

Photography Reframed

By Anna Dahlgren

Abstract

This article discusses the benefits of analysing photography as mediated, reproduced and entangled in media systems, and consequently as part of a larger media culture. Moreover it combines technological considerations drawn from media archaeology with art historical analysis focusing on visual aesthetics. It considers two mediating devices for photography in the nineteenth century, the photo album and the illustrated press. As displayed, a media historical perspective airs new interpretations and understandings of processes and practices in relation to photography in the period. Thus what from a photo historical point of view might appear as an important, paradigmatic invention or a critical technical delimitation might from a media historical perspective seem to have been merely a small adjustment in a chain of gradual improvements and experiments in the dissemination and consumption of images. Thus photographic media specificity delimited by technical procedures and certain materials outputs, which was so strongly emphasized in the twentieth century, was evidently not fixed to materiality and rather opened and negotiated in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, responsiveness to the literal and figurative framing of photography as mediated, discloses other photo histories.

Keywords: media history, photography, media specificity, Nineteenth century, album, illustrated press

Photography Reframed

This article seeks to discuss how a media historical perspective enables new interpretations and understandings of the dissemination and consumption of photographic images in the nineteenth century. Thus the aim is to disclose the general implications of acknowledging photographic images as mediated and the further implications of these mediations. On the basis of two different mediating devices for photography in the nineteenth century, the album and the illustrated press, I will reconsider the silent emergence and dissemination of albums for photographs and the representation of photographs in the illustrated press. Hence, what from a single media, photo historical perspective seems to have been an important, paradigmatic event – such as the invention of the photographic album, or a critical delimitation such as the photographic technique as opposed to other image techniques – proves to be very different when considered from a broader media historical perspective. Thus these episodes in the history of photography are not understood as a separate practice bound by a media specific discourse. Indeed, this study exemplifies the benefits of an extended perspective in line with Stephen Bann's argument against "photographic exceptionalism" which has had the unfortunate effect of causing historians to isolate photography from other media that coexisted alongside it (Bann 2015:61-66). While Bann's focus primarily has been on the intermingling relations between the image producers, that is painters, photographers and printmakers in the nineteenth century my concern is on the contrary on the consumption context of these images, or more specifically their distribution and commercial circulation (Bann 2001; Bann 2013). According to Simone Natale, there were significant relations between photography and other media technologies such as the telegraph, the railroad and the postal service during the nineteenth century. Yet, photography has played a marginal part in the scholarly field of media history, and she proposes that 'further examinations of photography's insertion into nineteenth-century media culture' is needed (Natale 2012: 451-456). With inspiration from media archaeology and cultural historical media research, the scope of media and media culture is more inclusive in this article. Thus I use a broader concept of media and focuses on media systems in the analysis (Jülich, Lundell & Snickars 2008; Harvard & Lundell 2010: 8-9; Huhtamo & Parikka 2011; Cronqvist, Jarlbrink & Lundell 2014:5). A paramount implication of a media historical perspective is that I acknowledge photography as mediated and entangled with other media. Thus this article seeks to present the analytical benefits of considering photographs as mediated in relation to a larger field of media history with the further goal of identifying unnoticed continuities and alternate histories of media and to highlight different intermedial relations.

An unnoticed invention

The invention of photography was, as pointed out by Geoffrey Batchen in his seminal *Burning With Desire*, not a straightforward event. The conception of photography could neither be pinned down to a single person or single technical or chemical breakthrough. Instead, several simultaneous efforts were made and depending on how photography is defined – as an idea, a process or an object – the invention can be located anywhere from the early eighteenth century to 1839 (Batchen 1999). The same holds for a later nineteenth century invention, namely the photo album and the reason for this can be found in its mercantile context or put differently the media system where it appeared.

