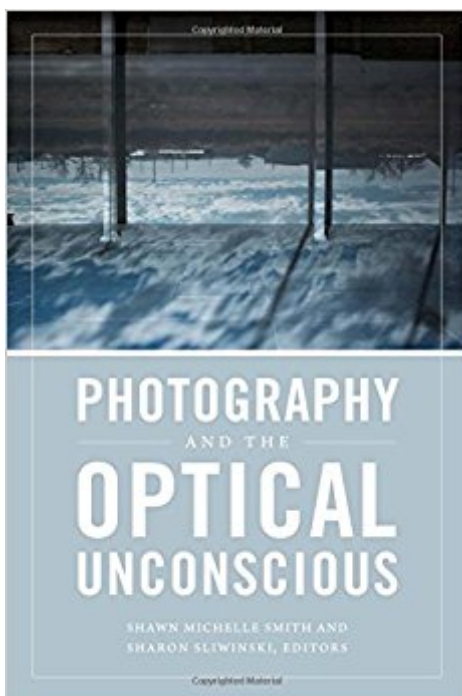


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# Photography And The Optical Unconscious



## Synopsis

Photography is one of the principal filters through which we engage the world. The contributors to this volume focus on Walter Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious to investigate how photography has shaped history, modernity, perception, lived experience, politics, race, and human agency. In essays that range from examinations of Benjamin's and Sigmund Freud's writings to the work of Kara Walker and Roland Barthes's famous Winter Garden photograph, the contributors explore what photography can teach us about the nature of the unconscious. They attend to side- perceptions, develop latent images, discover things hidden in plain sight, focus on the disavowed, and perceive the slow. Of particular note are the ways race and colonialism have informed photography from its beginning. The volume also contains photographic portfolios by Zoe Leonard, Kelly Wood, and Kristan Horton, whose work speaks to the optical unconscious while demonstrating how photographs communicate on their own terms. The essays and portfolios in *Photography and the Optical Unconscious* create a collective and sustained assessment of Benjamin's influential concept, opening up new avenues for thinking about photography and the human psyche. Contributors: Mary Bergstein, Jonathan Fardy, Kristan Horton, Terri Kapsalis, Sarah Kofman, Elisabeth Lebovici, Zoe Leonard, Gabrielle Moser, Mignon Nixon, Thy Phu, Mark Reinhardt, Shawn Michelle Smith, Sharon Sliwinski, Laura Wexler, Kelly Wood, Andrés Mario Zervigón

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## Customer Reviews

"By developing Walter Benjamin's under-considered ideas about photography and the unconscious, this volume makes an important contribution to the history and theory of photography. And the inclusion of work by theorists, historians, and artists makes this book fresh and engaging, guaranteeing a wide readership among artists, art school students, and art history and media studies scholars." (Lisa Cartwright, coauthor of *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*) "Making several important and timely interventions into theories of photography and modernity, this collection is the first extensive treatment of Walter Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious in relation to photography, postcolonial theory, and race. An exciting and wonderful book." (Elsbeth H. Brown, coeditor of *Feeling Photography*)

Shawn Michelle Smith is Professor of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the author of *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* and *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, both also published by Duke University Press. Sharon Sliwinski is Associate Professor of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario and author of *Mandela's Dark Years: A Political Theory of Dreaming and Human Rights in Camera*.

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