



When I Was a Photographer (MIT Press)

Félix Nadar, Eduardo Cadava, Liana Theodoratou

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Celebrated nineteenth-century photographer -- and writer, actor, caricaturist, inventor, and balloonist -- Félix Nadar published this memoir of his photographic life in 1900 at the age of eighty. Composed as a series of vignettes (we might view them as a series of "written photographs"), this intelligent and witty book offers stories of Nadar's experiences in the early years of photography, memorable character sketches, and meditations on history. It is a classic work, cited by writers from Walter Benjamin to Rosalind Krauss. This is its first and only complete English translation. In *When I Was a Photographer (Quand j'étais photographe)*, Nadar tells us about his descent into the sewers and catacombs of Paris, where he experimented with the use of artificial lighting, and his ascent into the skies over Paris in a hot air balloon, from which he took the first aerial photographs. He recounts his "postal photography" during the 1870-1871 Siege of Paris -- an amazing scheme involving micrographic images and carrier pigeons. He describes technical innovations and important figures in photography, and offers a thoughtful consideration of society and culture; but he also writes entertainingly about such matters as Balzac's terror of being photographed, the impact of a photograph on a celebrated murder case, and the difference between male and female clients. Nadar's memoir captures, as surely as his photographs, traces of a vanished era.

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