



ABIGAIL SOLOMON-GODEAU  
**PHOTOGRAPHY**  
AFTER PHOTOGRAPHY

GENDER, GENRE, HISTORY EDITED AND WITH A FOREWORD BY SARAH PARSONS



# Photography

AFTER

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GENDER, GENRE, HISTORY

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Abigail Solomon-Godeau

*Edited by Sarah Parsons*

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## PREFACE

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### May the Bridges We Burn Light the Way

*Sarah Parsons*

Like many other readers, my introduction to Abigail Solomon-Godeau's work was her article "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism" published in the July 1989 issue of *Art in America*. Taking the 1988 blockbuster exhibition on Gauguin at the Grand Palais in Paris as her subject, she produced a withering critique of art historical mythologies relative to the heroic, misunderstood genius-artist, French colonialism, exoticism and eroticism, and, hardly least, the ways in which "femininity is conventionally linked, when not altogether conflated, with the primitive."<sup>1</sup> In so doing, she carefully delineated the curatorial and scholarly strategies that conceptually naturalized these formations that produce and reproduce fantasies about cultural production.

That issue of *Art in America* was passed to me as an undergraduate by an older student with a "psst, check this out" excitement normally reserved for the exchange of purloined erotica among adolescents. It helped that one of our more conservative professors was among the two scholars Solomon-Godeau chose to represent the essentialist, ahistorical, sexist, and, frankly, inane analyses regularly imposed on Gauguin and his artistic output. But the extensive degree to which this essay has been anthologized and cited since its original publication suggests that its devastating institutional and discursive critique resonated widely.

The writing is not easy ("adumbrate" is not a word commonly found in *Art in America* and certainly sent me to the dictionary) nor does Solomon-Godeau go to great lengths to simplify the French deconstructionist theoretical frame from which she drew her lines of argument. Yet the analysis is so specific in its details and so pointed in its targets that it read as a call to arms,





at least among my ragtag group of young feminists, frustrated and alienated by much of what we were being taught. Reading it felt remarkably like having the curtain pulled back on the Wizard of Oz. Rereading it now, I am reminded of a recent essay by Rebecca Solnit, in which she introduces the term “mansplaining,” which, as Solnit is careful to point out, is not a universal flaw of masculinity (although the hubris of white male scholars pontificating on gender and race was/is not rare) but is “just the intersection between overconfidence and cluelessness where some portion of that gender gets stuck.”<sup>2</sup> In this regard, Solomon-Godeau’s summary of the literature on Gauguin (most of it the work of male scholars) might justly be described as a dissection of “mansplaining” in the field of art history.

Throughout the 1980s, Solomon-Godeau curated and published extensively, both as a critic and as an art historian. These roles informed one another in productive ways. As “Going Native” demonstrates, her criticism is historically and philosophically grounded (largely in feminism, critical theory, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction), and her scholarly essays have an urgency and directness of argument that is more rare than one might expect in academe. Those arguments she presented in “Going Native” derived from her doctoral research with the renowned feminist art historian Linda Nochlin at CUNY on gender and representation in nineteenth-century French visual culture. Looking back on it now, the decision of a graduate student, even one highly accomplished and already published, to identify *by name* specific scholars in such a public forum was audacious at best. Academic fields are surprisingly small worlds. In fact, the second scholar identified for his unconvincing views on Gauguin was a senior faculty member at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where Solomon-Godeau was hired shortly after the publication of “Going Native.” Then again, if you want to reframe the core questions in the discipline, a little awkwardness is bound to ensue.

Solomon-Godeau’s driving concern has always been how the history of visual culture—elite and mass—is discursively constructed, what these constructions put in place, ideologically speaking, and why that matters. A modern master such as Gauguin thereby served as a sensational hook, but Solomon-Godeau had previously developed a similar line of critique within photography criticism and history, then a less visible but burgeoning outpost of the art world. One of her first contributions to the topic appeared in a special 1981 issue of *October* journal consecrated to “Art World Follies” that also featured contributions from Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, and Benjamin Buchloh. As a group, these essays examined the overinvestment in the idea of





the singular artist while probing the relationship between the art market and discourses of art. Solomon-Godeau and *Village Voice* photo critic Ben Lifson contributed a conversation about the contemporary photography scene titled “Photophilia.” Even at this early moment, Solomon-Godeau’s assessment of the danger of framing photography in terms similar to those that art history had used in constructing its own discipline was clearly prescient: “Photography,” she observed, “is an art form only some of the time but an art-critical vocabulary is being used almost all the time” (102). This, she continued, was problematic because with respect to her own approach to the medium, which was profoundly influenced by Walter Benjamin, it seemed evident “that there is a *fundamental* difference between photography and earlier forms, and I think the rejection of [Benjamin’s] insight—no, the suppression of it—is the single greatest fallacy in the discourse of photography today” (118). Adopting an art historical approach or applying art critical terms to the medium, she claimed, is not without consequences: it literally changes what we see when we look at photographs: “The first thing that happens with such an approach is that the subjects of the photographs are jettisoned in favor of the artist,” which in turn is further reinforced by the mechanisms of the contemporary art market: “You need artists, so you look for artists” (104). Discussing Mapplethorpe and other celebrity photographers, she observed, “How their photographs are seen is predetermined by whom they photograph, where they show, and who will see them” (110).

The culmination of Solomon-Godeau’s early work on historical and contemporary photography was the book *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, published in 1991, still in print and regularly cited. In her introduction, Solomon-Godeau argued, “The history of photography is not the history of remarkable men, much less a succession of remarkable pictures, but the history of photographic uses” (xxiv). She carefully charted how a relatively new but seemingly insatiable market shapes the discourse through which we understand photography, what kinds of photographs we consider important, and what sort of questions we ask of them. As in her reference to the marketing of Mapplethorpe, she described the players in this new field, shaped by an intertwined and fluid group of collectors, artists, patrons, dealers, curators, auction houses, critics, and scholars.

In the same introduction, Solomon-Godeau remarked that she had begun writing about photography in the early 1980s, “at what now appears to have been the crest of the photography boom.” In retrospect, Solomon-Godeau was surfing a rising wave. In 1991, Andreas Gursky and the production of vast num-





bers of supersized art photographs was just an emerging trend. Vancouver-based conceptualist Jeff Wall had only a modest bibliography and several exhibition catalogues, as opposed to the massive scholarly/curatorial industry he has since generated (and quite deftly influenced). From the standpoint of 1991, it would have seemed highly unlikely that the blue-chip modernist art historian, Michael Fried, would turn from Manet and Courbet to spend years writing a book titled *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008), itself largely a love letter to Wall's genius (and the object of Geoff Dyer's comical critique of self-referential academic writing.)<sup>3</sup>

Photography was established in the academy, as Solomon-Godeau has pointed out, through dedicated art history faculty appointments that began in the 1980s. Nevertheless, art history's claims to preside over the study of photography have rested on a somewhat shaky foundation. For the many years before academic institutions assimilated photography as a serious object of study, important work on the medium was produced in other fields. After all, Roland Barthes, the patron saint of postmodern photographic studies, was a literary scholar by training and primary practice. From the mid-twentieth century on, a number of museums were collecting, exhibiting, and conducting research on photographs as art objects. But with respect to the development of photography theory, much of it was produced outside the academy and the museum. Important contributions to 1970s criticism was produced by writers such as Susan Sontag and John Berger, who, among others, constituted a body of fundamental texts still drawn upon by contemporary scholars and critics. That nonacademic tradition continues today in the work of Geoff Dyer (who has academic appointments but has chosen not to work from within the academy), Luc Sante, and Rebecca Solnit, whose 2003 book on Eadweard Muybridge is a widely cited contribution to the field.

