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INTERPRETING SUSAN SONTAG'S ESSAYS

RADICAL CONTEMPLATIVE

Mark K. Fulk

"Susan Sontag's public scholarship has been woefully under-read, and has a great deal to tell us in our current society and moment. Dr. Fulk's book offers an important lens on this vital voice and set of essays, and should advance both Sontag studies and American Studies in significant ways as a result."

— *Ben Railton, Professor of English Studies, Fitchburg State University*

Interpreting Susan Sontag's Essays

This book offers its readers a scholarly examination of Sontag's essays within the context of philosophy and aesthetic theory. This study sets up a dialogue between her works and their philosophical counterparts in France and Germany, including the works of Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Walter Benjamin. Artists and concepts discussed in relation to Sontag's essays include the works of Andy Warhol, Pop Art, French New Wave Cinema, the music of John Cage, and the cinematic art of Robert Bresson, Leni Riefenstahl, Ingmar Bergman, and Jean-Luc Godard. Her aesthetic formalism is compared with Harold Bloom, and this is the first volume to examine her late works and their position within the American events of 9/11/01 and the War on Terror(ism).

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Radical Contemplative

Mark K. Fulk

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For Angela B. Fulk, my wife
For William J. Fulk, my father
And for Walter and Ellen Brauza, my friends
Thank you for helping me be strong

Contents

Acknowledgments

Scholarship as I practice it is comprised of solitude and serendipity, especially in the case of the book you have before you. Back in 2009, while reading the book section of the Sunday *Buffalo News*, I came across a reference to Philip Lopate's recently published *Notes on Sontag*, which reminded me that Sontag was someone whose ideas floated around the departments of English and Art History in my graduate school and that I had always meant to read. I went to our favorite local independent bookstore, Talking Leaves, where I found not only copious amounts of Sontag's essays but also Lopate's volume. This discovery was the beginning of the work that culminates in *Interpreting Susan Sontag's Essays: Radical Contemplative*, and Lopate's volume alongside Fred Rush's article "Appreciating Susan Sontag" gave me an entrée into her work as well as a point of departure.

No book is written without lots of emotional and intellectual support, even if the writing itself is an act done alone. I am grateful to the Departments of English and of Philosophy and my colleagues Ralph Wahlstrom, Lisa Berglund, Lorna Perez, Adrienne Costello-Sulik, Peter Ramos, Jason Grinnell, Kim Blessing, Julian Cole, and John Draeger. Special thanks go to Mike Niman (Department of Communications) for his insightful discussion with my senior seminar on Susan Sontag on her work *On Photography*, as well as our collegial discussions and friendship of almost twenty years now. I cannot fail to note the two classes that I taught that were devoted exclusively to Sontag, a senior seminar and a Women in Literature course, and to both I give thanks. This book would never have been begun without a pivotal conversation at a conference with keynote speaker Ann Jurecic, who told me to either write the book or not, but not to waffle between doing and not doing (which I often do). I want to thank the Dean of Arts and Humanities, Ben Christy, who helped me secure a sabbatical early in the process; and for the two retreats at St. Gregory's Abbey, I am forever grateful to the monks there, not only for the time to write and focus but also for what they have taught me about living out my spirituality and my Benedictine practice as a confrater of their monastery.

The dedicatees of this book know how important they are to me in my daily practices. My dad Jim is a model of a strong work ethic, a big heart, too much humility, and the gracious model of aging that, as he enters his mid-eighties, seems hard to do as well as he does. My friends Ellen and Walter Brauza have kept my faith community of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church going during dark times and have strengthened my faith in more ways than I can enumerate. And for my wife Angie, who is always my first reader and best conversationalist, I have nothing but love. Let's keep the conversation going, my love.

