

Looking at Photographs

1. Hold up a photograph

Write about it. Discuss the things that are written.

2. Lecture part

What is criticism?

It is 4 things: descriptions--- what is there?

Interpretations--- what does it mean?

Evaluations--- is it good?

Theories--- why do this?

It is asking questions:

What am I seeing?

What is good?

What do I think the artist meant?

How does it make me feel?

Why is it composed this way?

Who influenced this work?

And so on...

A definition: criticism is informed talk about art.

You do not have to like the work you criticize. You need to know why you like or dislike it.

The last decision to make is the liking or disliking one.

Why do criticism?

The average viewing time of any work in a museum? 5 seconds

We read to increase knowledge.

In the same way, we force ourselves to learn about works, to go beyond/
past the like/dislike reaction.

Doing criticism (writing) forces us to articulate clearly what we see and feel.

Methods of attack

A) To describe photographs

1) notice things and discuss them. (What do I know for certain?)

You can discuss:

Subject matter

Historical background

Medium

Form/ Design

Social times

The photographer

Subject matter: things in the photograph

Name it--- there is a girl sitting on the sidewalk, etc.

The words you use to describe what is there give clues to your feelings

Form: the elements of design

Tonal range

Subject/ film contrast

Film format

Point of view--- lens used, distance

Frame/edge--- depth of field, degree of focus

Medium: what the art is made of

Style: resemblance among diverse works from an:

Artist or movement or time period or geographical location

Style : a characteristic handling of subject matter and

formal elements

Look at style by observing: subjects chosen

How picture designed

How photography is used

B) To Interpret

All photographs need this.

A good photograph is about something even if it just looks like a representation of a person, place, thing.

Remember, no photograph can be bias free. We photograph the things we do and the way we do because of who we are. We make choices based on beliefs, values, attitudes and are influenced by our culture.

To interpret: move beyond description to meaning. Tell w h a t you understand about the photo.

Think of it as visual metaphor.

When we look and interpret, we think in 2 ways

Denotations: what is shown

Connotations: what is implied

Are interpretations correct? How can we know?

a) correspondence --- the interpretation ought to

correspond to and account for all that appears and all the facts
around the picture

b) coherence --- ought to make sense in and of

itself.

What about our feelings?

Use them --- identify, acknowledge, figure out
what in the photo triggers them.

But--- what I make me feel, what it means to me may
not be what photo is about. Feelings can be too personal.

Don't make the interpretation about you, make it about the photo.

C) Types of Photographs

Generate categories

Not "people" or "landscape" but what photo intends to do

A photograph can:

1) **explain** something- show how things are.

documentary/photojournalism

2) **just show** what a thing is

ID picture/ art repro/NASA

3) **interpret** a theme

4) **be art for arts sake**-- aesthetics above all

Beauty/form/line etc. Nudes, landscapes

5) **art about art**

As for the photographer:

The work can be a mirror or a window.

Contexts

How, when, where, in what context you see a photo also contributes to how we interpret it.

We get contextual info that helps us decide

Internal context: pay attention to what is evident in photo

Original context: what was happening around photo, photo's intent

Think about --- the times, other work by , politics

External context: situation in which photo is seen

D) To Evaluate Photographs

1) have reasons for approval or disapproval

2) base evaluation of the work

3) emotions come into play but be careful of making the judgement about you rather than the work.

4) place work into context--- what was photographer trying to do? Was it worth it?

5) remember emotion and judgement not necessarily the same things.

To judge, you must have interpreted; to interpret, you must have described.