

16 Ways of Looking at a Photograph

Class Exercise: Chapter 2, Aesthetic Theory

Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime describes a pleasure that is almost painful, an experience that puts one at one's limits of perception. The Romantic idea of the sublime, which stems from Kantian theory, held that only the natural world could offer the experience of the sublime. On your way to class, find a tree and take a snapshot with your cell phone camera. After you do that, take a few minutes to look at the tree. Now, in class, look at the image you took of the tree. What is different about the experience of looking at the photograph, on your cell phone, versus looking at the tree? Likely neither of these experiences are sublime, but you can note ways that the experience of looking at the image makes you think about the tree 'aesthetically,' that is, *as an image*. How do you see the tree differently, after considering a photograph of it? If your campus has no trees, substitute another natural object, a flower, a cloud, a stone.