

**Writing Assignment #1
Documentary Photography Today**

“The photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims,
What a spectacle!” — Susan Sontag

Papers are due in class: **Tuesday, Oct 2nd**

You must submit 2 copies (one hard copy and one electronic)! Submit a digital copy to scheng@citytech.cuny.edu.

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore the function of documentary photography today.

Your paper should be 3 double-spaced pages, 1” margins, 12-point type (Please use Arial, Helvetica or Times).

Before you begin writing your paper, you must first do some research.

You must **read** and **analyze** the following (pdf copies are online):

1. Look up the term “documentary photography” and define for yourself
2. Read Chapter 7 (pp. 124-139), “The Social Photograph” in Fred Ritchin’s *After Photography* (2009)
3. Read an excerpt from Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2007). *Sontag is a renowned philosophical thinker who has published many seminal essays on photography, including the essays collected in On Photography* (1977).
4. Look up and explore one of the photo series mentioned in Ritchin’s chapter (ie, Robert Knoth’s “Nuclear Nightmares”) or choose an exhibition at www.pixelpress.org

Paper Instructions:

Consider the significance of documentary photography in Ritchin's and Sontag's articles. Do you consider documentary photography effective in today's society? Summarize each author's opinion of photography (you must discuss **both** readings). What do the authors think are the positive aspects of photography? What are the negative ones? Discuss some examples from each reading.

Then consider whether you think documentary photography remains effective in contemporary society. Compare Ritchin's and Sontag's views to **your own ideas** about the effectiveness of documentary photography in contemporary society. In addition, discuss your thoughts on the photo series that you've chosen to explore.

Please note that if you fail to discuss both the Ritchin and Sontag readings, it is impossible to receive an A on the paper.

An important note on plagiarism

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM AND WILL RESULT UNCONDITIONALLY IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.

To "plagiarize" is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as:

Take and use as one's own (the thoughts, writings, inventions, etc., of another person); copy (literary works, ideas, etc.) improperly or without acknowledgment; pass off the thoughts, work, etc., of (another person) as one's own. [Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Oxford: 1993), 2:2231]

If you do additional research for the essay, you must cite all sources for your work, not just books and articles but also internet and non-traditional media sources. If you have any doubts or questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me in class, in office hours, or via e-mail.