



The Camera Does the Rest: How Polaroid Changed Photography

Peter Buse

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In a world where nearly everyone has a cellphone camera capable of zapping countless instant photos, it can be a challenge to remember just how special and transformative Polaroid photography was in its day. And yet, there's still something magical for those of us who recall waiting for a Polaroid picture to develop. Writing in the context of two Polaroid Corporation bankruptcies, not to mention the obsolescence of its film, Peter Buse argues that Polaroid was, and is, distinguished by its process—by the fact that, as the *New York Times* put it in 1947, “the camera does the rest.”

Polaroid was often dismissed as a toy, but Buse takes it seriously, showing how it encouraged photographic play as well as new forms of artistic practice. Drawing on unprecedented access to the archives of the Polaroid Corporation, Buse reveals Polaroid as photography at its most intimate, where the photographer, photograph, and subject sit in close proximity in both time and space—making Polaroid not only the perfect party camera but also the tool for frankly salacious pictures taking.

Along the way, Buse tells the story of the Polaroid Corporation and its ultimately doomed hard-copy wager against the rising tide of digital imaging technology. He explores the continuities and the differences between Polaroid and digital, reflecting on what Polaroid can tell us about how we snap photos today. Richly illustrated, *The Camera Does the Rest* will delight historians, art critics, analog fanatics, photographers, and all those who miss the thrill of waiting to see what develops.

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