excruciating seriousness and fun, wit and nostalgia, survives in the form of frenzied eclecticism fueled by algorithms. The popular meme, admonishing critics and other designated haters to shut up and let people enjoy things, looks like an emoji-friendly update of Against Interpretation, with enjoy things a safer formulation than Sontag's erotic art. It's not what she meant, no more than her spiky, nuanced notes on 'Camp' had much to do with this year's Instagram-ready indifference at this year's Met Gala, which borrowed the title for its theme. And speaking of Gram, his ascent seems to confirm the terrible prophecy in the photograph, which saw the uncontrolled spread of the visual media as a kind of ecological disaster for human consciousness. 18 In other ways, Sontag of the 60s and 70s can strike current feelings as problematic or outlandish. She wrote almost exclusively about white men. She believed in fixed hierarchies and absolute standards. She wrote in a sophisticated length with the look of irreconcilable erudition that makes people feel bad. Even at her most polemical, she has never traded in opposing hot takes. Her name will never be the answer to the standard, time-slew social media request Which classic writer would be awesome on Twitter? It's of any Sontag essay could only be every word of it. Sontag was a strange, Jewish female writer who despised the rhetoric of identity. She was insecure about revealing her sexuality. Moser criticizes her for not coming out in the worst years of the AIDS epidemic, when it could be a powerful political statement. The political statements she made tend to get her into trouble. In 1966, she wrote that the white race was a cancer of human history. In 1982, speaking at the Town Hall in Manhattan, she communism fascism with a human face. After 9/11, she warned against clouding political judgments. Let's not just grieve but let's not be stupid together. This does not sound so unreasonable now, but the bulk of Sontag's letter served neither a explicit nor implicit ideological agenda. Her agenda - a list of issues that needed to be addressed rather than a list of positions to be adopted - was doggedly aesthetic. And it may be the most unfashionable, the most shocking, the most infuriating in it. 19 Right now, in what may feel like being a moral and political emergency, we are clinging to sentimental bromides about the importance of art. We treat this as an escape, a balm, a vague set of values that exist beyond the ugliness and corruption of the market and the state. Or we look at art to affirm our pieties and prejudices. This divides the difference between resistance and complicity. Sontag also knew about life in extraordinary conditions, a world that is threatened by violence, environmental disaster, political polarization and corruption. But the art she valued most did not soothe the suffering of modern life as much as the refract and exalted her torment. She didn't read - or go to movies, plays, museums or dance performances - to retreat from that world, but to get close to it. What art does, she says over and over again, is to confront the nature of human consciousness during a historical crisis, not to know and to revise its own terms and procedures. He confers a solemn commitment: From now until the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of protecting the art. 20 Consciousness is one of her keywords and she uses it in a way that can have a strange ring for the ears of the 21st century. Sometimes it is called now, in a weak sense, synonymous with moral awareness of injustice. His status as a philosophical problem, meanwhile, has been diminished by the rise of cognitive science, which subjugates the mysteries of the human mind to the chemical and physical operations of the brain. But consciousness, as Sontag realizes, is unlikely to have disappeared, because it calls the phenomenon that belongs - in a way that avoids scientific analysis - for both individual and species. Consciousness is in the personal, non-binding experience of one person, but it also lives in groups, in cultures and populations and historical epochs. Its closest synonym is thought, which similarly inhabits both the walls of the solitary skull and the collective sphere. If Sontag's great theme was consciousness, her great achievement was the thinker. Usually this label is reserved for theorists and system builders - Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, Sigmund Freud, but Sontag does not quite belong to this company. Instead, she wrote in a way that dramatized how thinking happens. The essays are exciting not only because of the ideas they convey, but also because you feel the rhythms and pulsations of living intelligence in them; they will bring you closer to the other person as much as possible. 21 Under the sign opens in a tiny room in Paris, where she lived for the previous previous - Small bare quarters that meet some must undress to close for a while to make a fresh start with as little as possible to retreat. Although, according to Sigrid Nunez, Sontag preferred to have other people around her when she worked, I tend to imagine her alone in this Parisian room, which, I believe, is a kind of physical manifestation, a symbol of her solitary consciousness. Consciousness, which was animated by the products of other minds, is just as mine activated it. If she's there alone, I can claim the privilege of being her only company. It's a fantasy, of course. She had the best readers and I loved other writers. Metaphors of marriage and possession, pleasure and power, can only be seen so far. There is no real harm in reading casually, promiscuously, offensively or selfishly. The page is a safe place; Every word is a safe word. Your lover could be my husband. It's just reading. By which I mean: That's it. A.O. Scott is the chief film critic at The Times and the author of Better To Live Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty and Truth. He last wrote for a magazine about the great movies of 2018. 2018. susan sontag pdf on photography. susan sontag pdf español. susan sontag pdf contra la interpretación. susan sontag pdf sobre la fotografía. notes on camp susan sontag pdf. against interpretation susan sontag pdf. illness as metaphor susan sontag pdf. fascinating fascism susan sontag pdf

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