



Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography

Geoffrey Batchen

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In an 1828 letter to his partner, Nicéphore Niépce, Louis Daguerre wrote, "I am burning with desire to see your experiments from nature." In this book, Geoffrey Batchen analyzes the desire to photograph as it emerged within the philosophical and scientific milieus that preceded the actual invention of photography. Recent accounts of photography's identity tend to divide between the postmodern view that all identity is determined by context and a formalist effort to define the fundamental characteristics of photography as a medium. Batchen critiques both approaches by way of a detailed discussion of photography's conception in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He examines the output of the various nominees for "first photographer," then incorporates this information into a mode of historical criticism informed by the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The result is a way of thinking about photography that persuasively accords with the medium's undeniable conceptual, political, and historical complexity.

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