Marchellino Harviandy

Essay 2

English D391 (Prof. Scanlan)

October 28t2016

The Simple Things in Life

Everything is connected with each other in our world, and together they create a meaning for us to understand. Photography, however, isolates one object and use that sole piece to create another meaning. There are so many invisible objects in the world because it is mundane or unimportant to their views. However, by taking a picture, it combines the photographer’s intent and the object, in order to separate it from the environment. When these objects are isolated in their own universe, it creates a meaning for them that people can focus on and interpret. John Berger stated in his essay, “Understanding a Photograph,” that “A photograph is a result of the photographer’s decision that it is worth recording that this particular event or this particular object has been seen.” (292). This further supports the idea that the photographer’s decision accentuates the simplest things in order to find something people can empathize within the object. The two photographs are compared by viewing the studium and mood in order to find the empathy it evokes.

The photograph “The Two Lovebirds” is a picture of two love locks located midway the Williamsburg Bridge. The subjects of this photo are the two rusty locks chained on a stainless-steel fence above a train track for the M and J train. There are two phrases sketched on the locks, the right one noted, “Getting Over this Hump.” While the left noted “Ashley” with hearts on the right and left hand side, and below it is written “Luke” with a date of “8.11.14.” There is a sharp contrast in the picture, which is the degradation of the locks and the polished metal fence behind it. Overall the picture has a soft color scheme with no overwhelming colors. The second picture, “Swim” is a photograph of a sign and the surrounding lake, located in Bear Mountain State Park in upstate New York. The subject of this photo is the “No Swimming” sign in front of a lake between the photographer and the mountain. There is a picture on the sign, it is of a person swimming surrounded by a red circle and a diagonal line is going through it. There is a vast blue lake right behind the sign and further away is the green mountain side and the light blue sky. The angle of the photograph makes it seem as if the person swimming is headed to the lake.

In her essay “On Photography,” Susan Santog stated that “Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos.” Pathos is the quality that brings out a sense of empathy from people, and photography is able to do that with any object. The two photographs are of simple objects but they give a complex mood. “The Two Lovebirds” have a very mysterious mood because of the writing “getting over this hump.” It brings up a lot of questions for the viewer, Did the same person write the first and second lock? What is this obstacle that he has to overcome? The fence on the Williamsburg bridge only had 10 locks and a coca cola bottle stuck in it, it could’ve been easily ignored by a local pedestrian. The depth of field, however, is able to isolate these two objects and make the viewer only see these two things. “Swim” contrasts the first picture because the sign was out in the open right in front of the lake, it was meant for people to see. The mood portrays an exciting, adventurous one, not an orderly one. The vibrant colors of the lake and the angle of the sign gives an adventurous dominant impression. While the two photographs are different in the way it is placed in the real world, both are still not thought provoking to the locals. The photograph is able to bring out a mood that the viewers can empathize, a desire for something.

The two different styles of the photographs further support the ideas prior. While in “The Two Lovebirds”, it is a macro shot with a very shallow depth of field, “Swim” is a landscape photo with a deep depth of field. The depth of field, which is the distance between the nearest and the furthest objects that give an image judged to be in focus, made the viewers able to focus on the subject of the photo. In the first photograph, it made the viewer only look at the locks disregarding its surroundings completely because of depth of field. While in “Swim,” the background is necessary for the picture, thus having a shallow depth of field made the viewer focus on the background too. Different styles of the two pictures however still lead to a sense of desire from the viewers.

People don’t see the things that they’re looking for sometimes, even if it’s in front of their eyes. Photography allows people to look at the irrelevant things and empathize with it, in order to find a meaning for its existence.

Works Cited

Berger, John. “Understanding a Photograph.” Classic Essays on Photography. 13th Edition. Alan Trachtenberg. 80 Edition. New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980. 291-294. Print.

Santog,Susan. “On Photography.” Essays of the 1960s & 1970s. David Reiff. The Library of America. NewYork. 2013.