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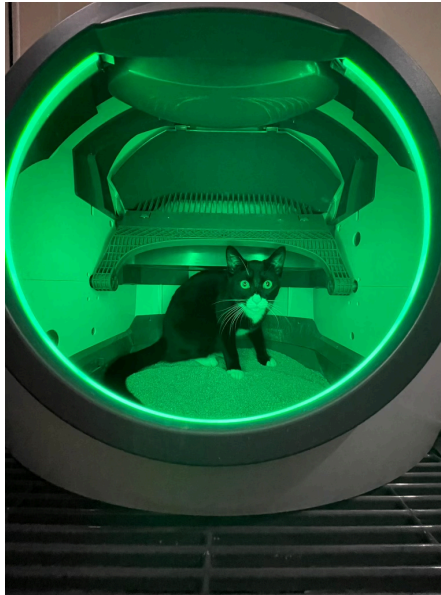
Essay 1: My Photo Essay

English 1121 (Prof. Scanlan)

09/24/2024



Heaven?(2024)



Spaceship?(2024)



Prison?(2024)

A Cat's Gaze on Life

Why do we take photos of our pets? Could it be that we want to practice taking photos? Maybe we want to cherish these times with our pets. Well, according to John McIntire (2020), “it involves a broader spectrum of skill sets than many other kinds of photography.” From things like lighting, variety, and just honing your camera skills, photographing your pets has many benefits. Maybe because they’re living beings that a photographer can get more

challenging photos. These three photos, “Heaven?”, “Spaceship?”, and “Prison?”, are captures of my two pets reacting to an interruption to their daily lives, which is the camera. While all three photos are about my pet cats, the measure and aspects that they’re taken in are vastly different in terms of lighting, composition, and interpretation.

The first photo is called “Heaven?”, which is a photo of my pet Sushi with the sunlight emitting from the front door window. This portrait photo is a prime example of a decisive moment; it was taken in a split second moment where my cat Sushi was standing in front of the sunlight emitting from the window of the front door. For context, Sushi is a very active cat and doesn’t like standing still, so a few seconds before, he wasn’t near the area, and a few seconds after, he ran away. Instead of Sushi being in the middle of the frame, the rule of thirds is used to not just emphasize Sushi, but the sunlight. This amplifies and in my opinion, improves on the composition of the photo. Additionally, what is the dominant expression? Sushi? The light? It can be both. The contrast between his fur and the light makes both aspects stand out in the neutral colored living room. To add on to contrast, the photo was turned into a black and white/mono colored photo to get rid of all color, and for the viewer to just focus on the shades instead. The lack of color further enhances the contrast between Sushi’s dark fur and the sun’s blinding light. Furthermore, the background is also blurred, giving it more of a focus on Sushi as well as a shallow depth of field.

While “Heaven?” focuses more on the contrast and values of the foreground and background, “Spaceship?” focuses more on the lighting. Although both photos can have different focuses, both of these photos are decisive moments. This portrait photo was also a decisive moment because of course, it’s Sushi, and he doesn’t like staying still. Him staring at the camera strengthens the story behind the photo. This photo was taken when we set up the automatic litter

box for the first time, and Sushi went in to explore it. The way that this photo was taken to not show any of the background past the litter box makes it look like he's in some kind of spaceship or alien aircraft, which is emphasized by the green lighting emitting onto not just Sushi, but inside the entire litter box. To add on, the way the photo is cropped further enhances the ambiguity of where Sushi is, which can also tell a story. The dominant expression could be two things here; the inside of the litter box being lit up with that green color, or Sushi himself with the way he is being illuminated by said lights. Moreover, this photo is known as a "centered composition", which has a subject right in the middle of the photo. That subject in this photo is Sushi, which lets the viewer know Sushi is the main topic of the photo.

Although "Spaceship?" is more concentrated on both lighting and cropping to make it seem like something else, "Prison?" uses mostly cropping and depth of field. This third portrait photo is of my other cat, Socks, staring at me through wooden stair beams, although just by looking at it, the viewer won't fully be able to tell that they're stair beams. This photo can also be considered a decisive moment because he could have moved at any time before or after I took the photo, making it vastly different than it is. However, Socks is a lazy cat, so when he lays down, he stays there a while. The way the photo is cropped to only show between the wooden beams and what's in between makes it seem as if Socks is stuck in some type of prison or painting. The beams give off the impression of a frame; being wooden. Hardly any subject in the photo is unfocused which gives it a sharper depth of field in this photo. The dominant impression could most likely be Socks, with him being in the center of the photo, as well as the contrast of his black and white fur contrasted with the beige and brown foreground and background. To add on, to enhance Socks being the dominant impression, this photo, like "Spaceship?" is a centered composition focused

on him. Furthermore, Socks seems to be staring at the camera which makes it feel like he is trying to tell the viewer something like “Let me out!”.

Ultimately, the reasons why people take photos of their pets vary, from wanting to enhance their photography skills to just cherishing the everyday moments they have with their pets. In Sophie Calle’s essay “Souris”, for example, she appreciates every moment with her cat; even the small things such as her cat sleeping because to her, her cat is who she has the strongest bond with, according to the quote “After our fathers die, we don’t sleep with their ghosts in our beds.” Photographs are a perfect way to capture my pets in their most vulnerable forms; just living their everyday lives. Taking decisive photos like these make the photos more alive. As Sontag states (2013), “after the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed” (535). From my standpoint, the reason I take photos of my pets is just like Calle; to cherish the moments I have with them because I know they won’t be here with me forever.

(1025 words)

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