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Essay 1: Before, During, After

English 1121 (Prof. Scanlan)

9/25/24



“Before” (2024)

Before, During, After

With every step on the course, the rhythm of my breath and the pounding of my feet against the pavement told a story of endurance, determination, and the unexpected beauty found in the journey of a 10-mile race. Although these three photos were taken very close together on the same day, and similar in terms of composition, they represent very different emotions surrounding the event. Each image reveals a different part of the experience from the buildup, through the intensity, and finally to the reflection afterward. Together, they form a complete narrative about what it means to push yourself, both physically and mentally.

The first image presents the race's beginning, a moment full of anticipation and excitement. In this photo, a sea of runners stands shoulder to shoulder beneath a bright blue sky,

the morning sunlight casting a golden glow over the crowd. The photograph captures what Henri Cartier-Bresson would call a "decisive moment," the calm before the runners surge forward into the race. It's a moment of quiet stillness, but also one charged with the energy of hundreds of people gathered for the same goal. The wide angle of the shot allows the viewer to take in the scale of the event and the sheer number of participants, the size of the buildings looming in the background, and the openness of the sky above. All of these elements hint at the magnitude of the task ahead. The composition draws the eye upward, from the tightly packed figures in the foreground to the vast sky above, giving a sense of possibility, as if the runners are about to break free and take on the world.



“During” (2024)

The race itself is full of contrasts. In the second photo, titled "During," the runners are now in motion, their backs to the camera as they surge forward down a city street lined with familiar urban structures. The vantage point from behind the runners suggests participation, as if the viewer, too, is part of the action. This photograph captures the reality of the race. It is a documentary photo that freezes people in motion. The sunlight, still bright, illuminates the

runners' backs and stretches their shadows across the asphalt. The vertical lines of the streetlights and the horizontal sweep of the road pull the viewer deeper into the frame, inviting them to become part of the scene. The wide road gives a sense of space, while the crowd of runners fills it with movement and energy. This photo also captures the unity among the runners, as they all move forward with a shared focus, their bodies angled in the same direction, their minds locked on the finish line. The buildings in the background are slightly blurred, a reminder that the world continues around them, but in this moment, the runners are in their own bubble, absorbed in the challenge ahead. The composition and framing of this shot are deliberate, bringing the runners into the center of the image while allowing the background to fade slightly. The depth of field keeps the focus on the middle ground, where the runners are, while the foreground and background fade into soft blurs. This creates a sense of movement, of being in the middle of the action. It's not just the runners who are in motion, the photograph itself feels dynamic, as if the viewer could step into the frame and join the race. The photo captures the essence of what it feels like to run in a large event: the adrenaline, the shared experience, and the way the outside world fades into the background as the race takes over.



“After” (2024)

The final image brings a dramatic change in tone. Night has fallen, and the street is quiet, bathed in the soft glow of streetlights. The rush of the race has vanished, replaced by the stillness of a city street at night. The contrast between the vibrant, crowded morning and the empty evening is striking, drawing attention to the loneliness that often follows a collective achievement. In the first two photos, the focus is on the shared experience of the race—the energy of the crowd, the excitement, and the sense of togetherness. But in this final photo, that sense of camaraderie is gone. The race is over, the streets are empty, and the runner is left alone with their thoughts.

Susan Sontag writes that “a photograph is both a pseudo-presence and token of absence” (539). This final photo truly represents this idea because, even though I still felt the lingering effects of the race, the sense of accomplishment and camaraderie had faded. The street, now empty and quiet, contrasts sharply with the bustling crowd from earlier. The race is over, but the photograph preserves the moment, making it both present and absent at the same time. In this way, the photo serves as a reminder of the fleeting nature of achievement and the way that, after the excitement fades, we are left to reflect on what we have accomplished. This final photo also speaks to the solitude that comes with pushing physical limits. The race, while filled with people, is ultimately a personal journey. You run your own race, set your own pace, and overcome your own challenges. After the race ends, you are left to process those emotions alone. The quiet night scene captures that perfectly, it's a moment of reflection, of looking back on the race and everything that came with it. Over time, I've come to realize that this post-race reflection is just as important as the race itself. It's a time to think about how far I've come and what I need to keep going. For me, running has become something more than just a physical activity. As the

final photo suggests, it is no longer just about the adrenaline or the competition, it's about the introspection that follows. The runner's journey doesn't end at the finish line. It continues in the quiet moments afterward, when the streets are empty and the world has moved on. Running has become a part of my daily routine, a way to challenge myself both physically and mentally. Over time, the act of pushing my limits has become addicting. It's no longer something I do for the physical benefits alone; it's a way to connect with myself, to test my endurance, and to find moments of clarity in the chaos of life.

In the end, these photos remind me that images capture more than just moments. They hold emotions, stories, and reflections. The start of the race, filled with excitement, the steady push in the middle, and the calm stillness of the night afterward show the full cycle of the experience. Photography isn't just about recording what's in front of the lens, it's about freezing a feeling, a fleeting instant that lingers longer than the moment itself. These pictures may be of a race, but they also tell a personal story of determination, connection, and the quiet reflection that follows.

Works Cited

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