For the first decade or so after photography became a bona fide field of study in the United States and Canada, art historians dominated the scholarly study of photography, but after the peak, marked somewhat by *Photography at the Dock*, art history lost control of the discussion. This is not to suggest that art historians are failing to produce important work on photography. On the contrary; but efforts to limit its study to art history/visual culture, as suggested by Douglas Nickel's "State of the Research" essay in *Art Bulletin* (2001) or Blake Stimson and Robin Kelsey's *The Meaning of Photography* (2008), seem limited by their preoccupation with aesthetic questions and artistic lineages. The field of photographic studies has now become a broadly interdisciplinary undertaking, with some of the most significant and influential texts produced





by scholars working in areas such as geography, history, cultural and literary studies, sociology, education, anthropology, performance studies, political science, communication studies, and film studies. As Solomon-Godeau argued in her contribution to James Elkins's anthology *Photography Theory* (2006), the problem is largely with art history and visual culture's focus on the medium as such and its putative specificity, itself disconnected from social, material, and viewing relations. There, she argued that "conceptualizing photography as a unitary or autonomous entity is doomed to fail, just as would the case with any other technology that has become braided into all aspects of modernity, and now postmodernity."<sup>4</sup> In that text, she responded to many of the contributors' preoccupation with "indexicality," remarking how this fixation (now increasingly hallucinatory and irrelevant in the digital age) distracted attention from more significant issues. More pressing, she remarked, are questions around discourse, ideology, commodity culture, subjectivity, and gender and the necessity of critical approaches—all foreclosed if we approach the subject as an isolated, autonomous, or specific medium. As scholars in various fields tackle increasingly global histories, practices, and cultural production, many have been directly influenced by Solomon-Godeau's pioneering research. Accordingly, for scholars in diverse fields, *Photography at the Dock* has been a cornerstone of any (now almost de facto) understanding that photographs cannot adequately be analyzed as fragments of reality outside of their place in history, politics, and ideology. As Henry Giroux argues in his essay on education after Abu Ghraib, acknowledging Solomon-Godeau's work, "This is not to suggest that photographs do not record some element of reality as much as to insist that what they capture can only be understood as part of a broader engagement over cultural politics and its intersection with various dynamics of power, all of which informs the conditions for reading photographs as both a pedagogical intervention and a form of cultural production."<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, for cultural historian Jonathan Long, Solomon-Godeau's work helps explain how photographs were able to play such an important role as a tool of power in colonial, anthropological, medical, and forensic discourses. Wendy Hersford uses Solomon-Godeau's essays to unpack the reality effect of photographs in human rights discourse.<sup>6</sup> Criminologist Eamonn Carrabine employs Solomon-Godeau's critical perspective on photographic truth to explore the role of the medium in criminology.<sup>7</sup> In his historical study of Indian boarding schools, Eric Margolis outlines a methodology for studying photography as social practice, drawing on Solomon-Godeau's essay "Who Is Speaking Thus?": "In her perceptive chapter on documentary. . . . [She] set forth a





project for those who would use photographs in social and cultural research: ‘... individual documentary projects, themselves the product of distinct historical circumstances and milieus, ‘speak’ of agendas both open and covert, personal and institutional, that inform their contents and, to a greater or lesser extent, mediate our reading of them. It is properly the work of historians and critics to attempt to excavate these coded and buried meanings, to bring to light these rhetorical and formal strategies that determined the work’s production, meaning, reception, and use.’”<sup>8</sup> Similar interest in the historical construction of social identities has helped make Solomon-Godeau’s essay “The Legs of the Countess” (1986) a key text for performance studies, women’s art production, and fashion history, as well as feminist cultural studies.<sup>9</sup> Sociologist David Andrews drew on this essay in his 2006 essay on representations of basketball superstar Michael Jordan, writing, “My intention is to engage the type of critical pedagogy of representation vaunted by Solomon-Godeau by ‘contextualizing specific practices of representation within particular historical and cultural circuits of power.’”<sup>10</sup>

This current volume brings together essays written between 1995 and 2014 in which Solomon-Godeau returns squarely to this question of historical and cultural circuits of power as they shape and inform the practice, criticism, and historiography of photography. Just as feminist analysis provided one of the key critical tools Solomon-Godeau used in *Photography at the Dock*, so too is this new collection informed by her emphasis on gender as a useful category for historical analysis, as Joan Scott famously claimed.<sup>11</sup> But equally, Solomon-Godeau considers the intersections of gender with genre, for genre, as Jacques Derrida argued in an influential essay, operates as a form of law.<sup>12</sup> In tandem with other critical methods, such analyses enable us to remap, refigure, and revise the disciplinary object of “photography,” to probe its circuits of power, and to rethink photographic practices previously categorized and dismissed as marginal.

In the last section of her earlier book, Solomon-Godeau described her grouping of essays on Connie Hatch, Francesca Woodman, and erotic photography as somewhat provisional efforts to map a way forward and to “reflect on the possibility of other aesthetics, other histories, other kinds of questions to be asked” (*Photography at the Dock*, xxxi). As the citations above demonstrate, the results of Solomon-Godeau’s efforts at remapping photographic studies and seeking new directions of inquiry have proven to be fertile, especially as they have been taken up by scholars in the social sciences. However, this influence seems not to have extended as much to Solomon-Godeau’s stress on feminism or to questions of sexual difference as to her other, related concerns.





On one hand, the elision of feminism is never surprising. As Peggy Phelan cautions, the “influence of feminist theory should not be underestimated but it almost always is.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, this elision is somewhat surprising given that popular discussions of photography often acknowledge the place of photographic representation in figuring sexual difference and reproducing hierarchies of gender. For instance, fashion photography is frequently held to account for its role in constructing an impossible and unhealthy vision of femininity. A fleeting consideration of issues such as celebrity photo hacking, photo sexting, and revenge porn indicates the continued relevance of Solomon-Godeau’s insight in *Photography at the Dock* that “photography has been—and remains—an especially potent purveyor (and producer) of sexual ideologies.”<sup>14</sup> Even writing about photography is gendered. After all, Rebecca Solnit’s essay “Men Explain Things to Me” revolves around the story of her conversation with a successful older man who simply could not hear (or recognize)—despite being told multiple times—that it was the young woman he was talking to (or at) who was the author of the brilliant new book on Eadweard Muybridge that he was extolling.

As it seems to fade from academic favor, feminism is increasingly relevant, if by no means univocal as a form of broad cultural analysis. In the realm of popular entertainment it is worth remarking that superstar Beyoncé performed in front of a twenty-foot projection of the word “FEMINIST” after succinctly identifying the term as a nexus of desire and economics: “You know, equality is a myth, and for some reason, everyone accepts the fact that women don’t make as much money as men do. . . . And let’s face it: money gives men the power to run the show. It gives men the power to define value. They define what’s sexy. And men define what’s feminine. It’s ridiculous.”<sup>15</sup> True as that may be (and disingenuous as it may be for Beyoncé to point this out), most public invocations of feminism become highly visible because of the anxieties, even vitriol, that feminism (still) engenders. A very different set of power relations were at play when cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian announced a Kickstarter campaign in 2012 for a video series called “Tropes vs. Women” that would explore the representation of women in video games. In doing so, she triggered a wave of violent misogyny that is still raging years later, including death and rape threats, weaponized pornography, and even a video game in which players may punch her in the head. Smart and well-researched, Sarkeesian’s analysis is nevertheless a fairly rudimentary feminist cultural analysis of “women is distress” and “women as background decoration.” Sarkeesian reworks critiques originally developed through film studies, literature, and art





and applies them to the medium of video games, thereby daring to instate gender issues within the still male-dominated world of video games. As I write this, the multibillion-dollar gaming industry has not responded by offering her much public support, nor does it seem likely that changes are imminent in the marketing of their products. Like armaments and militarism, culture wars are here to stay. In light of the seemingly never-ending backlash against feminism, Solomon-Godeau's query of 1991 is still perfectly and depressingly relevant: "Whose culture and whose aesthetics are threatened by the tiger at the gate?" (*Photography at the Dock*, xxxi).