In almost every museum, archive and home in the western world there are today some photo albums; a binder or a book destined for photographs. Despite the enormous spread and use of photo albums during the last 160 years, very little is known about the invention of this display mode for photographs. Information on where, when and by whom the photo album was invented are in fact scarce and fragmentary. According to Elisabeth Anne McCauley, the author of several publications on French nineteenth century photography, albums were first presented in a short note in *La Lumière* in 1854 when the Parisian photographer Victor Plumier was said to



Figure 1 Album destined for photographs from 1861. Photo: Nordiska museet, Stockholm.

offer his customers an ‘album artistique’ where the photographic portraits were mounted in oval frames made of cardboard (Lacan 1854: 198; McCauley 1985: 46–48). According to Ellen Maas, a photo historian who has written extensively on nineteenth-century photo albums in Germany, the album was on the contrary invented by the French photographer André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in 1858 (Maas 1977: 7). My own extensive readings of Swedish nineteenth century journals also point to Paris as the origin of albums, yet no details on inventors or years have been found (Dahlgren 2013:33-40). Thus, despite the photo album being such a widespread device for consuming photographic images, relatively little is known about its emergence in the nineteenth century. Instead of viewing this as a deficiency in historical sources I will discuss how a media perspective can illuminate and explain this apparent invisibility. If considered as a medium, the photo album could be inserted in a larger biotope of visual media. Thus by moving out of the purely photographic field, other processes, relations and trajectories come to the fore.

When the photo album emerged sometime in the 1850s there was in fact an already well-established market for albums filled with pictures, commonly graphic prints. They had existed long before the invention of photography and the production of such albums, typically filled with views, dramatically rose in the first decades of the nineteenth century when new graphic techniques such as steel engraving and lithography were introduced alongside the established techniques of wood cut and copper engraving. In many cases the same individuals were simultaneously producing graphic prints and photographs and the collaborations between painters, printmakers and photographers were substantial (Bann 2001).

The scarcity of reports on the invention of photo albums can thus be explained through a close study of the distribution and selling context. The majority of the illustrating examples in this article are taken from a Swedish context. However the following arguments are generalizable as image and print culture was to a large extent a transnational phenomenon. Indeed the nineteenth century displayed an emerging transnational market for images through the increasing establishment of illustrated magazines as pointed out by Lena Johannesson. Motifs and even individual printing stocks were reused and migrated over national borders in the western world (Johannesson 1997:110-112). In addition the market for photographic prints and album components were transnational. In Sweden as is other European countries it appears that stationary shops and art- and printdealers were initially the major outlets for albums for photographs and not photo retailers. Besides my own extensive study of Swedish outlets for albums there are several hints that the same mercantile pattern holds for Germany, France and the UK in the period (Ruskin 1874: 153; Emerson 1890: 7; Maas 1977; McCauley 1994: 279).¹ It is evident from the adverts and price-currents of such businesses that single photographs and albums destined for photographs were sold together with graphic prints, notebooks, maps, adress cards and other printed matter. Accordingly they were not sold together with cameras and photographic chemicals and utensils. Rather photo

albums were sold in the same commercial context as albums of graphic prints. The term ‘album’ had an inclusive meaning in the period and was used for set collections in bound books as well as loose prints assembled in portfolios. The designation album was thus used independently of image technique and binding, employed for photographs and graphic prints, and for bound volumes as well as loose prints (See for example Album 1829; Album 1831; Album 1843; Münchner Album 1846). A close reading of contemporary advertising and commodity inventories display the seamless introduction of albums designed for photographs. For example, the stationary shop Huldberg in Stockholm declared that they sold ‘albums’ in 1859 and the following year they also sold so called ‘photo albums’ (Stockholms Adresskalender 1856 – 1865).

Subsequently, empty albums destined for photographs can in light of its mercantile context in the mid nineteenth century be inscribed in a larger genealogy of picture distribution and circulation. Thus, instead of seeking for the invention of the photo album, this process could rather be described as a chain of partly overlapping types of image collections, sharing the label album. In light of this the albums of graphic prints, such as the famous *Description de l'Égypte. Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française* (1809-1821) or *Excursions daguerriennes. Vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe* (1840-1843), can be seen as direct predecessors to the later albums with set collections of photographs like Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie. Dessins Photographiques* (1852) produced by Blanquart-Evrard. Moreover, these set photo albums filled with photographs produced in several copies from the 1850s and onwards can be described as predecessors and partly contemporary alternatives to the empty photo album intended for an individually composed collection of photographs that was in use until the end of the twentieth century. (Gernsheim & Gernsheim 1955:121; Jammes 1981; Hannavy 2002: 187–188; Jäger 2003: 126–127; Smith 2012:17). Therefore, instead of looking for the invention of the photo album, it is evident that its introduction came rather unnoticed just because it fed smoothly into already existing media formats and selling contexts.

