Anthony Wu

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The Light at the End of the Photo

Geometric shapes make up the world, and thus can be discerned in every photograph taken. Light or lighting illuminates the room. In photos, light can drastically affect your pictures, Light can create shadows or illuminate a dark corner. There are two types of lights that can factor in on your photos, one is light from sun which is a natural source of light and the other is light from lamps or nightlights. These two types of light contribute to photos you take or photos that you see. In John Berger’s essay “Understanding a Photograph,” he states that “ A photograph is a result of the photographer’s decision that it is worth recording and that this particular object has been seen.” This means that when a photographer take a photograph, the photographer is saying that the photo he/she has just taken was worth being recorded. When photographers take photos, they consider one of the aspects of a photo, which is the lighting of the photos. Furthermore, the studium, rule of thirds, and the dominant impression of the two pictures will prove how light can affect the outcome of a picture.

In the first photograph, “Between Two Bridges” is located right under the F.D.R. Drive, in between the two bridges, the Manhattan bridge and the Brooklyn Bridge, in this photo at first glance the Brooklyn bridge, part of Brooklyn, the East River, and the construction of South Street Seaport mall are seen. What is also seen is the Sun’s behind the bridge and its light is illuminating the East River because of the sunlight’s reflection on the water. Sunlight is not the only type shown in this photo, there are also artificial lights coming from the Brooklyn Bridge and its shadow is seen on the East River. In the second photograph, “The Ship in the Light” the photo was taken on the Pier 15, East River Esplanade. In this photograph a huge ship with an american flag engulfs most of the space in the foreground accompanied by a dark silhouette of a person standing in the right corner. What is also seen is the construction of the South Street Seaport mall in the background. In this photo the presence of light is also spotted, the lighting in this photo are all artificial lighting, coming from the ship, the construction site, the F.D.R Drive, and some buildings also in the background.

Photographers around the world have different techniques and styles they like to use when taking photos, one style photographers use is called the rule of thirds which is  “thinking of the picture plane in terms of a grid made of three equal vertical and three equal horizontal divisions, with the points of interest placed at the intersections of these lines” as mentioned by Teju Cole in his article on New York Times, “Perfect and Unrehearsed,” This technique will furthermore show the significance of light in these photos. In the first photo, “Between Two Bridges” the grid intersects at key places of the photo, one key place is the reflection of the sunlight on the East River and the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge formed also by the sunlight. In addition, the horizontal divisions are almost placed right along the Brooklyn Bridge. In the second photo, “The Ship in Light” looks like the grid in the rule of third is already established, by the ship’s poles (masts), being its own three vertical divisions, and the wiring on the ship are the 3 horizontal divisions. The intersecting points on it own grid, are the lights on the ships which are key points of the photo. The use of the technique rule of thirds, reveals important elements or subjects in the photo at point of intersections.

When looking at a photo, they can strike a certain mood in a viewer’s mind, this is called the dominant impression. In the photo, “Between Two Bridges” the dominant impression is a feeling of relaxation, because of the sunlight brightening the East River and casting a shadow over the East River too. In the second photo, “The Ship in the Light” the dominant impression is a uneasy feeling, because of the lack of sunlight in the picture and the lack of light shining in the photo. What also gives off an uneasy feeling is the dark silhouette of a man in the right corner of the photo. The overall darkness in the photo, contributes to the uneasy feeling when looking at this photo. This shows that light can drastically affect your photo’s dominant impression either positively or negatively.

Photographers, a beginner photographer or a professional photographer, all have their own way or technique they follow when taking a photo. Photographers consider the overall lighting of their photos whether it is artificial lights coming from a photo shoot or the natural sunlight illuminating your photos. Light plays an important part on how your picture comes out, this is why there are flashes on your phone, to illuminate the photo you are going to take. Whether or not you want light in your photo it's the photographer's choice, as Teju Cole once said “There’s no single right answer, just as there’s no photographic formula.”

(929 words)

Works Cited

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