

Bethany Dearden

Lens of 'reality'

The iPhone has forever changed the way
society views and interacts with reality.



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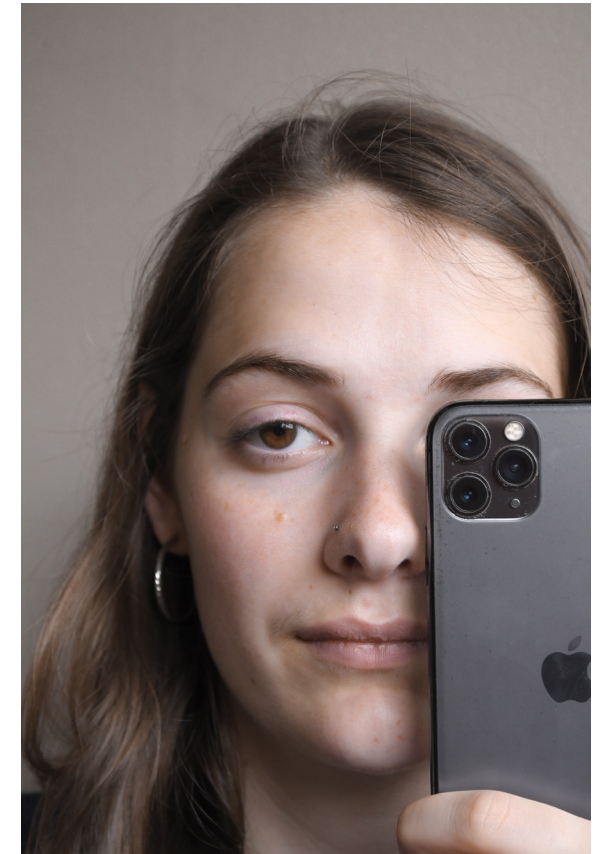
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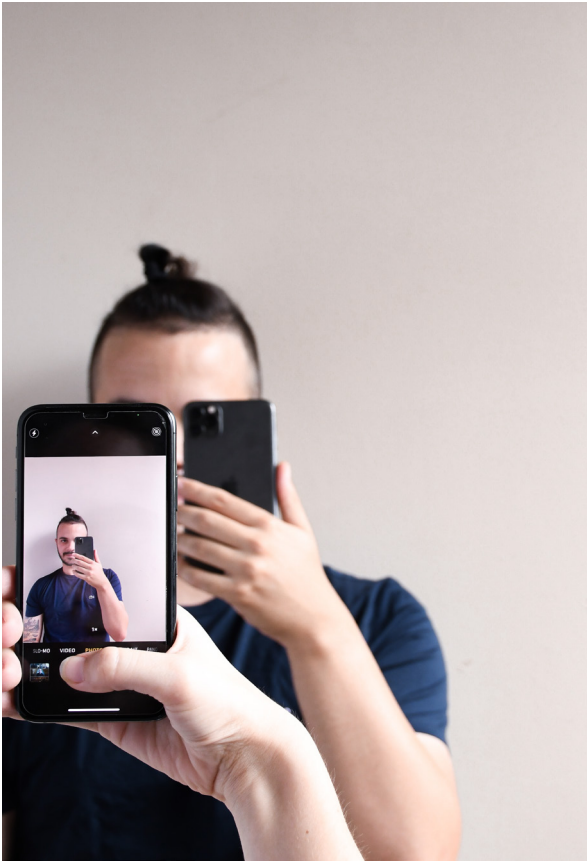
The new digital age that society is living in has been accelerated by the tool of the iPhone. One of its aims is to allow people to instantly capture elements of reality and then almost, instantaneously, share it on social media through its compatible interface and portable packaging. However, in the past decade this tool has shifted from capturing reality to creating 'reality' that is worthy to capture. Photographs have begun to alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe (Sontag 1977). Photography, especially on smartphones has become societies only means of affirming reality and ultimately human existence, allowing social interaction to be dependent on smartphones and the abilities they possess. Susan Sontag; a writer and critic has insight into the moral and aesthetic problems posed by the omnipresence of photographs in her book *On Photography* (1977). She writes "ultimately having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it "(Sontag 1977, p.24). Human interaction thus becomes

dependent on the virtual reality presented within smartphones.

Photography was introduced in the 1830s with its original aim to record the image of an object through the action of light. Despite the initial intent behind the camera, it was only 16 years later that William Henry Talbot documented the first known photo manipulation, warping and manipulating the original photograph. As soon as it was humanly possible to manipulate a small essence of reality, society immersed itself into this new possibility, thus creating its new definition of reality. From the earliest form of photography new and emerging scientists and artists have been subverting those boundaries of what is known and understood as reality. Every decision a photographer makes in deciding how an image will look including exposure, framing and content imposes a standard and false reality on their subjects.

In today's society "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a





photograph of it... A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened." (Sontag 1977, p.5).

References:

McRobbie, A. (1991). The Modernist Style of Susan Sontag. *Feminist Review*, (38), 1-19.