Abbreviations

Abbr.	Work Represented
AA	Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud*
AI	Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*
AST	Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time*
BR	Susan Sontag, *A Barthes Reader*
Essays	Susan Sontag, *Essay of the 1960s and 1970s*
FMM	Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of a Moralist*
FWT	Jacques Derrida & Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow*
IM	Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*
MDT	Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*
PTT	Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*
Reborn	Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947–1963*
Rog	Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*
SRW	Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*
USS	Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*
WDZ	Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*
WSF	Susan Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls*

Introduction

Sontag, the Essay Form, and Modernism

1 Why Sontag (Still) Matters

Susan Sontag's essays mark an important transitional space between the Modern and the Postmodern. Enigmatic, compelling, and often intellectually ruthless, her essays over a four-decade career document a critical transition in aesthetics for the latter twentieth century. A popular philosopher who devoted her time to art and literary criticism and who yet had a war of words with Camille Paglia, another influential philosophical art critic; a self-named feminist who spent much of her career analyzing and celebrating the works of significant men and arguing with other feminists over the political efficacy of feminist theory; and a truly American intellectual who rightly identified the problems of American anti-intellectualism, right-wing hyperbole, bullying, and international imperialism, and who lived in virtual exile in Europe;[1] Sontag in her writings replicates and analyzes the myriad contradictions and promises of identity and epistemology for American intellectuals and radicals that remain relevant to today.

Sontag set the bar high early in her career in her first and most famous collection of essays, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, and its eponymous title essay. Coming at a time when academic criticism was stymied between the death of New Criticism without a concomitant birth of something else, and the stultification in cultural studies because of critics' laxity with and over-simplifications of Marx and Freud, Sontag's essays blazed a new and revolutionary trail, pointing toward the text (whether a work of art, a poem, or a sonata) as somehow more dynamic than formalism or other reigning cultural orthodoxies could adequately describe. Sontag called for an "erotics of art" (*AI* 14) without fully defining what this aesthetic praxis might entail; instead, in its enigma and openness, it stood for a means of experiencing art in its rawest and most unmediated form as world-creation.

The collection, however, marked more than a mere shift in critical procedure and theory that has passed on now to other things since the 1960s. This calling out of the critic's lapse into intellectual cliché and lethargy opens the door to the understanding of both the power

as well as the problems of modernist epistemology and offers, alongside her other works, a relevant and continuing conversation about the challenges that the fine arts and the humanities face in our academy and culture today. In the title essay, "Against Interpretation" (1964), Sontag calls for a reconsideration of how we approach our experience of art. Preparing us for her radical call to leave behind pre-formulated Freudian and Marxian "hermeneutics" and transition to this new "erotics of art," Sontag asks critics to stop positing something "behind" the work of art that has to be found out (or, even worse, diagnosed) in order for meaning to be established; she puts in its place a delight in detailed, exhaustive openness to the surface play of the work in question; criticism becomes a way of finding that delight, of demonstrating "*how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*" (*AI* 14) rather than determining and fixing meaning. The tone in this passage is typical Sontag: polemical, assertive, and determinative. She wants a response and, moreover, for her readers to live out the approach, as she herself has done. As Sohnya Sayres rightly notes, Sontag's "was a classicizing mind…seeking to spare the good, the true, and the beautiful from trivialization" ("Theories and Methodologies" 837).

What Sontag calls for is a new ontology for the reading of the arts—indeed, a move from epistemology to ontology in our approach to art. Epistemology is the study of the ways we know as well as what we know; Sontag suggests that we have already gone too far in positing what art always already *knows* through our various critical lenses that then allow us to escape art's impact on our lives. What she calls for in its place to "show *how it is what it is*" by asking the questions that open us to the art work; questions that come prior to any epistemological *knowing* and that fall into the range of the ontological, or how something comes to be. Randall E. Auxier writes that ontological analysis leads to a "reflective frame of mind" (13),[2] and this is the kind of interaction with the aesthetic that Sontag seeks for her readers, what I refer to as a contemplative mind that resists formulation for the openness of experiencing art itself.