When considering photography as a printed medium, among other reproductive technologies or printing techniques, another context emerges, that may in turn illuminate events, innovations and practices in other ways. With this example I have highlighted how the conspicuously silent introduction of the photo album is in fact an effect of the media landscape where photography has existed. Put differently, photography was a new image technique that fed into an already existing media format, called the album. The reason for the unnoticed introduction of the photographic album probably lie in the fact that it was not a complete novelty in the 1850s but merely apprehended as a slight revision or improvement of existing display media formats which met its audiences through well-established mercantile channels.



Figure 2 Album Lithographique par Charlet (1829): Paris: Gihaut Frères, Editeurs. Photo: Bibliothèque National de France, Paris

Taken together, the introduction of the photo album follows a quite typical pattern in media history, where the function and uses of new media are shaped in close relation to old media through a slow, gradual process of adaptation (Gitelman & Pingree 2003: XII; Thorburn & Jenkins 2003: 2). Even the labelling practices can be interpreted as part of this process. The term 'album' inscribed photography as a new image technique in a familiar context. This is because while the term album has been used as a short name for photographic albums since the late nineteenth century it was in the nineteenth century applied to bound books containing pictures, independently of image technique. In fact, even the wording 'after nature' commonly used in figural descriptions of photographic images can be described as an expression of such transitional process, since the designation 'after nature' was also used for graphic prints to certify the artists' presence in the setting when drawing or painting the view, which had then been reproduced through graphic print (see for example Fichot 1852; Niboyet 1857).

Photographicality by framing

While the above example typify a kind of indifference to image technique the following example display a somewhat more complex play between enhancing and repressing or dissolving media specificity. This second case in point that illuminates the implications of a broader media historical perspective on photography concerns the re-presentation of photographs in the illustrated press during the nineteenth century. In the following I seek to combine what Wolfgang Ernst has argued are two incompatible methods: the technological considerations from media archaeology with attentiveness to visual details and aesthetic common to art historical analysis (Ernst 2005: 582-603).

The usage of printed photographs in journals and other printed matter lagged considerably. Despite that the half tone process for printing photographic images was introduced in the 1870s, photographs was until the early twentieth century reproduced through lithography and xylography. They were, however, presented as photographic images by their immediate context on the page of the journal. This could be enhanced by the adjoining byline 'after photographs', or by longer explanatory descriptions pointing out the inherent, but not always visible, photographic qualities of the image. This dialectical relationship between photography and written text has already drawn considerable scholarly interest (Di Bello, Wilson & Zamir 2012; Dinius 2012). Nevertheless, I would also like to stress that the visual framing of reproduced photographs actually constructed and instructed readings and understandings of them as photographic. Put differently, the features of the photographic technique were pronounced by its visual setting, but not by its material features such as being produced by a camera and consisting of silver nitrate. Accordingly, what can be termed 'photographicality' was constructed through text but also by different visual features in the illustrated press.

Illustrerad Tidning



Stockholm den 2 Januari.

Preparationen i Stockholm för hett är 8 riksmärken, för kallt 4 riksmärken.

J. P. Mæren & Konev. Litografiska Institutet och Boktryckeri. Kardmansgatan n:o 10.

4 Lundström: för hett är 5 riksmärken, för kallt 4 riksmärken, genomskuren i sidan.

1864.

№ 1.

Fredrika Bremer *).