The essays collected in this book argue that there is still much to be gained from asking questions about culture, gender, and power, including interrogations of the ever-changing relationship between photography and the art world, photography as an academic "object," and photography as it is being historicized. Art history has shaped and often occluded our understanding of photography, but the relationship is also reciprocal in that the reproducibility and omnipresence of photography have also shaped the direction of art history. In *Photography at the Dock*, Solomon-Godeau chronicled how the languages and discourses of art and art history "reframe" or reposition the multiplicity of photographic practices to produce newly minted artistic entities. In *Photography after Photography*, Solomon-Godeau continues this investigation into how the twentieth-century establishment of discrete photographic genres operates to "discipline" the diversity of actual photographic practice. To illustrate this argument, Solomon-Godeau takes as her examples so-called landscape and so-called street photography to examine how the imposition of genres (what she calls "genre-fication") "function to obscure those historical, sociological, and indeed psychological formations that shape if not determine forms of cultural production, and do their own ideological work in transforming problems into givens" (chapter 5). Given these fundamental concerns, it is not surprising that the essays in this volume focus primarily on photographic work that has gained cultural currency in the art world by being drawn into a constantly expanding market and entrenched within various legitimizing aesthetic discourses. The essays are organized in chronological rather than thematic order. However, Solomon-Godeau's overarching argument, flowing in different ways through each of the essays, is that we must never lose sight of photography's embeddedness in social practice, material relations, and ideological formations even (or especially) when it is it produced, repurposed, or circulated as art.

Throughout this collection, Solomon-Godeau continues to wrestle with the legacy and usefulness of the term "documentary" as a way of thinking





about the relationships between photographers, subjects, and viewers. The question as to whether the relation (or nonrelation) of the photographer to his or her subject determines the effect or affect of the work produced with respect to the viewer is thus one of the recurring themes and frames of “Inside/Out,” originally published as a catalogue essay for a San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibition titled *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*. Solomon-Godeau begins with Susan Sontag’s indictment of Diane Arbus as a predatory photographer, outsider, and voyeur, inevitably exploiting the people she photographed. Solomon-Godeau argues that this distinction between insider and outsider is by no means a simple division between the presumed empathy of the former and the presumed objectification of the latter. The ethical and political distinction between insider and outsider photography may obscure a slippage between viewing relationships, those that operate between photographed subject and actual viewer. Nan Goldin and Larry Clark stake their claim for authenticity (and “non-objectification”) on their belonging to the milieus they have photographed. In Goldin’s case, she appears sometimes in her photographs along with her friends, and thus exposes herself as she does her other subjects. However, this presumed intimacy among the subjects does not necessarily alter the nature of the viewing relationship between the viewers of the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and the subjects depicted. Rejecting this notion that being “inside” a particular milieu automatically exculpates the photographer from a voyeuristic and objectifying role, Solomon-Godeau asks whether it is not possible to consider the photographer’s utter exteriority as no more (or less) capable of rendering a certain truth within the limits of what is given to be seen. “If we are then to consider the possibility that a photographic practice ostensibly premised on insiderness ultimately reveals the very impossibility of such a position in the realm of the visual, might it conversely be the case that a photographic practice that affirms its own implacable exteriority yields a certain truth of its own?”

“Written on the Body” also probes the structure of visual analysis, in this case, turning to the “discursive eclipse of beauty by desire.” Solomon-Godeau begins with a consideration of beauty as employed in art criticism, psychoanalysis, and photography, taking as one of her examples the photographs made by the Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden in Taormina, many of nude male adolescents. Solomon-Godeau investigates how the depiction of bodies requires coding and inscription in ways that signal not just the difference between various representations of the human body, but difference itself and its inherent erotic significance. However, this coding, this writing on the body is always





somewhat occluded by the powerful naturalism and presumed indexicality of the photographic image itself: "... by virtue of its indexicality, its potent illusion of a reality produced by the camera, photography has been an indispensable purveyor of dominant ideologies (of gender, race, class, nation and their subcategories)." As Solomon-Godeau argues, the circuits of desire are shaped not only by aesthetic contemplation and individual sexual desire but also by wider systems of power such as colonialism, and that such representations require forms of "supplemental coding if they are to be intelligible." Following from this acknowledgment, Solomon-Godeau examines these codes as they function to mark bodies and subjects according to their status as objects of desire, abjection, subjection, or as specimens or fetishes.

In "*The Family of Man*: Refurbishing Humanism for a Postmodern Age" Solomon-Godeau examines what is coded by absence in one of the most famous projects in post-World War II photography, the extraordinarily successful American Cold War exhibition that toured globally. Solomon-Godeau here examines the recent permanent restaging of the exhibition in Luxembourg (birthplace of curator Edward Steichen) and its prior history. For Solomon-Godeau, drawing on the arguments of Viktoria Schmitt-Linsonoff, this Cold War blockbuster is better viewed not so much as a token of American triumphalism but as a covert symptom of American trauma. The nature of this trauma is complex, occasioned by the war itself, as well as the revelation of genocide, the new threat of nuclear destruction, and the effects of demobilization on notions of manhood. But where should this symptomization of trauma be located? Should it be located in those who produced the curatorial project itself (Steichen and his assistants)? In the American picture press from which most of the images were drawn? Or somewhere in the general Cold War psyche? Solomon-Godeau asks who is really the "author" of this exhibition? As she argues, "Although it is unquestionably the 'work' of Steichen—his concept, his orchestration of the project, his final say on the selection of pictures, texts, lighting, and design—by its very nature, both exhibition and catalogue are root and branch collective entities. In other words, as cultural artifacts, both exhibition and catalogue require a kind of analysis associated more with critical readings of film or theater than with individual productions, be they visual or textual." Solomon-Godeau therefore seeks to identify the structuring absences of the exhibition and its catalogue through a methodical analysis of the sources and subjects of the 503 photographs and their suturing into a naturalized whole. Gender too is at stake in this compilation of images, for as Solomon-Godeau remarks, in agreement with Allen Sekula, "It would thus





seem justified to look at the exhibition's Edenic representation of the patriarch and the patriarchal family as compensatory strategy, warding off the anxieties of demobilized and variously traumatized masculinity."

In contrast to the masked trauma of the *Family of Man*, there is no escaping the tangible violence and active force played by relatively poor-quality digital photographs in the more contemporary Abu Ghraib scandal. As Solomon-Godeau suggests, these carefully staged photographs function not so much as document (outside of their actual status as evidence in law) but rather as spectacle. And yet, despite their digital production, they carry the weight of truth, of capturing something horrible that not even President Bush disputed as occurring at the time the pictures were made. "Torture at Abu Ghraib: In and Out of the Media" explores the various ways race, class, gender, religion, and nationality all shaped the creation and circulation of these images. Solomon-Godeau, as others have done, recognizes the visual tropes of amateur pornography as they inform the "carnavalesque atmosphere, its eroticism, and its S/M trappings and staging," within which the participants function as both actors and directors. She then turns to the circulation of these images to "consider the implications of the visual archive itself; not only in terms of what shaped the forms of 'abuse' it depicts, but also, how that archive then functions once its contents are made public and become accessible for various uses, especially critical ones." Solomon-Godeau argues that the art historical references invoked by Stephen Eisenmann or W. J. T. Mitchell, among others, are inadequate analogies because the photographic record, even if digital, is fundamentally different from graphic or painting representations, whether or not those accounts are based on observation. As a whole, this archive (still only partially revealed) points to a terrifying dark side of the role of representation in building community and collective identity. In this respect, the Abu Ghraib archive might be considered the infernal double of so-called worker photography of the 1920s and 1930s, producing not an emancipatory and collective self-representation but a lethal bond of murderous fraternity. For at Abu Ghraib, community was in part constructed through torture performed for the camera, based, as Solomon-Godeau remarks, "on fantasies of imaginary possession and appropriation."

