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Essay 2

English 1101 (Prof. Scanlan)

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"On My Way"

With every photo taken, there is a story to be told. These stories have their own way of describing who the photographer is and give reason to the existence of the photo. While this statement can be considered to be true to some, there are cases in which the photo's story is given by the photographer and may only be important to them. The photo bears a significant importance to the photographer and is usually understood best by them. To support this claim, I will show some of my photos and tell the story behind them.

The first photo I took takes place in the 168th Street A train station in Manhattan, New York. What should easily be noticed is that the photo was taken at an angle that has a focal point on the right side of it. Within the photo, the dark, trash-filled tracks in which the A train goes along are visible. There is also a wall with square white tiles that has a burgundy line of tiles close to the ceiling. Under this line, the number 168 is repeated with 11 white tiles in between each repetition. At the bottom of this wall, there are no tiles, which resembles the same color and texture as the tracks. Above the tracks is the ceiling. The ceiling is not flat, as it has miniature arches, about 2 feet separating each of them. On the right side, the platform is seen. Here, there is a yellow line that tells where passengers should stand. Along the platform are other passengers waiting for the downtown train. At the very end of the tracks is where the train enters the station from. At the moment when the photo was taken, the train has not arrived, so all that is seen is a pitch-black entrance with a blue light towards the left of the entrance.

The second photo that I took was taken on East 162nd Street in Manhattan, New York but is showing West 162nd Street along with Broadway. The time in which this was taken was approximately 6:00 PM. Half of the photo is filled with the presence of Broadway. On the left, see white lines that direct pedestrians where to walk can be seen, while the right side only shows asphalt. At the center is what is called a Broadway mall; an area where there are benches facing Broadway and have different plants and sometimes trees behind them. On the mall, there are streetlights. The other half of this photo shows a number of apartment buildings, one of which I live in. My building is towards the left of the photo. It is of a reddish-brownish color with white stripes above each window. Below that building is a hardware store with a large yellow sign. The store has glass windows with bright white lights. Towards the right are a number of lights, some of which are located at the entrance of the building. There are a number of small trees that are scattered along the whole block on both sides. Across that building is a beige/tan-colored building that has a deli under it. The deli has a white sign that when activated, is lined with multicolored neon lights. Towards the left side of the store, there is a glass window with a blue neon light lining it. On West 162nd Street, there are multiple cars, one is parked and two of them are being driven. The brands of the cars being driven are Chevrolet and Jeep. The Jeep is turning towards Broadway going downtown. The Chevrolet is moving straight into Broadway. All of this sits under a fading cloudless dark blue sky that gets darker towards the east.

The meaning behind these two photos have a fair amount of similarities and differences. Starting with the first photo, the reason why I took this photo was to explicitly show the first stop in my trip to school. I would consider this photo to be mostly an art photo than a documentary photo because of the way I took it. I purposefully took it at such a sharp angle to show the length of the station and to symbolize the distance I travel to get to school. The depth of field in this photo shortens the true length of the platform but stretches out the tracks, which boosts the definition of the symbol. In "Understanding a Photograph," John Berger says that a "photograph is already a message about the event it records." The photo is partially self-explanatory, but it doesn't give the reason behind the message. A viewer can infer that the photographer was going somewhere but they wouldn't know why they were going there, where the destination was, or even if the photographer was trying to convey an idea. All of those questions remain unanswered until the photographer intervenes. That brings me to the second photo. Berger mentions that, in relation to taking a photo, the "choice is not between photographing x and y: but between photographing at x moment or at y moment." The second photo was taken at the end of my trip from school. At this point in time, I was going home, which is seen in the photo. I could've easily taken a photo of the train station I got on to get home or the station I got off, but in this case, it isn't about how I got here; it's about where I am. This photo, unlike the other photo is more of a documentary photo than an art photo because despite having a collection of different objects and colors, the photo itself can mean nothing to any viewer except the photographer. The photo shows a part of the life of the photographer, solidifying that event into something others can see. The depth of field in this photo initially had no significance, but eventually became part of my trip to school. This time, however, it wasn't a case of distance, but of time. The photo shows a dark sky, showing how long it takes to get from school to my home. Distance and time coexist and are a part of each other, which is present in both photos. Berger explains that " what distinguishes the one from the other is the degree to which the photograph explains the message, the degree to which the photograph makes the photographer's decision transparent and comprehensive." In these photos, the message I try to send to viewers is much more evident in the first photo than the second, since it requires less explanation and includes a subject that is easily identifiable. The second photo bears the same message but cannot be recognized as easily.

Ultimately, all photos give viewers a story that is created with the contents of it. The story can be self-fabricated and is merely captured by the photographer. But some photos are given meaning by the photographer. Their existence alone cannot tell a story, not without the help of the photographer. With these photos, I learned that photos don't just capture an event, but also tell of what the event as and what was going on. They bear more meaning than what is thought. Once the story is told, viewers can attempt to put the pieces together and create a bigger image that can easily show what he photographer wanted to exhibit.

Works Cited

Berger, John. "Understanding a Photograph." *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Leete's Island Books,1980, pp. 291-294.