Sommaren 1831 besökte mamsell Bremer det då nyigen på modet blifna badet i Strömstad. Tillfälligtvis hade jag vid samma tid kommit på ett besök i mitt gamla barnomsken, och jag betraktade som en verklig gäst af lyckan att den redan då berömda tecknariinnan af *Beogrödslyftet* bodde i nästa hus ofvannför, så att jag alla dagar fick se henne gå förbi. Snart såg jag henne också nästan dagligen stiga upp för trappan till ett hus, som ligger midt emot det, hvilket då tillhörde mina föräldrar. Jag undrade först hvilket ärende som förde henne dit — det blef snart bekant, och jag har dertill sedan funnit bilden af den mission, i hvilken hon visat en så varm ihärdighet: barmhertighetens mission.

I det betecknade huset bodde en helt liten familj: mannen, hustrun och dottern. De hade varit så lyckliga. Men en dag eller rättare en natt, då fönstret för den qvafra sommarlufsen stod halföppet, skymdes rutan af ett strålande anlete, ett gudomligt skönt anlete — det var dödsengeln. Dödsengeln tyckte icke om tretallet. Han gick sakt i genom det halföppna fönstret och lutade sig ned öfver den unga flickans bädd, men i detsamma han ärnade trycka sin kys på hennes läppar, höljde han sig, upptecknade henne blott och hvissade: «Om någon tid!»

ifrån och med detta besök ålyttade rosorna från den unga flickans kinder; andedragten, berörd af engeln, blef kort; blodet stelnade småningom, och under månader satte i trötthet smärta vid hennes bädd fader och moder, aldrig kännande hvarken hopp eller ro. Då inträdde en morgon i det mörka hemmet en liten främmande gestalt. Det var gestalten af en hjertogud qvinna, väl bevandrad i den kristna lärans skönaste stycken. Hvad hon sade och hvad hon lärde vet jag ej, men jag vet att lifran den tiden gick det en värdig anda af tålmod och undergifvenhet igenom den lilla familjen. Och den andan vek icke bort, sedan föräldrarna suto ensamma och stadens alla unga flickor lagt sina blommor på lek-systemens graf.

Emellertid framgelo lifvets vexlingar öfver mången sommar och mången vinter, och efter åtta år förde ödet åter mamsell Bremer och mig samtidigt till Strömstad; men då skulle vi icke blifva så främmande för hvarandra. Minnet af den lilla gestalten, som jag sett skynda öfver trappan till det ofvannömda huset, hade outplånligt parat sig i mina tankar med författariinnan, hvars ära under tiden vuxit allt mera. Redan 1831 hade hon fått emotags svenska akademien första akt-mingsbevis i en jettan af guld (1844 belönades hon för andra gången, då med stora priser).

Vid denna tidpunkt (1839) hade jag i min tur, hustrun förut, vågat taga första steget på den bana, der hon stod stadig, och önskade ingenting högre än att få sammanträffa med mamsell Bremer, som då bodde vid den så kallade Långgatan hos en min släkting, i hvars mindre hus nästan till vårt möte blef barmad. Jag har aldrig kunnat glömma den stund, när jag inträdde i den långa gång, som skilde de tvänne husen från hvarandra. Till vänster bodde den, som jag med hjertklappning gick att möta, men till höger hade fördom (1747) bott någon, hvars steg jag alltid tyckte mig höra genljuda från den mörka, låga och elysa salen. Huset var nämligen detsamma som en gång i tiden tillhört borgmästaren Kamp, och gästen som lefvat der var Carl XII. I detta hemlighetsfulla rum, der man kunde cyfvas af tanken på dess stora minnen, der man tyckte sig inandas ett och ett fjerdodels sekels tunga stoft och kvarifrån man ännu tyckte sig förnimma återklangen af den väldiga stämman, som med lika lugn listet ett fader-vär som den uppbådade till strid, dit gingo nu tvänne qvinnor att byta sina tankar, der det blef fråga om en annan strid, en strid för eröfrandet af några blygsamma blad att insticks bland fosterlandets fredliga minnen.

Med min första lilla bok dold under schalen gick jag emot den stora författariinnan, som med sin goda blick genast märkte nybörjarinnans förigenhet och hastade sitt genom några hjertegoda ord bortstycka den. Det var då som jag, sittande bredvid henne, hörde henne i poetiska ord utgjuta en del af sin själens rikedomar och tala om de strider, till hvilka hon redd sig för att i ljuset se framgå de många planer, som utan tvifvel lefvat i hennes hjerta, innan de tagit form i hennes hufvud.