From these grainy images of spectacle and trauma, the next essay turns to consider a form of documentary photography solidly embraced by art photography, namely "street photography," a recently (ca. 1970s) institutionalized genre unique to the medium of photography. (There exists, as Solomon-Godeau remarks, "no category of 'street painting'"). Starting with a close ex-





amination of the work and reputation of a canonized modernist, Harry Callahan, Solomon-Godeau presents a critical and alternative history of street photography that rejects the notion of “genre.” She explores how and why this practice of photographing people unawares on the street became both legitimized and elaborated precisely *as* a genre. Using Callahan’s photographs made in Chicago and a few other cities as her examples, she suggests that there are other meanings within such work that exceed their nominal subject matter, conscious authorial intention, or, indeed, modernist aesthetics. Among these are the gendered attributes of public space and the psychosexual dynamics at work in male photographers’ clandestine looks at the (unaware) female pedestrian. Critiques of street photography are fairly common in discussions of the work of less abstract and more confrontational photographers such as Garry Winogrand and Diane Arbus. However, Solomon-Godeau seeks to understand the logic of inclusion and exclusion that generates a genre and thus suggests that no matter how “abstract” Callahan’s work, it remains always and already embedded in social and political circuits of mastery, desire, fear, and control, especially in the context of postwar US politics and culture.

Magnum photographer Susan Meiselas has always self-consciously foregrounded the politics in her documentary projects. In her essay on Meiselas’s *Carnival Strippers* (1973–78), Solomon-Godeau reflects on if and how a work that foregrounds voyeurism can complicate its mechanisms. Meiselas spent four summers working on this project, photographing the performers at work and in their private lives, along with their boyfriends, managers, and customers. Over these months and years, Meiselas got to know her subjects and included their voices (audio and written) in addition to their images in the original project and in its subsequent exhibitions and publications. Ultimately, Meiselas created a work that disturbs the familiar objectification of the female body, especially when on display, and, as Solomon-Godeau remarks, “raises issues about the activity of looking itself and the forms by which looking is bound up with gender, with sex, by mechanisms of objectification, fetishism, and projection, especially when the depicted subject is that of the female body.” But Solomon-Godeau also cautions that, irrespective of efforts to critically intervene within the gendered regimes of looking and being looked at, these relations are ultimately overdetermined by preexisting conditions of class and gender and their predetermined relations of domination and submission. In any case, we cannot talk about the meaning of *Carnival Strippers* without addressing “its discursive framing, the context of viewing, a host of cultural assumptions and beliefs, and our own subjectivity, conscious and un-



conscious. And it goes without saying that the meanings of any cultural object are more dependent on these determinations than they are on the photographer's intentions."

"Framing Landscape Photography" (like her earlier essays on Eugène Atget, Auguste Salzmann, and calotype photography in France) traces how a category called "landscape" was imposed on a quite different and by no means "aesthetically" motivated production.<sup>16</sup> As Solomon-Godeau argues, by the mid-nineteenth century, landscape had become one of the most popular genres in French painting, from the most official forms to the more innovative versions exemplified by the Barbizon school and, later, Impressionism. However, although many photographers directed their cameras at "nature," few of the results, she maintains, can be categorized as "landscape" or, much less, "nature." That is to say that such imagery belonged more often to a nineteenth-century category of the "view," or to categories of topographic documentation or, somewhat later, touristic souvenirs. Solomon-Godeau here traces the technological developments and social shifts that enabled these various forms to be gradually unified under the titular genre of landscape, observing at the outset that "many standard photography histories seamlessly write these heterogeneous photographic practices into discussions of landscape photography, thereby obscuring not only the specificity of many nineteenth-century photographic practices, but superimposing upon the extant record what is essentially a modernist conception of photography, oblivious to the historical contingencies of vision, viewing, and visual production." This retrospective construction of a presumptive genre shapes the way we view such photographs. As products of modernity, the imagery of forest, park, or indeed "nature" itself comes to serve, paradoxically, as a respite from modernity (expressed through the subjectivity and "authenticity" that only an artist can deliver), as well as collapsing difference into a unitary category. This notion of a genre of photographic landscape historically parallels the commodification of nature itself in the form of national parks such as Fontainebleau, which in fact served as the site of many of these nineteenth-century photographs. As the depiction of an aestheticized, mythologized nature, this "repurposing" of topographic document and view also obscures conflict over natural resources and their exploitation, both of which invisibly underpin images of rural spaces. In light of the current scale of environmental destruction across the globe, exhibitionary practices and art historical writing that uncritically frame work within the genre of landscape continue this process of mystification by providing for almost a century and a half the prepackaged "spectacle of nature."<sup>17</sup>





In “The Ghosts of Documentary,” Solomon-Godeau continues her investigation of the problem of documentary (a problem that she considers as epistemological, ethical, and political). She examines how changing technologies have affected truth claims in various manifestations of “documentary” photography. Such an inquiry requires distinguishing particular practices from a rather inchoate range of representations stretching from journalism to social documentary, all anchored by the presumed evidentiary and indexical nature of photography, which, needless to say, has been put in question by the now general use of digital technologies. As for the subset of the vague category of “social documentary,” the unifying logic is generally attributed to the goals of progressive politics and reformist intentions. In one sense, it seems that the category of “documentary” as it has traditionally been defined is a historical artifact that contemporary photographers who identify with its goals can only mourn, and Solomon-Godeau examines the nature of this mourning process. But if we step away from the notion of documentary as a genre implying political intent and consider it as a style, as many scholars have argued, Solomon-Godeau observes that it remains alive and well (which is by no means to say that she endorses it). These recent manifestations of documentary, some of which are assimilated into artistic networks and markets, are haunted by the eclipse of evidentiary certainty but simultaneously entranced by the artistic prospects that digital tools offer. But here, too, as Solomon-Godeau remarks, “what is at stake . . . is the phenomenon of documentary (or photojournalistic) subjects repurposed as art objects, where subject matter once perceived as the purview of documentation—are now resignified (after various formal and contextual transformations) as images for aesthetic contemplation.”

Ghosts also haunt the extraordinary case history of Vivian Maier, a Chicago nanny unknown until after her death in 2009. Like Callahan, Maier made many of her images on the street, although she also created self-portraits and candid images of her young charges. Maier’s is a story of how an enormous corpus of photographs, made by an unknown photographer, and never intended to be seen by anyone, can now be reconstituted and reframed as an organic “oeuvre,” her identity refigured as artist, and a market created from zero, complete with catalogues, films, and exhibitions. In stark contrast to the more gradual recognition of Francesca Woodman as a major artist over a forty-year period, Maier’s legend has been almost instantly manufactured by the owners of her work through social media, thereby sidelining the mechanisms of museum, scholarship, and criticism, and delivering her work directly to the market pri-





marily through digital networks of reproduction and dissemination. Drawing again on Rosalind Krauss's discussion in "Landscape/View," and on her own earlier discussion of canon formation in the case of Atget, Solomon-Godeau traces the role of Maier's collectors and of the media in shaping the production of Maier the artist photographer. While Maier's photographs made on the street (as opposed to her much more idiosyncratic self-portraiture) are not especially different from those of other photographers working in black and white and depicting urban life, their familiar quality, and their immediate recognition as "street photography," combined with Maier's "outsider" identity, elusive biography, and staggering production, combine to forge an instant legend. And photography discourse and markets are ever in search of them.

