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English 1101

Essay 2

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The Power Within an Image

 Although “Flash Back” and “Normal State” may have similar compositions, I chose to compare them because their punctum is different. The composition of “Flash Back” has the oceanic view of the coastline and has the power to alter my mood and provoke my emotions as it brings back memories of happier days growing up as a child when I would visit the beach with my neighbors on different holidays. The composition of “Normal State” does nothing for my emotions and therefore does not have the power to light my day even though it has a beautiful sunlit sky and amazing waterscape that also reflects the color of the blue sky. While I look at the compositions of “Flash Back” and “Normal State” -- which show the shapes, colors, objects, and arrangements within the images -- the punctum affects me in a deep private way by raising memories and consciousness. I am more attracted to the idea of the punctum as it helps me to understand how “Flash Back” is more relevant and important to me than “Normal State.”

“Flash Back” is a partial image of the Canarsie Pier in Canarsie, Brooklyn, New York, taken on March 28, 2017 at 5:45 pm. The skies were grey due to the lingering rain in this image, and there were trees without leaves on the banks on the farther side of its shore where the coastline lies over one hundred feet from the dock of the pier. The water looked grey and seemed calm, and hosts two Herring Gulls a stone throw away. Closer to the dock of the pier, in a pro-filmic event, one gull flew just above the water with its elongated wings that were white and had a darker shade of brown around their border. “Flash Back” captures John Berger’s notion that “Photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation,” (293), meaning it was my choice to try and get a shot at the right moment before the gull disappeared. This was the decisive moment of “Flash Back” which is described as the moment the shutter is pressed and captures an event. Susan Sontag also said that “photography is essentially an act of non-intervention” (535). This is true because there is no way I could tell the bird to fly at the correct moment and whether or not I was there, it would be doing the same action.

“Normal State” was taken of a pond on March 29, 2017 around 6pm at the Canarsie Park on Seaview Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. Although it was late evening the sun was still out and it added some color to the photo’s scenic view of the sky which was clearly blue and looked much paler further down the horizon. There were bushes that looked deprived of natural moisture and trees without leaves around the diameter of the pond which had an odd rectangle shape and a power line which run over thirty feet from the pond’s bank. There was an open walk way that was dark and muddy with dried bushes on either side and led right up to the edge of the pond. The water looked dark blue and wavy as the wind blew over it. The edge of the pond seemed dirtier than the water further out. In addition, a ladder with a danger sign was on the other side of the pond.

Although both photos were taken minutes apart on separate days’ “Normal State” had colors of the blue sky, a red ladder with a black and white sign, a black and muddy pathway, brownish dried bushes and trees, and dark blue wavy water. “Flash Back” also had dried trees, but grey skies instead of blue, a calm gray ocean instead of dark blue wavy waters, a coastline instead of encamping bushes, and birds instead of the loneliness of waterscape.

The coastline in “Flash Back” pierced my soul as twinkles of joy came rushing in reviving peace and tranquility that my soul had long tasted. Memories of driving to the Bluefields Beach at the age of ten in Jamaica and seeing the coastline from over a hundred feet away intensified the anticipation of running into the water and made me fuzzy on the inside. Even though I could not swim, once the coastline was in sight that was when I started to plan how and what I was going to do in the water. “Photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal,” (533) said Susan Sontag. This is how the punctum of the photo of the ocean’s coastline shocked me, and for a brief moment I was alive again and my past was now real.

Both photos contained the dominant impression of calm as seen in the sky and water. Even though the two shots seemed similar they are different in their totality. I also think that the punctum is helpful when examining these waterscape photos, but the punctum can also be used in a landscape photo. What I mean is that the punctum is selfish and only visible to its captive and may be different for the viewer from what I have outlined as my punctum. While “Normal State” openly displayed its colors, objects, and arrangements, I love “Flash Back” because it holds memories that I can relive each time I look at it.