Intill dess hade jag haft den förmånenheten att föreställa mig att också



*) Porträttet är ritadt af hr Fr. Meyer jor efter en i dessa dagar tagen fotograf af hr C. J. Malmberg.

Conchuka Malmberg

Figure 3 Reproduction of a photograph and an authograph. Ny Illustrerad Tidning 50 (December 1873), 396. Most probably xylography. Photo: The National Library of Sweden, Stockholm

One visual strategy for enhancing the photographicality of the xylographic or lithographic prints was to intermingle them with other indexical signs such as the autograph. Adding one's signature on a photographic portrait was common practice in the second half of the nineteenth century. Obviously this made the 'having been there' effect of the photographic image even stronger. Just as the light that had touched the body of the portrayed person had touched the photographic plate and print, the hands of the portrayed person had touched the photographic print while signing the picture. Subsequently, when reproductions of photographic portraits of contemporary celebrities were published in the illustrated press, they were often adjoined by the sitters' autograph and not their name in printed letters.

Yet the photographicality was especially pertinent in the cases where images were represented side by side with objects.² This was regularly made in the Swedish illustrated press during the late nineteenth century. A page from *Illustrerad familj journal* 1882 entitled 'Sketches from The Gaboon River on the west coast of Africa' is a typical case. It displays images of different locations and events along the Gaboon River as well as tools, jewellery and other artefacts from the region. The journal's "drawings" are taken after "sketches by mr Pritsehet" according the adjoining text (Gaboon-floden 1882:19-20). Although, taken together with the other written information on genesis of the images, they were made by the British artist Robert Taylor Pritchett (Lambert 1883). He was renowned for making drawings. However the word 'sketches' was at the time applied to drawings as well as photographs and whether the source for these images were drawings made after photographs or drawings made after nature is not known. The overall design of the page builds on a long tradition of *trompe l'oeil* painting, with its variety of objects and oscillation or play between representation and 'real' objects. The four images in the picture, as it were, display the ship *Vandraren*, the house of the commandant and the official buildings in *Lebreville*, a national dance in the moonlight and a woman wearing a *Mponweq* headdress. They are visually pronounced as three-dimensional objects since they have eared corners, ragged edges and cast shadows on their immediate surroundings on the page. That they are photographic prints or postcards is underlined by their lack of frames and artists' signatures, but also by their ragged edges and eared corners, which accentuate that they are made of thin paper. The omission of frames is conspicuous, and clearly distinguish these images from reproductions of paintings and drawings that would typically be adorned with frames. Adding frames to graphically reproduced art works had been common practice since printed picture gallery catalogues emerged in the late Eighteen Century (Gaetgens & Marchesano 2011). Hence, the exclusion of frames can be read as a deliberate act of differentiation.

Around these four images several other objects are represented, such as a wooden spoon, a steel tomahawk, a hair needle of ivory, and the cranium of a male gorilla etcetera. Taken together, the materiality of the represented images is pronounced visually. They clearly appear as objects made of paper among others made

