

Writing 3

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The Evolution of Photography

From the heliograph, to Daguerrotypes, emulsion plates, and dry plates, to roll film, to instant images, to SLR cameras, to “point and shoot” cameras, and finally to smartphones, photography has evolved immensely in just a short period of time. The oldest surviving camera photograph is called “View from the Window at Le Gras,” whose subject does not seem to be a particularly important or riveting photo. Compare this with photographs seen today, many are not extremely important either. In this digital age, digital technology has only augmented the medium of photography.

“In Plato’s Cave” by Susan Sontag critiques the use of photography in 1977. Sontag juxtaposes photographs with knowledge and power. One example is that it furnishes evidence: a camera record can either incriminate or justify. This holds true even today. Photographs are extremely important evidence in a courtroom and having just that piece of evidence can determine the direction of the ruling. One difference between Sontag’s time and today is that photographs back then were not digital: it would have been extremely difficult to alter an image, therefore, the photograph would serve a higher purpose in the judgement. Today, just a series of clicks on Photoshop can take a normal photo of someone shaking hands with a normal person could be turned into a photo of that someone shaking hands with a Russian mafia boss.

Sontag describes the work of photographers in her time to be just interpretations and not exactly truth. This is still seen today where photographers have an idea of what they want to capture and they find the perfect settings to which they can capture it. They do not capture the subject in its raw form, rather, they capture it to their own standard and their own interpretation of the subject. Normal citizens take pictures of things they think are pretty or interesting. They find the perfect angle, crop, edit, caption, and post the picture on different platforms of social media so that others can find it pretty or interesting as well. "Einstein's Camera" by Joshua Hammer talks about Adam Maygar who is a photographer. Maygar's work is also only an interpretation of the world. One of his works "Urban Flow," represents time and not space; because of the scanning technology, there were many distortions in the photograph that did not imitate the real world.

In this digital age, there are two extremes in the use of photography: for knowledge and for interpretation. In court, the news, and professional settings, photographs are extremely important. They must show the rawness and truth of the world in its contents: it must not be distorted, it must not show bias. However, photography as an artform can be interpreted in many ways. It could be the way you take the picture, or the post-production of the photo you captured. You want others to view the subject the way you view it, or they could interpret your work as something completely different. The main difference between photography in Sontag's time and today is the accessibility of the photographs. You could see these photographs just by doing an internet search or even just scrolling through social media. The digital age has simply augmented the medium and made it more accessible for normal people.