In "Robert Mapplethorpe: Whitewashed and Polished," Solomon-Godeau returns to the Grand Palais in Paris, and a satellite exhibition at the Musée Rodin, which presented Robert Mapplethorpe's work simultaneously in 2014. Apparently, not a great deal has changed in the quarter century since its Gauguin exhibition that inspired "Going Native." In the Musée Rodin exhibition, Mapplethorpe's pictures and objects, assembled in the museum's "Chapel" space, were counterpoised with Rodin's small sculptural studies. Reflecting on the critical reception of the exhibitions in the French press, Solomon-Godeau draws attention to the conspicuous lack of any commentary about race, insofar as Mapplethorpe's nudes are exclusively of black men, often on pedestals, and often with large or erect genitalia. Insofar as both exhibitions were supported by the Mapplethorpe Foundation, Solomon-Godeau points out that "it is [now] the combined force of investment—in all its senses—from the ideology of the great artist to the monetary value of the work, from the increasing dependence of institutional art spaces such as the Grand Palais on corporate financial support and blockbuster attendance, which determine exhibitions." However, she insists, no one can will away the problematic aspects of the work or its racial and sexual politics by containing it within the space of the museum, even (or especially) if certain works are exhibited in a separate space, veiled with a curtain, and accompanied by a warning message. Whatever the transgressive or subversive capacities that one might identify in these photographs, their highly aestheticized presentation and museological placement deprive their presentation of any critical potential, congealing each photograph in its own fetishistic universe in which the black male body and the luxury object are seamlessly united. Solomon-Godeau concludes, "If feminism teaches us anything in terms of the politics of corporeal representation, especially photographic representation, it is that relations of domination and





subordination, and ideologies of gender, voyeurism, objectification—and, preeminently, affirmations of fetishistic desire—are inevitably sustained if they are not subverted, desublimated, or otherwise ‘ruined.’”

Along with Rosalind Krauss, Solomon-Godeau was one of the first scholars to study Francesca Woodman’s work after her suicide at twenty-two, and, with Krauss, was the first to write about Woodman’s work in the 1986 exhibition catalogue that launched her remarkable posthumous career. In “Body Double,” Solomon-Godeau seeks to understand the way Woodman’s work and legacy have been subsequently framed. As she did with Gauguin, Solomon-Godeau surveys the existing literature, much of it characterized by mechanisms of projection and identification that shape the writers’ interpretations. Even considering the most rigorous work on Woodman, Solomon-Godeau argues that Woodman’s ascension to the pantheon of modern or contemporary art has been accomplished by effacing the political issue of gender and the psychological problem of sexual difference. Solomon-Godeau thus maps the way in which Woodman’s positioning has been variously interpreted by connecting her work to that of various important male artists or, alternatively, inserting her into a lineage of female photographers without attention to historical context. Further, with respect to debates as to how or if one might use the designation “feminist” to modify “artist,” Solomon-Godeau makes the point that whether or not Woodman defined herself personally as a feminist or was making “feminist” art is less important than acknowledging the existence of a “cultural and political environment in which she came of age and where many of her own preoccupations were writ large.” Solomon-Godeau thus asks what we might learn by thinking about the wider context and determinations within which such production was possible, and the various positions available to female spectators in relation to Woodman’s work.

In the final essay in the book, “The Coming of Age: Cindy Sherman, Feminism, and Art History,” Solomon-Godeau tracks the gradual diminishing of feminist approaches to understanding or situating art production. Addressing Cindy Sherman’s production since the late 1990s, she focuses on three aspects of aging as it relates to a major artist whose work has been centrally concerned with the imagery of femininity, fetishism, and the problem of sexual difference. Thus she considers the aging of feminism, the aging of the artist herself, and the image of aging women in two different series that Sherman produced, as well as the commentary it provokes, or fails to provoke. In an earlier essay on Sherman, Solomon-Godeau described how Sherman’s well-deserved elevation to the first rank of major artists *necessitated* her transformation from







“woman artist” to universal artist, and, concomitantly, the downplaying of the political, that is, the feminist, aspects of her work. In this later essay, however, Solomon-Godeau focuses on the later work to argue that the “problem” of the (white, middle-class) woman’s aging can either be treated as a political issue for art making (as in the theoretically informed work of Mary Kelly) or, alternatively (in the case of a brilliantly intuitive artist such as Sherman), risks the reduction of the subject to parody or social satire. In contrast, therefore, to the polemical tenor of many of the essays in this volume, this essay strikes a somewhat somber note. Although Solomon-Godeau remains critical of left-wing nostalgia or melancholy, her commitment to feminist thought and politics makes her especially attentive to the consequences of the backlash to feminism, to antifeminism (a.k.a. postfeminism), and to feminist theory’s marginalization in art criticism and theory. In contrast to her unapologetic characterization of her critical work in photography as “raining on the parade,” in her reading of the discourse around even the most celebrated women artists (living or dead), she reminds us that feminism is not only the longest revolution (per Juliet Mitchell) but one that retains, however precariously, a transformative potential, a promise far from being realized, especially at a time of its massive repudiation.





## INTRODUCTION

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The earliest essays in this volume were written at a time when photography was generally, but not universally, considered to be a discrete artistic medium. However, the most recent essays, including this introduction, were completed at a time when the boundaries that separate photography from other forms of artistic production are anything but clear. These essays span about twenty years of photography criticism, and all were written after the publication of my previous book on photography (*Photography at the Dock*, 1991). As originally conceived, this volume, like the previous one, was to be “about photography,” but many of my essays written in the 1990s and after (particularly those dealing with contemporary art or women artists), are not medium specific, even if the artists discussed often used photography as one of their mediums (e.g., Ana Mendieta, Birgit Jürgenssen, Walid Raad, and Alfredo Jaar). Necessarily, then, these were excluded from consideration, but in keeping with larger changes in the art and photography world, it is clear that medium specificity is no longer an adequate organizing principle in contemporary visual culture. For these and other reasons, compiling a collection of essays that respects the category “photography” as the object of criticism seems itself anachronistic, even if the essays seek to engage with larger questions that arise in a given body of work.

Clearly, there are those who deplore the eclipse of medium specificity as the foundation of artistic practice, but whatever the nature of the various arguments, there can be little dispute about current “facts on the ground.” As abundantly demonstrated in current practice, “medium” has become variously hybridized, problematized, or even dematerialized. Which is not to deny the enduring presence of those whose work remains rooted in formalist paradigms or other modernist forms of art photography. Such work does not seem to



be at any immediate risk of extinction and has validation and support from numerous quarters.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the book's organization, I had first thought to duplicate the structure of my previous book within which the essays were grouped under thematic categories (i.e., "histories," "institutions," and "practices"), but this turned out to be intractable. As my editor Sarah Parsons and one of the early readers for the press justly observed, almost any of the essays could fit into any of the categories I proposed. Whether for good or ill, this has to do with certain of my critical preoccupations that regularly recur with respect to entirely different kinds of photography and their related discourses. Likewise, the mechanisms of fetishism (commodity and psychic), voyeurism, and objectification that are frequently invoked in these essays, as they were in my earlier work, remain relevant to feminist analyses of photographic practices of all types. These terms, employed in photographic theory and criticism since the late 1970s, far from being *démodé*, provide important critical tools to investigate the ethics and politics of representation.