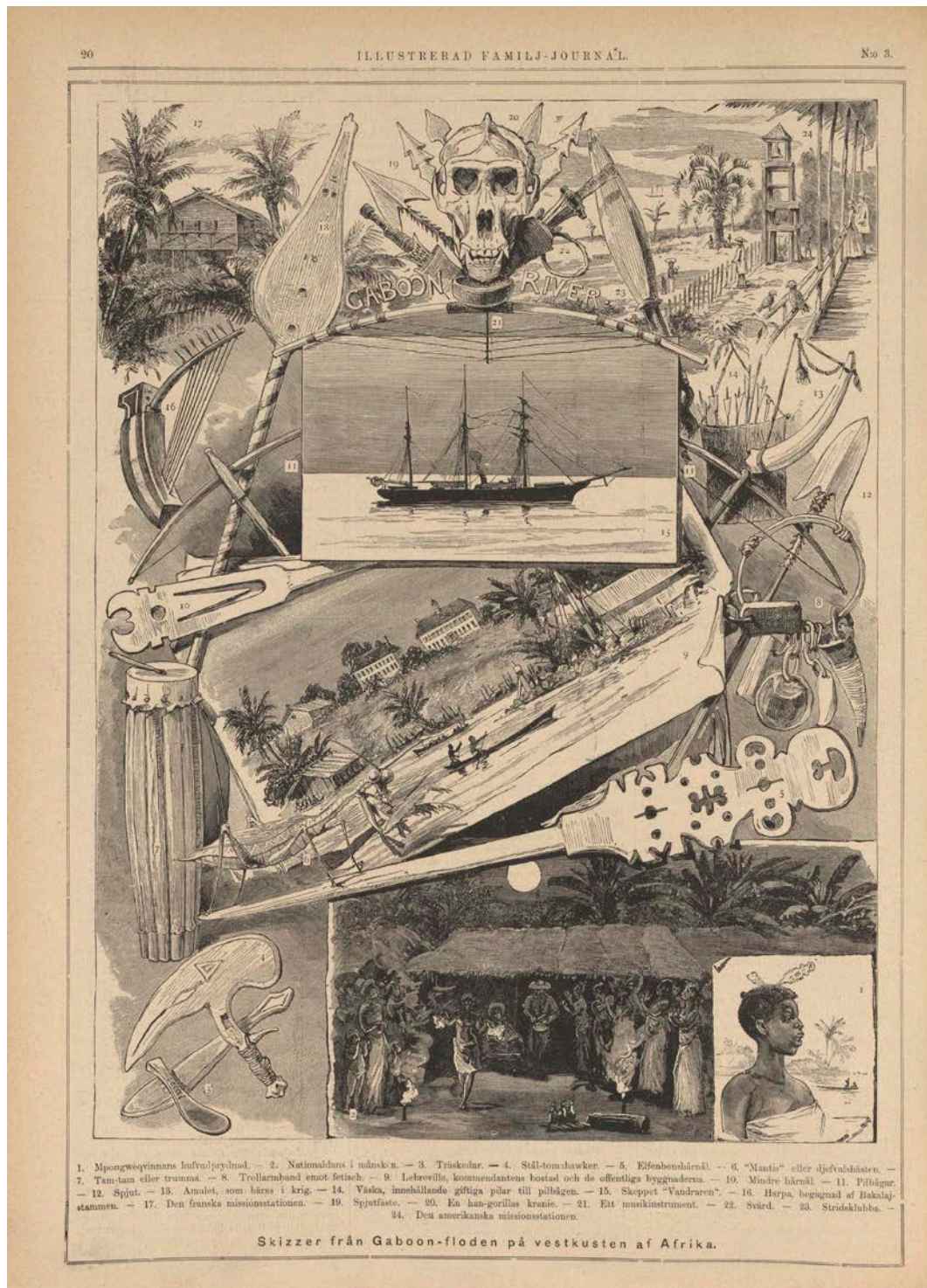


Figure 4 Sketches from Gabon River on the west coast of Africa', page from *Illustrerad familj journal*, 3 (1882), 20. Most probably xylography. Photo: The National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

of materials such as bone, wood and metal. Although the realism of the still life is pronounced by the shadow, the many details and the meticulous arrangement, the relative size of the components are not realistic. Accordingly, the representation contains a combination of elements characterized by hypermediacy *and* immediacy, using Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's terminology (Bolter & Grusin 2000). The hypermediacy is underlined by the artificiality in relative size and the way the represented three-dimensional objects are floating in an artificial space. Nevertheless, the immediacy is also apparent as the objecthood of the photographs and the other objects are emphasised through shadows, wear and tear.