After ending "Against Interpretation" with a call for an "erotics of art," Sontag explains in her second major essay, "On Style" (1965), what this erotic ontology may be; it consists in not viewing the artwork from a detached and intellectualized distance, but practicing a form of phenomenological analysis, possibly in the style of philosopher Martin Heidegger, but including a more immediate description and appropriation of aesthetic experience that works to make viewers more open to the world as it is, in all its contingency and complexity. Sontag writes that art for her is a form of "nourishment," because art, when viewed rightly, causes one to practice the spiritual virtue of detachment; however, for this to be accomplished, the artwork must remain "a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object" that changes the viewer when it is encountered (*AI* 28). While detachment is still a virtue in Sontag's aesthetic practice, it is

not the disinterested detachment from the work of art that ironized its content, as the New Critics/American Formalists practiced. As Deanne Bogdan writes, coming out of this training, she discovered that

> [m]y intellectual framework had limited me to regarding what now I would call [New Critical practice as] a *poetics of refusal*—the act of saying 'no' to a literary classic, either in whole or in part—within the context of a mistaken interpretation, deficient understanding, or a kind of *agnosis* or resistance to knowing. (478)

Sontag in "On Style" and other early essays calls on critics to detach from the world and make the art work itself the center of one's experience, and not the detached, critical response.[3] Situating moments like those expressed by Sontag in her early essays as a prelude to the post-structural/deconstructive moment that reached its zenith in the 1980s and 1990s would indeed not be an overreach; more to the point, Sontag does for art criticism what Cubism did to art in the 1910s and 1920s—finally giving up the *illusion* of three-dimensional space (and the fourth dimension of intent or social conditioning or whatever notion makes the academic critic feel superior to the art s/he studies) and replacing it with the visceral experience of the art itself when we refuse to prejudge.

In addition, Sontag's call from her first collection lays the groundwork for her arguments for secularized contemplative practices that she theorizes in "The Aesthetics of Silence" and other mid-1970s essays. My journey to Sontag's writing came as a result of reading Philip Lopate's book *Notes on Sontag* (2009), which works more as memoir of his experiences with her and her writing than as traditional analysis or critique. Lopate's reluctance to see Sontag's version of contemplative silence as possible moved me as someone living out this kind of ideal to see how Sontag's vision could help us understand art and experience (and the experience of silence in art) even better. Modernism itself, with its practice of the art of shock-value and abstract expressionism, creates these kinds of contemplative spaces as either a direct result of or a by-product of the experience of the art itself. Rather than presenting an ideal that cannot be realized, Sontag's essays present a valid praxis for understanding the creation of silence within Modern and Post-Modern art, literature, and film.

My approach in this book to Sontag's essays follows a roughly chronological pattern, which allows for a growing but open-ended analysis of her ideas over the space of time. Sontag's work can be read as a series of positional statements in their provisional and developmental manner more fully this way, as her writing of the essays is a means of thinking through and modifying previous viewpoints. As she herself observes in her 1996 postscript to *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, the provisionality of many of her statements made in her essays takes center-stage in the genre itself, seeing them as "contentious writings"

that "matter to new generations of readers" even though they are thirty years old (*AI* 311–12). Fred Rush describes the provisionality of Sontag's approach as follows: it is the nature of her thought that Sontag "presents her answers" to the larger aesthetic and theoretical concerns in "an unstructured way that requires conceptual reconstruction in order to avoid an overwhelming impression that there is a central incoherency at the heart of her aesthetic theory" (37).

It is the provisionality of some of her essayistic statements that has caused misreading of the works that Sontag herself commented upon. In the same 1996 postscript to an edition of *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* cited before, for instance, she describes how the cultural moment of these essays (the mid-1960s) and the disparities between that time and the 1990s can cause this collection to be read as "an influential, pioneering document from a bygone era" rather than as works that continue to "contribute to the quixotic task of shoring up the values out of which" they were penned. Sontag worries that the "judgments of taste" she made when the essays were originally published may have become the new normal, but the "values" that those judgments articulated have not succeeded as they should have (*AI* 312). By reading across a life and through the chronological development of her ideology, we can better come to understand the distance between these first articulations of her thoughts and views on modern selfhood and her later claims about its dramatic change in nature and the unintentional work her "contentious writings" may have done.