Among other recurring issues are those relating to "genre-fication," by which I inelegantly refer to those processes providing the institutionally necessary illusion that photography can be "disciplined," as is evident in the discursive construction of "landscape photography," "street photography" or "documentary."<sup>2</sup> "Museo-fication," another clunking neologism, functions similarly. And while the use of categories is necessary to organize a given field, genre-fication and museo-fication function generally, then as now, to produce questionable art histories of photography provided with requisite ancestries, pedigrees, and (needless to say) canonized masters. Two recent examples of these formations are the newly minted categories of "aftermath" photography and the rebranding of large color work, often digitally produced, as "tableau" photography.<sup>3</sup> The former has functioned to foster the integration of images (variously repurposed and reformatted), often first produced as photojournalism, into the vastly more prestigious and remunerative circuits of contemporary art.<sup>4</sup> The latter has not only served to better align photographs with the history of painting (including history painting itself) but has also functioned to refurbish aspects of both formalist and modernist art theory (including its auteurist bias) so as to embrace forms of art photography intended specifically for museum, gallery, and other spaces for artistic display—exhibition value thus fully replacing discursive value and communicative function.<sup>5</sup>

Although the increasing importance of photography in art production was already perceptible in conceptual art and feminist-influenced art of the





1970s, within the contemporary globalized art world and its various venues and institutions, the place of camera-made imagery, digital or analogue, is now fully taken for granted. Nevertheless, there is some irony in the fact that it was only in the 1980s that the medium was more or less securely integrated into university departments and curricula, museum collections, art criticism and its journals, galleries, and, not least, an expanding marketplace. And then, in a temporal blink of an eye, photography was everywhere and everything within contemporary art, no longer largely dependent on consecrated spaces or publications, and decoupled from traditional notions of “realism” based on its analogical technologies.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, those spaces or institutions once exclusively dedicated to the medium must now reinvent themselves, orienting themselves to the more inclusive domain of *the* image and its various technologies, including video, hybridized media installations, and even film. In tandem with this development, at least since the 1990s, if not before, there developed a conceptual reorientation of theoretical discourses addressing the nature, terms, and problematics of *the* image—although, considered in its broadest sense, this has been a recurring preoccupation in Western philosophy (as well as religion) going back to Plato. But in its more contemporary incarnations in the United States and elsewhere, whether associated with the emergence of visual studies as a disciplinary entity or with such formulations as W. J. T. Mitchell’s “pictorial turn” (or in yet another related concept, “picture theory”), such a programmatically inclusive and ecumenical domain poses its own set of problems.<sup>7</sup> For just as the theoretical object dubbed *the* image risks an ahistorical essentializing of what is actually a boundless heterogeneity, so too does current thinking about *the* photograph elide the no less boundless field of photography’s plurality.

Considering the material as well as discursive changes that have marked the photographic field since the 1990s, there are a number of other significant developments that need to be taken on board. Certainly, the most obvious one has to do with the epistemological upheaval provoked by the advent and subsequent triumph of digital technologies of imaging. In this respect, the question of the identity of an entity once simply labeled “photography” is fractured not only by digital technologies (subject of endless discussion), but also by current practices themselves, whether professional, amateur, or artistic. Notwithstanding these debates on the implications of digitally produced photographs, for those whose investments in photography pivot on its status as an art form, digital technologies that sever photography’s umbilical link to what it represents merely expand the medium’s artistic purview, enabling big-





ger, more complex, more striking, more “pictorial” representations, celebrated in the concept of the “tableau.” It is not for nothing that Andreas Gursky’s supersized digital pictures command the highest prices of any photographer at auction.

Be that as it may, the dominance of digital technologies provides yet another reason to dispense with traditional notions of the “photographic” as such, and to come to terms with the transformed terms of photography in all its uses. As a now “residual” form, analogue photography did in fact attain its modernist respectability under the sign of medium specificity. But the eclipse of both this particular technology and its associated aesthetics is not reason for celebration, mourning, or nostalgia. All of the problems posed by image culture, spectacle, and simulation in the globalized networks of late capitalism and the complex articulations between them are as proper to one technology as to the other. Similarly, questions related to reception, spectatorship, regimes of viewing, subject formation, and processes of signification remain important areas of investigation, no matter what technology is at stake. Accordingly, such phenomena as the explosion of “selfie” pictures, the billionfold circulation of images in social media, and the speed by which digital images are produced and disseminated does not by that token herald a “post-photographic” condition.<sup>8</sup> Rather, it might be better considered as an intensification and proliferation of what was already implicit in the nineteenth-century industrialization of photography.

This helps explain why many of the medium’s foundational essays of the twentieth century (such as those by Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, André Bazin, Roland Barthes, etc.) remain productive touchstones for contemporary theorists. Indeed, much of what counts in contemporary theory still takes many of its cues or engages directly with Benjamin and Barthes, especially Barthes’s last book, *Camera Lucida*, although far less so in relation to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio.<sup>9</sup> None of these latter theorists was especially concerned with ontological formulations, and all have been in a certain sense “channelled” into subcategories of photography discourse variously assimilated to cultural studies, sociological inquiry, and technological analyses.

Also less influential for current theorists (or so it appears in the English- and French-language photographic literature) has been the work of Vilém Flusser, a Jewish Prague-born philosopher who fled Czechoslovakia in 1939 and spent most of his life in Brazil, the last decade in France. Written in mostly in German and Portuguese, and in a defiantly antiacademic and stylistically id-





iosyncratic manner (no footnotes, no citations, no references to others' work), many of Flusser's works were not translated into English until after his death in 1991; thereafter, his writings were almost immediately recognized as being of major significance by media historians, media theorists, and philosophers.<sup>10</sup> Among the French theorists cited, his work is perhaps closer to that of Virilio's, as can be seen in the short book originally published in German, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (1983), published in English in 2000 as *Toward a Theory of the Photograph*. Overall, his work is hard to categorize, although many of his commentators associate it with figures such as Marshall McLuhan or Thomas Kubler rather than Benjamin or Barthes. Which is only to remark that when, how, and why particular theorists are taken up in photographic discourse depends as much on the vagaries of translation as to how photographic discourse defines its objects.

This in turn depends on the nature and terms by which the medium is constructed as precisely a "theoretical object," as opposed to an aesthetic, material, or historical one.<sup>11</sup> But to broadly, if not crudely, overstate the issue, photographic theory as such tends to be largely couched in the most general of terms, insofar as the inquiry is oriented toward ontological, epistemological, or phenomenological questions. Consequently, actual practices, past or present, or individual photographers and technological accounts occupy a somewhat different discursive terrain. In this respect, the territorial division between what is defined as photography theory (or philosophy) and what as photographic history or institutional analysis might be analogized with respect to the disciplinary divide between aesthetic philosophy and art history. Histories of photography, be they technological, artistic or generic, may refer to theoretical paradigms but rarely produce them; conversely, photographic theory is rarely concerned with the nuts and bolts of specific forms of production, except incidentally, or with reference to artistic usages vis-à-vis individual artists or photographers.

It must be also recognized that the foundational texts in photography theory, including post-1970s intellectual formations—those drawing on post-structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis—did not emerge from either photographic or art historical discourse, but were variously assimilated by those working on photography *après coup*. Moreover, inasmuch as film studies was far more responsive to continental theory in the 1970s, it was often the case that photography criticism, including my own, took this body of work as a model, and sought to adapt it to the critical analyses of the still photographic image. But it nonetheless remains the case that art historians and photogra-





phy historians quote theorists, but theorists rarely quote art or photography historians.<sup>12</sup>

My own writing on photography has been generally concerned with particular bodies of work, or with particular photographers, and exists in a difficult-to-define space between journalistic, academic, and polemical modes of description and analysis. I do not consider my work to be particularly theoretical, although my writings on photography, like those on art history or contemporary art, are informed by the theorists, past and present, who have shaped my thinking overall. Perhaps my essays are best characterized as a form of practical criticism insofar as they engage with specific bodies of work, historical contexts, social relations, and institutional structures, rather than with the more philosophical questions manifested in the new field of the philosophy of photography. This philosophical approach has become far more prevalent in academic discourse since the 1990s, at least in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding the diversity of this literature, generally speaking, it seems relatively unconcerned with the diversity of individual practices or with their instrumentalities, but when it does address particular practices, it is art photography—again, Jeff Wall is the ubiquitous figure—that is most often taken as the exemplary practice supporting or illustrating the theory.