The act of enhancing the photographicality of printed images in the illustrated press by layout and other visual graphical means had a double acting effect. Indeed, there was a reciprocal exchange, for what the photograph had the printed press lacked and vice versa. In the illustrated press the notion that photographic images conveyed the truth, that they were direct and true to life, was enhanced. Already from the early nineteenth century photographic images had dual function. The technique was simultaneously considered a fictional marvel and an authentic document. In the printed press the photograph brought authenticity and immediacy, which in these cases merged with the reproducibility and large dissemination of the illustrated press. Moreover, in a narrower, image wise sense, the photograph and the lithograph or xylograph had complementary qualities. On the one hand, the print could never compete with the photograph in terms of sharpness and smooth gradation, which was a cardinal reason why professional photographic journals included pasted photographic prints even long after the introduction of the halftone process, well into the twentieth century. On the other hand, the graphic artist could add features to the picture that the photographer had not been fortunate enough to capture or, given the technical means in the period, would never have been able to fix on a photographic plate. This especially holds for moving objects as human figures and vehicles, which was routinely added when photographs were transcribed by graphic artists in print shops (Hassner 1977: 165; Henisch & Henisch 1994: 85-88). Put differently, this exemplifies the mutual, not hierarchic, relationship between photographs and the re-production of photographs by linear printing technique.

Media specificity negotiated

The discourse on photography in the twentieth century focused on a notion of media specificity, understood as a characteristic expression derived from the techniques and materials used. In the case of photography this meant a focus on the use of cameras, silver nitrate, negative celluloid film and positive paper prints. Thus what in retrospect from a twentieth century strictly photo historical point of view seems to have been an important, paradigmatic event – such as the invention of a medium for displaying photographs, the photo album, or a critical technical delimitation

such as the photographic image as opposed to steel engraving, lithographs, drawings and paintings – might from the perspective of the contemporary nineteenth century media context seem to have been merely small adjustments in a chain of gradual improvement or experiments in the production, distribution and circulation of pictures.

Indeed it appears that a media specific notion of photography, as it has been formulated during the twentieth century (Szarkowski 1966), do not fully comply with the nineteenth century's visual culture. In fact photography was simultaneously separated and intermingled with other image techniques, conceptually as well as technically. The different visual and textual markers used in connection to photographic images emphasized different aspects of the photograph. Simultaneously the notion of 'the photographic' was not always used as a media specific term in the period. It could refer to truthfulness in general, meaning in full display or an all-encompassing collection and could, for example, be used to designate a collection of texts or a biography. A case in point is the biography on the Swedish politician Gustaf Adolf Reuterholm published in 1862 that even bore the subtitle 'A photograph' (Sturzen Becker 1845; Sturzen Becker 1862). In the introduction, the author expands on the parable between photography and text: 'We call these sheets a photograph' he writes and continues to explain that by mainly using the writings of the main character himself he sought to 'let the character depict himself. We edit rather than compose and our reflections should be few. We are only arranging the "camera" in a proper manner, let Reuterholm take a seat in front of it and let he himself fixate his image on the plate'. Another case in point is the so-called confession albums that were intermittently labelled albums for mental photographs (Mental Photographs 1869; Twain 1872; Mental Photographs 1875). In these, friends and acquaintances were supposed to enter information on habits and tastes, likes and dislikes through written entries, and the use of photographic metaphors for these collections of written testimonies were plentiful. The resulting written entries were 'mental photographs' or 'self-photography' as the persons in question 'portray their inner human beings their virtues and faults, their dislikes and likes' as said in an introduction to one of these publications (Indiscretionernas bok 1881). Thus it seems that aesthetics, a particular appearance, the image technique or even modality were not the only ways of delimitating the photographic. Accordingly, 'a photograph' could be a chemically produced image by the aid of light and silver nitrate, a printed picture *or* a text. In some cases the indifference also held for disparate image techniques. When the spread of *carte-de-visite* portraits was at its height in Sweden in the mid 1860s, they were still equalled to silhouettes. As a contemporary writer remarks, 'a collection of silhouettes may serve the exact same purpose as the most excellent photographs. The main thing is that you get an illustrated inventory over the personalities who are the targets of public comments' (Några ord om fotografier och manier 1865). The casualness or indifference to the various image techniques is also revealed in printed publications from the mid-nineteenth century.



