

**Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, and Sarah Parsons. *Photography after Photography: Gender, Genre, History*. Duke University Press, 2017.**

- 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 (x)
- 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). (xi)
- 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). (xi)
- 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.) (xii)
- 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 line ages. 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. (xii-xiii)
- 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. (xiii)
- 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. (xiii)

- the practice, criticism, and historiography of photography (xiv)
- 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 (xvi)
- 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. (xvii)
- 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. (xix)
- 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. (xxv)