

Independent Project

ADAA6000

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Understanding a Photography by John Berger

Summary

The resource "Understanding a Photograph" by John Berger (*Berger, J. 2013*) explores the role of photography as a means of communication, challenging its classification solely as fine art. Berger argues that photography, unlike painting, does not transform reality but rather captures moments as they are, emphasizing the role of the photographer in making deliberate choices about what to record. Berger supports his argument by contrasting photography with other art forms like painting and sculpture, asserting that photography uniquely presents an event or subject reproducibly and objectively while raising deeper meanings beyond the image itself. He highlights the social function of photography and how it serves to witness and document events, shaping our understanding of the world.

Evaluation

Berger's arguments are compelling, particularly in his assertion that photography operates in a unique space that documents reality and invites interpretation. The strength of his argument lies in his understanding of how photographs are both records of moments and vehicles for more significant meanings. However, his dismissal of photography as a fine art in some contexts, this rigid distinction may overlook photographic work's creative decisions and aesthetic considerations.

Connection

This resource is highly relevant to research on the impact of digital technology on documentary photography. Berger's discussion of the photographer's role in choosing what to capture directly relates to how modern photographers manipulate images to shape narratives, especially in the digital age. This book fits well with other resources that explore the ethics of photography, raising questions about the authenticity of digital images and the photographer's influence in shaping public perception. It prompts further inquiry into how digital manipulation alters the truth-telling nature of photography that Berger highlights

Berger, J. (2013).

This book supports authenticity in the digital age and emphasizes the concept of narrative, exploring how digital platforms and online environments contribute to the construction of narratives in documentary photography.

Ways of Seeing by John Berger

Summary

John Berger *Ways of seeing* (Berger, J. 2008). critically examines how visual culture, particularly art, influences how we perceive the world. Berger argues that traditional art, particularly European oil painting, historically reinforced social orders through representations of ownership and the objectification of women. He discusses how photography and other forms of reproduction have fundamentally altered the way art is experienced, removing its original context and changing its meaning. Berger highlights that every image reflects the creator's perspective, which is fundamentally political and influenced by societal power structures. His arguments are supported by historical examples and a critique of how art has been used to reinforce economic and social power.

Evaluation

Berger's arguments are highly persuasive, particularly his analysis of how reproduction alters the meaning of art. His strength lies in his ability to connect visual culture to larger social and political structures, making his critique of art both accessible and insightful. However, his focus on the political aspects of art can sometimes overshadow the aesthetic and emotional experiences art can induce. His critique, may not fully account for the personal or spiritual engagement with art that some individuals experience outside of social constructs. This will help with different aspects and understanding

Connection

This resource is helpful for research on the authenticity of documentary photography in the digital age. Berger's insights into how images are influenced by societal power dynamics and how reproduction alters perception resonate with concerns about manipulating images through digital technology. His work provides a framework for understanding how photographers shape public perception and the authenticity of their work. It raises further questions about the

ethical responsibilities of photographers and how digital tools might further complicate or democratise the control of narratives in visual *media* (Berger, J. 2008).

Ways of seeing can help analyse how digital tools and manipulation impact authenticity in documentary photography. By understanding the relationship between technology, social power dynamics, and ethical issues, revealing how photographers influence public perception in the digital era.

On Photography by Susan Sontag

Summary

“On Photography” Susan Sontag (*Sontag, S. 2005*). provides a critical examination of photography and its role in modern culture. She explores how photography has shaped our understanding of reality, arguing that photographs both document and distort the world that mediates our experiences. Sontag also addresses the ethical implications of photography, suggesting that taking a photograph often involves a form of passive appropriation or even exploitation. She discusses how photographs can desensitise viewers to suffering, yet they are

also powerful tools for mobilising public values. Historical examples and philosophical reflections on the role of images in society support her arguments.

Evaluation

Sontag's arguments are compelling, particularly in her critique of how photography can both reveal and manipulate reality. Her strength lies in addressing the dual nature of photography and its ability to document truth while at the same time creating distance between the viewer and the subject. However, she can be overly critical, at times underestimating photography's capacity to cause empathy or genuine understanding. Her focus on the darker aspects of photography's influence might overshadow its positive contributions to visual storytelling and cultural engagement.

Connection

This resource is crucial for understanding the ethical dilemmas posed by digital manipulation in documentary photography. Sontag's insights into the passive power of photography to exploit or desensitise are directly relevant to the current

discourse on authenticity in the digital age. Her work complements other sources that discuss the manipulation of images and their effect on public perception, raising additional questions about the responsibilities of photographers in shaping narratives and how technology further complicates the representation of reality in visual media (*Sontag, S. 2005*).

This book will help research/support how photographers can shape narratives that respects authenticity and ethical considerations.

Bibliography

Berger, J. (2013) Understanding a photograph. Edited by G. Dyer. London: Penguin Books.

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Sontag, S. (2005). On photography. [online] New York: Rosettabooks. Available at: <https://www.lab404.com/3741/readings/sontag.pdf>.