My own primary intellectual debt and commitment is to feminist theory and criticism, and, of course, politics—praxis. I am hopeful that the reader will perceive how this intellectual/conceptual/political framework underlies the critical analysis I bring to bear on nominally unrelated issues. Feminist criticism is for me not about the subject as such—even when the subject addressed is the work of women photographers or women artists. Feminist criticism is grounded in the ways one reads cultural production, what questions are asked of it by the critic, and, in turn, what questions and issues are raised by the work itself. But considering the field of photography in terms of its scholarly production overall, feminist approaches to theory or practice in the past decade or so seem to have diminished rather than expanded. It is notable that in many recent anthologies of photography criticism, or special issues of academic journals, feminist (and women's) contributions are notably rare.

Consequently, the apparent marginalization of feminist investigations of the image world of photography thus subtly shapes what kinds of questions can be posed, what kinds of research can be supported or legitimized, what new interpretive or analytic languages can be developed. We should not confuse the growing amount of monographic studies or exhibitions devoted to





women photographers, past or present, with feminist work *on* photography in any of its diverse manifestations, although, it goes without saying, both are necessary. A feminist orientation necessarily addresses the complex relations between the individual viewer and image, and the coding of photographic images (conscious or not) through which the multiform components of individual and collective gendered identities are produced, confirmed, or contested. This diminished presence of feminist analyses, whether oriented to gender or to sexual difference (they are not the same), therefore functions in photographic discourse as a structuring absence, evident, to take one example, in the presumption of a universal male photographer and a universal male spectator.

Whether the “critical object” of inquiry is vernacular photography, photographic histories and contexts, specific photographic practices, or photography as a particular element (or medium) in artistic production, we remain always, in some sense, subject to its very ubiquity, its interpellative powers, and its collective shaping of our conscious (or preconscious) existences. The close-up view, so to speak, of *any* photographic practice may tell us something about the power of the image, so various in its effects and affects, so contingent on the subjectivity of the viewer, so mutable in its meanings according to its framing contexts. Despite the illusory autonomy a photograph may have as it hangs on a museum or gallery wall, no image ever stands alone. Even as we consider the ways that photographs, however generated, produce their effects, it is also the case that this imagery is harnessed to and embedded within larger configurations far more politically, socially, and culturally determining than the imagery itself. Similarly, it should also be acknowledged that while photography as a museum art implicitly or explicitly prompts most photographic theory, criticism, and art journalism, this tends to overshadow more important considerations of the specific and heterogeneous instrumentalities of photographic production. Collectively, these participate in and contribute to our life world shaped by the powerful forces of capitalism, consumerism, globalism, and the naturalization (or occlusion) of relations of domination and subordination. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the conspicuous pluralism of current production, including atavistic returns to older technologies (e.g., view cameras, analogue film, Lubitel cameras, and darkroom legerdemain), there are reasons to identify alternative, more critical initiatives. By this is meant a diverse array of practices that seek to invent new forms and artistic languages that speak to and of contemporary circumstances, conditions, and social relations, as opposed to those that revamp, repurpose, or reiterate familiar and already-institutionalized types of production. Consequently, while





the artistic uses of the medium, especially those that emerged from various historical avant-gardes (e.g., Dada and Surrealism, and Russian Constructivism and Productivism) or other formations, may have once functioned as counter-discursive critical interventions, photography in its vernacular usages is an essentially affirmative medium. That is to say, it functions affirmatively by virtue of its (mythical) transparency, its solipsistic ratification of the way things are, its illusory affirmation of the truth of appearances, and its identification (however contested) with the veridical notion of the index. Even in the digital era, we still use photographs for drivers' licenses and passports, and now, alarmingly, for access to voting rights. In any case, and specifically in the case of artistic production, there is reason to conclude that work that does not contest, destabilize, subvert, or otherwise "ruin" dominant regimes of representation can only represent the ways things are and therefore forecloses even the imaginative or utopian possibility that things might be otherwise.

The process of selecting the essays for this compilation was harder than I had anticipated, and this collection was long—very long—in the making. Some of the essays chosen for inclusion in this volume were never published in English. Others are not readily accessible, and both this introductory essay and the one on documentary photography were written expressly for this volume.

For anyone assembling an anthology of essays, some published long before the selection process, the immediate question is whether to revise or not to revise. There are, of course, all manner of revisions possible, from the correction of factual errors in dates or misspelled names to the editing of the texts themselves (which can be major or minor) to the incorporation of new material to and the updating of the terminology, notes, and bibliography. With respect to this collection, at least one of the essays included, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: In and Out of the Media," posed particular questions inherent to its subject—a reflection on the images from Abu Ghraib prison (renamed Baghdad Central Prison in 2009). Since the essay was written in 2005 and published in French in 2006, there has been a succession of lawsuits, trials, Freedom of Information requests by ACLU attorneys and various journalists, and many kinds of fallout (although no senior military personnel have ever been charged, much less convicted). Furthermore, there is now a massive bibliography on all aspects of the events that fall under the shorthand designation "torture at Abu Ghraib." Thus, my choice was whether to try and incorporate new information, to describe subsequent developments and significant scholarship, or whether to let the essay stand as written. In this particular case, I decided to append a short





update, as this seemed the most efficient expedient for addressing an event whose consequences continue to unfold.<sup>13</sup> In every instance, however, I considered it necessary to provide the original date of the essay, and the occasion or type of publication for which it was written. Where subsequent critics and scholars have amplified or enlarged upon my particular subject in significant ways, I have sometimes added footnotes to the text.



## NOTES

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### Preface

- 1 Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," 118–29.
- 2 In 2012, Rebecca Solnit reposted her 2008 essay "Men Explain Things to Me: Facts Didn't Get in Their Way" with a new introduction, "The Archipelago of Arrogance," on *TomDispatch*, August 19, 2012, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175584/>.
- 3 Dyer, "Academic Author's Unintentional Masterpiece," *New York Times*, July 22, 2011.
- 4 Solomon-Godeau, "Ontology, Essences, and Photography's Aesthetics," 269.
- 5 Giroux, "What Might Education Mean," 3–22.
- 6 Long, *W. G. Sebald*, 48–49. See also Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics*, 57.
- 7 Carrabine, "Just Images," 463–89.
- 8 Margolis, "Looking at Discipline," 72–96.
- 9 Brevik-Zender, "Interstitial Narratives," 91–123.
- 10 Andrews, "Excavating Michael Jordan" 186.
- 11 Scott, "Gender," 1053–75.
- 12 Derrida, "Law of Genre," 55–81.
- 13 Phelan, "Returns of Touch," 357.
- 14 Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, xxxi. And yet few photography scholars focus on these questions. New Media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun examines the new cultural circuits of power engendered (in both senses of the term) by new technologies. "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2015): 1–28, cowritten with Sarah Friedland, analyzes the innate leakiness of social media through several cases, including the case of Canadian teenager Amanda Todd. After a year of requests, a stranger convinced Todd to flash her breasts during a webcam chat when she was twelve. The man took a screenshot and circulated the photograph, which was eventually used to cyberbully and slut shame her. After years of trying to escape the abuse, Amanda Todd committed suicide at the age of fifteen.