Moreover, the major differences between the essays of the 1960s and the "Thirty Years Later" postscript that finds Sontag lamenting the loss of seriousness record the full breakdown of Modernist paradigms in art and culture. Sontag's connections to Modernist paradigms and practices have been noted before,[4] and her career comes rather late to be fully incorporated into a Modernist paradigm, although Modernism informed much of her education in the 1940s and 1950s. Kylie Valentine argues that Modernism as period and style provided a "moment of creative and cultural possibility, when an optimism that the social world could be transformed connected to an optimism about the transformations of the self" (147). Valentine further notes that the "possibilities and limitations of modernism inhere in its conditions of possibility as well as its constructions of the personal" (148), and that we do well to attend to the politics of the body and the polis as well as the aesthetic theories of Modernism as "[t]here are contemporary political gains to be made from recognising the contradictions and absences within modernist politics, and the radical unrealised possibilities of those politics" (Valentine 116). Sontag's works provide an entry point for the reconsideration Valentine envisions. By focusing on this theme of Modernist selfhood across her career and foregrounding the genre of the essay within her oeuvre, I hope to explain the philosophical and aesthetic observations she garnered over a career of four decades.

Although this study is mostly chronological, assessing the development of her ideas in essays across her career, I do break chronology in two instances, both related to Sontag's relationship with the philosophy of Roland Barthes. Barthes's theories, which she helped to translate and proselytize in the United States through her volume *A Barthes Reader* (1982) and other works, informed her work on photography and on illness; I cover these works in two chapters, one on each of these topics, though the work itself extends across almost thirty years.

The chapters that comprise this study see the making of meaning in Sontag's essays as fraught with desire, delays, contradictions, and deletions, ultimately open-ended and suggestive rather than definitive. The critical or academic essay as written by Sontag engages in the same modes of desire that writing the body in other so-called "creative" genres does. Thus, her essays are provisional, determinative, argumentative, and filled with open-ended questions and conditional answers. Sontag's essays, which are often masterfully aphoristic and elusive, and her interest in the arts of silence and the fragment, beautifully anticipate this practice of reading associated with the deconstructive praxis of Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, and others. Charles J. Rzepka reflects that there is a "tendency evident in a wide range of philosophy, literary criticism, and historiography of a decade or two [ago]" that is symptomatic of an essential "weariness with the clanking chains of traditional disciplinarity." "This weariness has," according to Rzepka, "resulted in works like 'Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* and Richard Rorty['s] … *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*'" in which these authors "reject the unsustainable day dreams of reason and embrace the more recognizably 'self-sustaining fantasies' of art" (191).[5]

Paul de Man describes these new practices of reading, sharing many similarities with Sontag. In his preface to Carol Jacobs's *The Dissimulating Harmony* (1978), for instance, de Man celebrates Jacobs's ability to embrace the materials she covers with warmth and complexity, averring that her writing's "combination of pleasure and worth…should not be jettisoned lightly" (219). De Man describes that what Jacobs does in her essays is to "reverse the ethos of explication and try to be really precise, replacing…paraphrase by what one would have to call genuinely analytic reading" (220). Showing that his method of reading does not merely replace ethics with relativism (a charge often leveled at Deconstruction), de Man argues that this praxis creates its own "ethical imperatives" and reflects that

> [r]eading is an argument (which is not necessarily the same as a polemic) because it has to go against the grain of what one would want to happen in the name of what has to happen; this is the same as saying that understanding is an epistemological event prior to being an ethical or aesthetic value. This does not mean that there

> can be a true reading, but that no reading is conceivable in which the question of truth or falsehood is not primarily involved. (221–22)

De Man cautions critics against "polemic," the making of an argument from a detached and disengaged position that is conceived as superior to the work being analyzed; in this sense, what de Man calls out in this parenthetical aside is similar to the predigested art readings that Sontag criticizes under the idea of "hermeneutics." In its place, de Man (and Sontag) calls for a radical and contingent openness in thought: not a lack of rigor per se (which is often a misread form of existentialism), but a new mode of reading that puts the work first and foremost, and foregrounds its desires and disparities so as to create a new and perhaps revolutionary epistemology that is, as de Man says, an "event" that is "prior to" the creation or determining of "an ethical or aesthetic value." De Man concludes by ruminating that "true reading, as opposed to paraphrase, is an argument," or, we might say, a dialogue with the text, "that…has the sequential coherence we associate with a demonstration or with a particularly compelling narrative" (222). Perhaps Sontag's own celebration of herself as a storyteller in her later career could suggest that there is not as much of a difference between her as an essayist and herself as a writer of open-ended, narrative thought that some of the best novels of recent years (including her later novels) practice.[6]

