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Essay 2

English 1101 (Prof. Scanlan)

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**Concrete & Nature**

In John Berger’s article, “Understanding a Photograph”, he states that “the photograph is an automatic record through the mediation of light of a given event: yet it uses the given event to explain its recording. (292)” That’s one way to define a photograph but I prefer to say that a photograph is a moment in time captured with a lens because it has significance and its kept as a memory or a reminder. Photography is the process/study of capturing different types of photos. With those different types of photos, come various terms that can be used to describe them. For example, dominant impression, which is the mood of a photograph. Studium and punctum are other terms that really allow a person to fully explain a photograph because the studium is the public visual; what you can see in the picture, but the punctum is personal; any memories the photo may trigger, what it makes you think of, how it makes you feel, etc. The photos I’ve taken can be described by many of these terms but the real focus is on how different they are; two completely different environments are portrayed but they still have some similarities.

The first photograph, titled “A Train”, was taken by me, at the Jay St.-MetroTech Station as I was about to take the uptown-bound A train to go home after a long day of classes. The studium of the photo is a grimy A train pulling into the station, a crowd of people waiting on the platform to board the train on either side, a run-down ceiling whose paint is visibly cracked and peeled, and a seemingly clean floor. The punctum, for me at that time, was the memory of routine because I take that train every day, in the morning and then again in the afternoon. In that moment, as I saw the train approaching, I felt happiness and relief knowing I was that much closer to getting home. Geometric shapes also play a part in this picture; the rectangular lights neatly lined up above the platform, the yellow rectangular margin placed right before the tracks to represent caution of stepping any closer to the edge, the equal blue columns that give the station support, and the square steel front of the train, which contains more rectangular windows, circular lights, but the biggest circle to symbolize it with the letter “A”. The geometric shapes help to give the picture structure and alignment, so that it’s not just a mess of things in a frame. What I particularly like about the train is the slight “lens flare” that the headlights of the train created, just enough light comes into the photo where you get a sense of warning. I guess you could say the “dominant impression” of the photo is caution.

The second photograph, titled “Willow Tree” was taken by me, in Boston as I walked through the Boston Common & Public Garden with my family. We took a small boat ride in “The Lagoon” and I was fascinated by the large trees so I captured a photo. The studium of the photo is a sunny day with clear skies in a park filled with people and a large willow tree that seems to be resting just atop the water with a blurred reflection in the lagoon. This is clearly a landscape photo because it includes water, middle ground and sky. The punctum for me was the thought that everything was peaceful and how the park reminded me of Central Park and the beauty and nature that envelopes it. I’d say the “dominant impression” is peaceful or relaxed due to the weather and environment.

Both photos I chose are completely different but they also have similarities. Major differences would be the environments, one is underground in a gritty train station where there’s no sign of nature or and the other one is of a park where everything is nature, peace and open. One has significant geometric shapes whilst the other has none, instead it’s a landscape photo. Those are clear differences that anyone can see, but they also give you different feelings. The “A Train” photo comes with caution, bustling crowds and a sense of purpose, but the “Willow Tree” brings a calmness and no real purpose; just views. Their similarities include beauty and reality, both were taken in the moment and justly interpret the environments captured. Susan Sontag has stated in her article “On Photography”, that “Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are. (532)” Both pictures were also taken by means of my own travel, and they were taken with no rush, or preparation. Which relates to when Susan Sontag also stated that “The very act of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel. (534)” But, in conclusion, both of these photos, using such terms, can be clearly described and easily compared to create a visual and an understanding for any reader.

**Works Cited**

* Sontag, Susan, “Essays of the 1960s & 70s on Photography”, The Library of America, New York, 2013.
* Berger, John, “Understanding a Photograph”, Aperture, 2013.