- 15 Beyoncé quoted in Amy Wallace, “Miss Millennium: Beyoncé,” *Gentleman’s Quarterly*, January 10, 2013. <http://www.gq.com/story/beyonce-cover-story-interview-gq-february-2013>.
- 16 As Solomon-Godeau acknowledges, her arguments have been influenced by the pioneering texts of Rosalind Krauss (e.g., “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View”) and by Douglas Crimp’s “The Museum’s Old/The Library’s New Subject,” both of which forcefully demonstrate the transformation of photographic production in the nineteenth century (and after) from discourse value to commodity value.
- 17 Green, *Spectacle of Nature*.

## Introduction

- 1 See Fried’s *Why Photography Matters* and Krauss’s somewhat different definition of and brief for medium specificity, *A Voyage on the North Sea*; “Reinventing the Medium”; and also *Perpetual Inventory*, in which Krauss states, “The abandonment of the specific medium spells the death of serious art” (xiii). For a detailed discussion of how medium specificity has figured in recent photography theory, see Costello, “On the Very Idea of a ‘Specific’ Medium.” A recent exhibition and catalogue reflecting on the durability of formalist approaches to photography is Chéroux, *Photographie*.
- 2 “A soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind.” Derrida, “Law of Genre,” 202.
- 3 Notwithstanding the logical absurdity of this designation (all photographic imagery is an “aftermath” of the moment represented), this term has come to refer to a form of practice that blurs boundaries between photojournalistic imagery, often made in theaters of war (initially intended for mass media reproduction and dissemination) and art photography. Exemplified by photographers such as Simon Norfolk, Luc Delahaye, and Sophie Ristelhueber, among others, its characteristics are scale (large and very large) and emphasis on the physical terrain rather than human subjects. Such work tends to minimize action or dramatic event and is without any textual support or information relating to its subject. See, in this regard, Company, “Safety in Numbness”; Roberts, “Photography after the Photograph”; James, “Making an Ugly World Beautiful”; and Tello, “Aftermath Photography.”
- 4 As for “tableau,” like other aesthetic mystifications that cluster around photographic production, this concept aligns camera-made imagery not merely with the history of easel painting but, even more extravagantly, with history painting itself. Olivier Lugon traces the invention and development of this putative genre in “Avant la forme Tableau.” His genealogy includes Chevrier and Lingwood, *Une autre objectivité*; Chevrier, “Aventures de la forme tableau”; Chevrier and David, “Actualité de l’image”; and Chevrier, “Tableau and the Document of Experience.” Chevrier’s notions have thus born fruit in Anglophone criticism, especially in Fried’s *Why Photography Matters*.





- 5 Jeff Wall, possibly the most famous figure among Canadian artists *ever*, is unquestionably the major protagonist in this development. His commanding position in contemporary art and photography criticism (theoretical, aesthetic, philosophical, academic, etc.) has been facilitated by his own writing and interviews, which have provided a form of an “authoritative” *vade mecum* to his own production. And while there have been other (but few) artist/theorists in photography (e.g., Victor Burgin, Allan Sekula, and Martha Rosler), none has had the same kind of legitimation, either discursively or in the market.
- 6 Thus, when Bernd Stiegler writes in the first sentence of his essay “Photography as the Medium of Reflection” that “photography is the technical medium of realism,” he implies that there is no structural contradiction between concepts of realism and all the complex mediations of representational media, analogue photography included. In any case, the issue of photographic realism, given its best-known twentieth-century formulation in Bazin’s “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” has itself a lengthy bibliography, both supporting and contesting the medium’s realist definitions. With regard to the fortunes of specialized periodicals devoted to photography as a discrete medium, these of course continue to exist, whether in the form of specialized publications (e.g., *History of Photography*, *Aperture*, *Afterimage*, *Eikon*, *Études Photographiques*, *Camera Austria*, *Foam*, *Fotogeschichte*, etc.) or in popular mass media journals. As for the concept of photography as a medium based on analogue representation, Kaja Silverman’s recent book, *The Miracle of Analogy*, posits that *every* aspect of the medium, including its chemistry, its physical properties, and its psychological affects, is not to be located in its semiotic status (i.e., the photograph as both index and icon) but springs from its *essential* identity as analogical.
- 7 “Visual turn” and “pictorial turn” are generally associated with the writing of W. J. T. Mitchell, in, for example, “Picture Theory,” and in many related essays that have appeared in the journal *Critical Inquiry* and elsewhere. But there exist similar and more or less contemporary versions in German and French theory as well.
- 8 William J. Mitchell seems to be one of the first to have coined the term “post-photographic” in his book *The Reconfigured Eye*, still one of the basic texts for understanding the shift to and consequences of electronic media.
- 9 Two recent books on photographic theory can stand as examples, although the bibliography drawing on Barthes and Benjamin in German, French, and English is enormous. See Elkins, *What Photography Is*, which duplicates the exact form of *Camera Lucida*, including short, numbered meditations on individual photographs, and Silverman, *Miracle of an Analogy*. Other influential studies include Cadava, *Words of Light*, and Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero*.
- 10 Enthusiastic reception to Flusser’s work occurred earlier in Germany, in the early 1980s. See van der Meulen, “Vilém Flusser’s Media Theory,” 110.
- 11 See Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium.”
- 12 One significant exception has to do with Walter Benjamin’s use of the historical research of his friend Gisèle Freund in her doctoral thesis in *Photographie en France dans le XIX siècle*. Her significant contribution to photographic history is rarely





given its due. An English-language version of her dissertation was published in 1982 with the title *Photography and Society*.

- 13 To take one symbolic example, the orange uniforms used by the État Islamique (E. I., or Daech) for their prisoners were deliberately copied from the American military ones used in Guantanamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

#### Chapter 1. Inside/Out

Originally published as “Inside/Out” in the exhibition catalogue *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995).

- 1 Sontag, *On Photography*, 41–42.
- 2 Rosler, “In, Around, and Afterthoughts,” 78. Sontag, *On Photography*, 12.
- 3 Sontag, *On Photography*, 42.
- 4 Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, 206.
- 5 Sontag, *On Photography*, 42.
- 6 SFMOMA, *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*.
- 7 Goldin, *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, 6. It is, however, important to note that the original format of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* was a slide/audio work involving more than seven hundred images. The specific nature of this format; the sound track that organizes, accompanies, and counterpoints the images; the darkness in which the work is viewed by the spectator; the speed with which the images flash by; its temporal, evanescent structure; and, lastly, its intentionally “spectacularizing” form all decisively distinguish it from the book version of the same project. Nevertheless, in exploring the modalities of the inside/outside opposition, and given my emphasis on the medium of still photography, I have based my discussion of Goldin on the book versions of her projects.
- 8 L. Clark, *Tulsa*, n.p.
- 9 L. Clark, *Teenage Lust*, n.p.
- 10 L. Clark, *Perfect Childhood*, n.p.
- 11 “Le film commencerait dans l’éblouissement de l’été, en Allemagne de l’Est, puis en Pologne. Juste le regard de quelqu’un qui passe, quelqu’un qui n’a pas totalement accès à cette réalité. Peu à peu, alors qu’on pénètre plus avant dans le pays, l’été s’éteint pour faire place à l’automne, un automne sourd et blanc, recouvert par une masse de brouillard. Dans la campagne, des hommes et des femmes presque couchés sur la terre noire d’Ukraine, se confondant avec elle, ramassent des betteraves. Non loin d’eux, la route défoncée par le passage continu des camions déginglées dont s’échappe une lunée noire. Et c’est l’hiver en Moscou où le film se resserrera. Laissera sans doute percevoir quelque chose de ce monde déboussolé avec cette impression d’après-guerre où chaque jour passe semble être une victoire. Cela peut sembler terrible et sans poids, mais au milieu de tout cela, je monterai des visages, qui des qu’ils sont isolés de la masse, expriment quelque chose d’encore intouché et souvent le contraire de cette uniformité qui parfois nous frappe dans le mouvement des foules, le contraire de notre uniformité à nous aussi. Sans