Even more recently than de Man and Rzepka, literary criticism has called for a return to the kind of reading informed by the longings of both author and reader, and open to a radical reconfiguring of text and reader that figure what Sontag labeled an "erotics of art," and that has been a hallmark of writing-the-body in both feminist and queer studies. Jack Halberstam calls us to "live beyond norms" in our critical practice (13), heading into a "new politics…of occupation, passive resistance, and unlearning" that can be accomplished in tandem with a return to the practices of focused "attention, learning and unlearning, focusing and unfocusing, refusing and resistance" (12) that the arts so aptly can teach if viewers are open to use them as a mode of being-ness. As a result of the reintroduction of these practices, in what Halberstam refers to as a "polemical call for unlearning" that is not substantially different from Sontag's own call in "Against Interpretation," Halberstam speculates that "we need to undiscipline ourselves, free ourselves from our training, and find new narratives to tell about life, literature, and learning, narratives more attuned to the harsh realities of human frailty and less calibrated to the rhythm of late capital[ism]" (12). I am certain Sontag would wholeheartedly agree.

2 On the Style of Sontag's "Contentious" Essays

Sontag's primary method for addressing her cultural and epistemological concerns is via the essay form, one which straddles the line between academic and popular. Wayne Koestenbaum writes that Sontag's essays

have "a respect for any text's unruly, tricky self-contradictions." Koestenbaum reveals that, while her writing is "usually cited for her content rather than her form or style," Sontag's "paragraphs and sentences bear close and admiring scrutiny as exemplars of experimental writing: avatar of *move on*, she sought prose forms that would permit maximum drift and detour" (239). Fred Rush suggests that any analysis of Sontag's prose must walk the line between "simplicity" and "reflexivity," recounting that she is "skeptical that aesthetic surfaces," including the ones that she herself creates, "can command [a simple, unitary meaning] at all any more," and as a result her writing and the art it represents must "*assert* its aesthetic nature and, in the Modern period, one that implicates artistic reflexivity," or art's ability to represent openly its own processes (48). In ways similar to the viewer's relationship to Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona* (1967) (one of Sontag's favorite films[7]), just when the audience is immersed in the story of Sister Alma and Elizabeth enough to believe that it is real, the filmmaker Bergman gestures toward the constructed nature of film itself by making the film appear to break and by throwing in a random hodgepodge of tangentially related, surrealistic images. Sontag's prose works in a similar way, using various stylistic and rhetorical techniques to immerse the reader and then call her back to the consciousness of seeming reality of that createdness of the art and the nature of the critical prose that represents it.

Sontag's essays cross disciplinary lines, which have often been constructed with the idea of a set pattern of reasoning about works, texts, or ideas that does not comply with other disciplines' views on the same topic. Many of my colleagues in history and philosophy teach literature, but literature is approached as a stepchild to those disciplines—to prove points, make other arguments, give students an "experience" of the times—rather than as valuable in and of itself instead of as a by-product. Sontag felt that disciplinary boundaries in academics were too limiting, and this is ultimately why she left academics and turned to the popular essay as a form for her thoughts and interventions (*AI* 308). Sontag describes herself as at this point in her career (the mid-1960s) as someone in a battle against the deceptive ease of academics and the world at large (*AI* 308).

Sontag's awareness of the history of the essay genre informs her own practice at the level of both form and content. Sontag's essays follow in the tradition of classical French essays, which, starting with Michel de Montaigne, embraced a formalizing of uncertainty into the provisional arguments found within the essays themselves. Dan Engster argues that Montaigne is a paradigmatic thinker for the form, bringing a humanist critique to Machiavelli's political materialism. Montaigne's essays enact this critique; he represents through them:

> a first step toward restoring right and authority to this contingent and disorderly world. Montaigne argued that individuals would enjoy more stability and order in their personal lives if they focused

> their attention on forming their characters, re-oriented their actions around minimal principles of natural law, and moderated their external endeavors.[8] (649)

