

Susan Sontag:
(On) On Photography

Lecture Notes

Christian Molitor's Views

- Photography's inferior but inexorable version of reality is the basis of On Photography
- Photography levels everything (and thereby beautifies everything?)
- Photography appropriates the thing photographed
- Photography alienates us from direct experiences
- To know an experience by seeing it photographed is to know it as distanced, second-hand, fragmentary

Christian Molidor's Views

- Photographs are a way of preserving what we see
- “making pictures” versus “taking pictures”
- It is not the sight the camera satisfies so thoroughly, but the mind

Mike Harter's Views

- Photography is taking pictures
- Photography records a physical reality and an inner reality
- How does academic language distance us from understanding, from reading comfortably, from engaging, ultimately, with the subject?
- Sontag creates a sweeping critique of everything photographic

Susan Sontag: Quotes

- “I long to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied.” Julia Margaret Cameron
- “To experience a thing as beautiful means: to experience it necessarily wrong.” Nietzsche
- “If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn’t need to lug a camera”. Lewis Hine
- “I photograph what I do not wish to paint and I paint what I cannot photograph.” Man Ray

Susan Sontag: Quotes

- “You can photograph anything now.” Robert Frank
- “Life itself is not the reality. We are the ones who put life into stones and pebbles.” Frederick Sommer
- “I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed.” Gary Winnogrand
- “I’m always mentally photographing everything as practice.” Minor White