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Arts 12A Writing Three

The criticisms Sontag lays out in “In Plato’s Cave” are still relevant despite the rapidly progressing technology that is—at least on the surface level—changing numerous aspects of photography. Some of these changes include an over-saturation of images. Recently, social media platforms that are entirely image-based (Snapchat and Instagram being the primary ones) have developed and flourished in recent years. Another shift in the field of photography is accessibility; progressing technology and the advent of smartphones have made photography possible for anyone who owns a cellphone. While art critics can debate about the level of artistry between photos taken on an iPhone and photos taken on a DSLR, the fact that these images are captured moments in time makes them photographs. Sontag’s criticisms of photography encompass the mental and sociological foundations that make up photography rather than the technological changes photographs go through. The points she makes throughout the piece—that the inexplicable “compulsion” to photograph works in tandem with the desire to participate, that “having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it”—are still present in our social consciousness concerning photography (Sontag). If anything, social media makes Sontag’s criticisms all the more apparent. We see the aforementioned compulsion, the belief that because we see a photograph of something we have knowledge about it—play out on our timelines every day. Joshua Hammer’s piece “Einstein’s Camera” is exemplary of every-changing technology combined with fundamental ideologies. Hammer consistently portrays how photographer Adam Magyar moves as a “detached-observer...a life of constant motion: He’s permanently passing through” (Hammer). Despite this near-ghostly characterization of Magyar, if we are functioning off of Sontag’s idea that photographing is not passive, Magyar himself is taking a more active

role than that of the “detached observer.” In addition to the actual act of Maygar’s photographing himself, the fact that he developed his own software to take advantage of scanning technology in order to composite the images seen in *Stainless* makes him arguably more active than other photographers. The type of participation Maygar has with his photos is a different type of active than any of those that Sontag addresses directly due to the limitations of technology when she wrote “In Plato’s Cave.” While it is topically different, Maygar is still a photographer—instilling his views on his subjects in the way he chooses to shoot and edit. These ideas parallel those brought up by Sontag, only the technological lens through which photography is quite literally viewed. In this way, photography is the opposite of dead.