This call of Montaigne's was against what he saw as the ruthlessly public and political life recommended in *The Prince*. Montaigne describes the openness of his essay writing in a way that prefigures how Sontag herself would describe her process of essay-writing; for Montaigne, when he writes, he is "not portraying being but becoming: not the passage from one age to another…but from day to day, from minute to minute." Accordingly, he

> must adapt this account of myself to the passing hour. I shall perhaps change soon, *not accidentally but intentionally*. This [the essay] is the register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory, *either because I myself have become different or because I grasp hold of different attributes or aspects of my subjects*.[9] (Engster 908–9; emphasis added)

Sontag's early essays, coming at a time of social chaos and dramatic cultural change, fall into the same kind of milieu that Montaigne's did in Early Modern Europe,[10] which was also a time of major philosophical and religious contention. Like him, Sontag choses the essay form as a way of modeling openly how to live into this cultural crisis and shape a self that is worthy of her times and open to emulation by others.

The essay genre in this study is thus both the focus of my analysis of Sontag's contribution as well as the means through which I arrive at that analysis. Sontag offers knowledgeable guidance on the reading of her own favored form of the essay. More so than her novels and short fiction, Sontag's essays are her most important intellectual and aesthetic contribution to today's readers. Sontag began writing essays very early in her career, inspired by her readings of essays found in intellectual magazines like *The Partisan Review*; here, as well as in *The New Yorker* and other magazines of popular intellectual taste, some of her best work was originally published before it was compiled into the various collections. *The Partisan Review* in particular figures strongly in her concept of the intellectual/critical essay and the forms of selfhood it constructs; as she quips to Eileen Manion and Sherry Simon in a 1984 interview, "when I was in my mid-teens, going to high school in Los Angeles, my dream was to come to New York and write for *Partisan Review* and be read by 10,000 people" (213)—a goal she accomplished!

The Partisan Review and its history at the time of Sontag's early readership (the late 1940s and early 1950s) are formative for Sontag's own

approach to the intellectual and artistic world of her essays. After World War II ended, around the time that the young Sontag lived in Los Angeles with her parents and became enamored of its essays, *The Partisan Review* had broken its earlier ties with the American Communist Party but was still a vital purveyor of leftist intellectual ideas. Mark Greif labels it as "a bastion of irreligion" for this era (44). In fact, one can trace many of Sontag's concerns in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* and *Styles of Radical Will* to *The Partisan's Review*'s self-conception: as it reports of itself in this time:

> PARTISAN REVIEW will analyze the obscurantist tendencies gathering force in the world today: the revolt against reason…; the exaltation of mystery as a mode of knowledge;…The revival of religiosity and supernaturalism; [and] the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach.[11]

Greif also notes that *The Partisan Review* was a vehicle for the introduction to many American readers of what was labeled at the time as the "'New French Writing,'" which included writers like Camus, Sartre, and de Beauvoir (68).

Sontag's early essays are formed on these desires and concerns, documenting the process of discovery that Sontag experienced, and detailing the means and results of her epiphanies and insights. Her early approach to the essay form, similar in conception to Wordsworth's notion of life-meanings revealed by "spots of time" in his *Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1805/1850), falls within a Romantic paradigm that is in some ways in conflict with Modernist notions of the individual. Although not lyrical or autobiographical in the strictly Wordsworthian Romantic sense (we must recall, for instance, that Sontag does not reveal autobiographical details about her personal battle with cancer in her book *Illness as Metaphor*), Sontag's essays do document the growth and development of her mind. In her 1996 prefatory note to *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Sontag reflects that these texts have worked if through them, she sees the world "with fresher eyes"; the writing of the essays themselves becomes, as in much process theory in Composition Studies, a changing of the writer herself. The essays thus attest to an open process, that even though they may no longer represent the belief of the writer who wrote them, they have changed that writer in some significant way that would not have occurred had she not written the essay (*AI* x). This radically indeterminate, intellectual process that can be described as quintessentially essayistic leads to what Rush describes as Sontag's work appearing ostensibly "unstructured"; however, once we grasp this history of the genre and Sontag's own methods, her essays leads us in the process of discovery, as if we are travelling alongside a fellow voyager, reading over her shoulder.