Figure 5 Reproductions of silhouettes, paintings, drawings and a sculpture. 427 portraits of famous Swedish men and women, 1840-1847. Lithography. Photo: The National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

A case in point is the book *427 portraits of famous Swedish men and women* that contains short written biographical entries and plates where silhouettes, paintings, drawings and sculpture appear side by side reproduced through lithography (*427 porträtter ... 1840–1847*).

In retrospect, it seems that notion of a photographic media specificity tied to medium and materiality may not only have influenced the aesthetics and reception of photography in the twentieth century but might also have shaped later understanding of nineteenth century photographs and photographic practices. Indeed it appears that the nineteenth century visual culture embraced another notion of media specificity, not tied to materiality but rather to general ideas of inherent features in the technique. This might be described as a historiographical anachronism. For while notions of media specificity, has dominated the discourse on photography in the twentieth century, both for contemporary and historical photographs, nineteenth century sources tell other stories. The many reference works on ‘The history of photography’ published from the 1930s and onwards being the paramount examples of this emphasize on such media specificity (see for example Newhall 1937; Gernsheim & Gernsheim 1955; Frizot 1998). Thus before modernism and the construction of a photo history, photography was not only defined as true to nature and objective, but equally as an artifice and an artistic, even magical enterprise. Moreover photography was not only detail, frame and time, but also temporal and spatial synthesis. It is true that photography was considered to possess a unique relation to reality, a certain ability to bring to life whatever it depicted which was accentuated visually and textually every now and then. Nevertheless, this ‘liveness’ was primarily tied to detail, that nothing eluded the camera, and movement, as the camera could move around its motif or induce movement by its haphazard registration of humans, nature and objects (Di Bello 2013: 412-420; Bremmer 2013: 421-430). Ultimately, the main attributes of photography in the nineteenth century were equally tied to the later invented film, as they were to still photography. Moreover, the relation between photography and time was apprehended differently. When photography was still a new medium in the mid nineteenth century, its contemporaneity was pronounced. Thus, photography was not only a petrification of a passed moment but was able display the present and even the future (Galton 1884).

Conclusion

This article displays some implications of a media historical perspective on photography that enables new interpretations of historical processes and practices. As has been shown, photography has always been embedded in a mediating apparatus. The two cases above illuminate the implications of two different mediating apparatuses, be it a bound volume called an album or a printed publication called a journal. The media historical perspective further entails a consideration of photographic images in a larger system of distribution and circulation of visual media, be it the mercantile

context of the stationary or print shops where photographs were sold, displayed and bought or the printed press that spread photographs to large audiences. These media apparatuses were, as much as the photographs they mediated, determined by technical inventions and social practices. From a historiographical point of view, the mono medial perspective in the writing of the history of photography could be described as the necessity of virtue. When the names, work and techniques of individual photographers remained unknown, and the photographic pictures were scattered and hidden in private and public collections, the primary task for research was to construct a corpus. Thus, photo historical writings in the twentieth century cannot be singularly described as the effects of a modernist discourse focused on materially defined media specificity. However, when the reference works on the ‘international’ as well as ‘national’ histories of photography are plentiful, main traditions and revaluations of them are given. Today when this grand corpus exists, which also coincides with the postmodern era that emphasises the dissolution between genres and media, it is possible and even essential to inscribe photography in a larger context of production, circulation and dissemination of images in general. In other words, photographs cannot be confined to a purely photographic field but must be considered as a part of larger systems of visual culture. Nevertheless, the implications of this media historical perspective do not rest in a time long since passed. The notion of photographicality by framing might, for example, be applied to images in the digital era. For just like the xylographs of the nineteenth century illustrated press were made to look like photographs by their framing, so the photographicality of digital images in the early twenty first century is produced by different visual framing. Therefore now as then, photography is not only an idea, a process or an object but also always mediated in a larger biotope of visual media.

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Notes

¹ The US market reveals on the contrary a different pattern: albums were introduced later and were foremost sold by retailers of photographic material. See Siegel 2010.

² Despite my usage of the terms images and object for simplicity here I do acknowledge that images are three-dimensional objects too. See further Edwards & Hart, 2004.

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