Morrison, B., Perry, G., O'Hagan, S., Kiss, J., & Searle, A. (2020). The power of photography: time, mortality and memory. Retrieved 19 October 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/interactive/2013/may/19/power-photography-time-mortality-memory#blake-morrison>

This is evidently showcased within the context of the iPhone today, whereby cameras pervade the everyday. Society insists on creating social media platforms that don't just allow humans to validate their experience through a photo but demand complete dependency and devotion from other people knowing and viewing that photo. Written in 1977, prior to the digital age and the rise of the iPhone, Sontag refers to the theme of tourism to exemplify the addictive behavior society has for photography even before the iPhone. She states, "it seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along." (Sontag 1977, p.9). Photographs become evidence of experience and a way to exacerbate reality. Life become less about being present in a partial moment and doing things that bring happiness to one's self and more about accumulating a photogenic portfolio of one's life. In effect, this obsession with curating reality drive the decisions one makes, including where they travel.

Because of this societal addiction and obsession with creating and confirming evidence of what we now call 'reality', society now interacts in a completely different way. Humans are seemingly more dependent on affirmation, than they have ever been before. Social interaction has shifted from being primarily face to face to online. Shared social experiences are less about the present moment and more about after editing and masking of the moment with the conversion of an aesthetic image to replace the actual experience. This in turn has been intensified by the introduction of the iPhone through its portable camera and networking capabilities. It has diminished an individual's ability to subconsciously have meaningful experiences because of their lack of ability to be completely present. This constant absent mindedness from reality and society's constant drive for affirmation creates an environment of social interaction that is dependent and controlled by new technology, photography and social media.

Popova, M. (2020). Aesthetic Consumerism and the Violence of Photography: What Susan Sontag Teaches Us about Visual Culture and the Social Web. Retrieved 15 October 2020, from <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/09/16/susan-sontag-on-photography-social-media/>

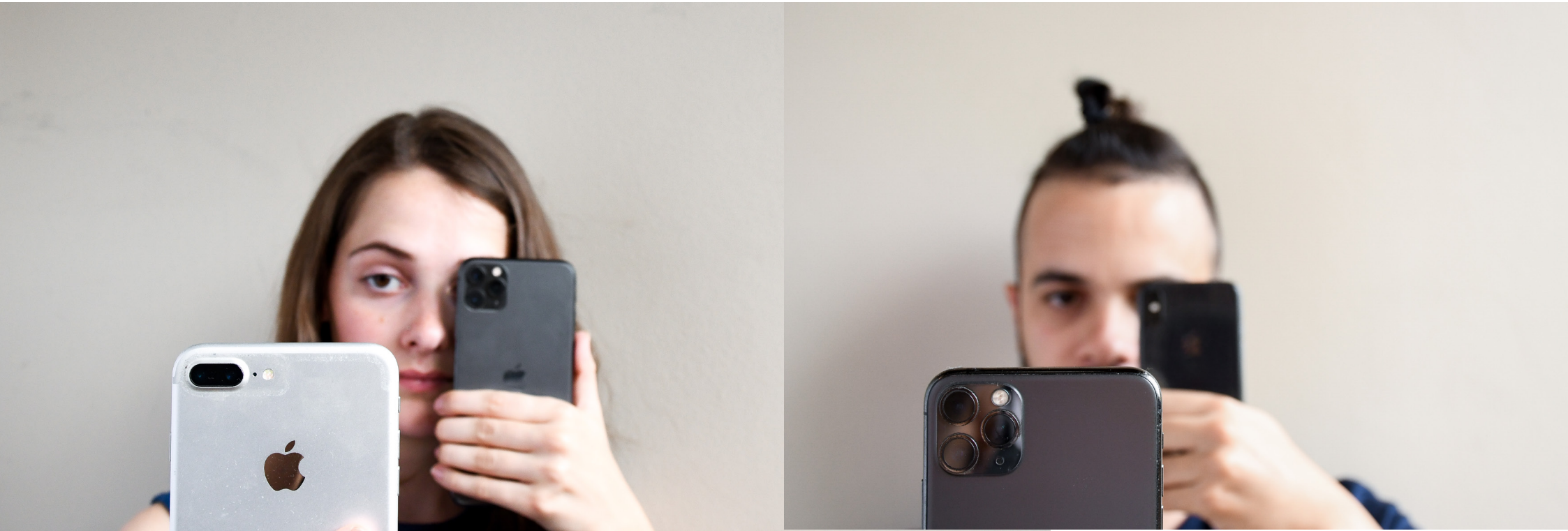
Sontag, S. (1977). *On Photography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Thomas, J. A. (2008). Power Made Visible: Photography and Postwar Japan's Elusive Reality. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67(2), 365-394.

"Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture. This gives shape to experience: stop, take the photograph and move on"

(Sontag 1977)





Social interaction has forever been altered due to the unclear and constant evolving definition of reality fueled by the invention of photography but more specifically,

The iPhone.