Photography and the Photographic Image

Where, then, should one begin a history of photography's dissemination? Traditionally one might have started any history of photography with one of the first photographs to be made by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, a French painter and designer who seems to have begun his photographic experiments in 1824, or by William Henry Fox Talbot, the independently wealthy English polymath who was experimenting with a photographic process as early as 1833. The announcements of their discoveries in Paris and London, respectively, in January of 1839 make this month a crucial date for most historians.¹⁵ Depending on one's inclinations, this version of photography's story therefore comes to be founded on one or more of a series of specific origin points: a particular individual, a particular moment, and a particular object, an early daguerreotype or photogenic drawing.¹⁶

A history of the dissemination of the photographic image, on the other hand, might well set out from the first reproductions to be made after photographs, and therefore with the first exposure of photography to a truly public audience. Wood-engraved 'fac-similes' of photogenic drawings made using Talbot's process were, for example, published in English journals as early as April 1839.¹⁷ On 13 April of that month, *Mechanic and Chemist: A Magazine of the Arts and Sciences* featured on its cover two anonymously produced wood-engraved versions of camera-made photogenic drawings, one a negative and one its positive imprint (Fig. 3). Looking like silhouettes, these images in fact appeared in the same month in which Talbot himself made his first positive prints from a photogenic drawing negative, so presumably the journal's editor was very well informed about the latest photographic innovations.¹⁸

A week later, on 20 April, the cover of the *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* bore an engraved version of a photogenic drawing contact print of three sprigs of ferns. It was printed twice: once in black, and once in a rust colour to imitate the look of the original photograph (Fig. 4). According to the following week's issue of the magazine:

Fac-simile of a photogenic drawing in Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, 20 April 1839, front cover. Ink-on-paper print from wood engraving after a photogenic drawing, contact photograph by Golding Bird, 21.5×13.5 cm (sheet). Courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



[...] the engraving gave a most accurate idea of the photogenic picture, which represents the fern with such extreme fidelity that not only its veins, but the imperfections, and accidental folding of the leaves of the specimen are copied,—*the* greater opacity of the folded parts being represented by the large white patches on our fac-simile [emphasis in original].¹⁹

These cover images were intended to illustrate an article inside the journal by Dr Golding Bird titled 'A Treatise on Photogenic Drawing'. Bird, the inventor of the stethoscope, published at least two other such essays during 1839, one a letter titled 'Observations on the Application of Heliographic or Photogenic Drawing to Botanical Purposes; With an Account of an Economic Mode of Preparing the Paper' and sent to the *Magazine of Natural History* on 25 March (this being the text reprinted in the *Mirror*) and another titled 'Flora: On Taking Impressions of Flowers, etc, by the Photogenic Process', published in the *Floricultural Cabinet and Florist's Magazine* in December.

Bird's essays were soon circulated around the British Empire. Some time before August 1840, for example, Conrad Martens, an English-born painter who had emigrated to Sydney, Australia, carefully wrote out a recipe for photogenic drawings in his notebooks, the source being a reprinted essay by Bird that Martens had read in his copy of the Visitor, or Monthly Instructor of 1839. This was a magazine published in London by the Religious Tract Society but which was obviously also available to homesick readers in Australia. Based on his reading, and perhaps on his own experiments, Martens recommended using 'glazed writing paper of the thinnest kind' and the 'stopping solution recommended by Mr Bird' in order to obtain 'the dark colour produced by the action of the sun'. He also suggested applying the 'Photogenic fluid using a brush' and doing so by candlelight.²⁰ Although we have no other evidence that Martens made any photogenic drawings himself, we can reasonably say that, thanks to these publications, he had photographed in his imagination well before any photographic camera arrived on Australian shores. Martens' experience of photography-more rhetorical than actual-was fairly typical during these first few years of the medium's circulation.

On 27 April 1839 the *Magazine of Science*, and *School of Arts*, a relatively new London publication, devoted one of its covers to wood-engraved *Fac-similes of photogenic drawings*: two of botanical specimens and one of a contact print of a piece of lace.²¹ The image

Fac-similes of photogenic drawings in Magazine of Science, and School of Arts, vol. 1, no. 4, 27 April 1839, front cover. Ink-on-paper print from wood engravings after photogenic drawings, contact photographs by George William Francis, 22.0 × 13.0 cm (sheet).



of lace, in its machine-made repetitions of geometric patterns, was the very embodiment of mass-production techniques, and thus of industrial capitalism.²² The plant specimens conjured nature, photography's generative force, but also the science of botany and its particular pictorial demands (Fig. 5). The photographs were the work of botanist George William Francis (who, as it happened, subsequently emigrated to Australia). Francis explained that he had photographically sensitised boxwood blocks and made the photographic impressions directly on them. These image-impregnated blocks were then sent to an engraver, who carved directly into the wood around them. The editor felt that the lace was accurately represented, but 'in the flowers he has failed to express the delicacy and beauty of the drawings'.²³

The 4 May issue of the magazine featured two more wood engravings after camera-made photogenic drawings by Francis, one captioned 'Edith Church, Kent', and the other 'Fac-simile of Photogenic Drawing', again showing the same scene in negative and positive versions. Not to be outdone, the *Mechanic and Chemist* reproduced a 'Specimen of Mr Ackermann's Photogenic Drawing' on its cover of 18 May, displaying some admirably transparent photographic images of insect wings. The issue of 25 May carried what it called a 'Photogenic Printing' on its cover, the first wood-engraved reproduction after a *cliché verre* photograph, again made by inventor, bookseller and publisher Rudolph Ackermann.²⁴

A daguerreotype image was similarly translated into a reproducible media form in France, after which it too was distributed all over the Western world. Although the invention of Daguerre's process was announced at the Académie des sciences in Paris on 7 January 1839, the details of the process were not made public until 19 August of that year. English newspapers published accounts of these details just four days later. A booklet outlining the techniques required to make daguerreotypes, titled Historique et description des procédés du daguerréotype et du diorama, was published in Paris on 7 September (although it was first advertised two days before), the same day that Daguerre began giving public demonstrations of these procedures.²⁵ The first edition of this booklet became available in an English translation as early as 13 September, but this was just one of many such translations.²⁶ Indeed, being issued in thirty-two editions and eight languages during the next twelve months, this book had become a global publication well before most people had ever seen a daguerreotype in the flesh. And among its six illustrations was an engraved view of a picture sque landscape representing the

L.L. Boscawen Ibbetson (England), Fossils, engraved on a daguerreotype plate, 1840,

in Westminster Review, vol. 34, no. 2, September 1840, following page 460.

Ink-on-paper lithograph by A. Friedel. Courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London/

Smithsonian Graphic Arts Collection, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC.



L.L. Boscawen Ibbetson (England), A silicified pentaconaster, engraved on a daguerreotype plate, 1840, in Westminster Review, vol. 34, no. 2, September 1840, preceding page 461.

Ink-on-paper lithograph by A. Friedel. Courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London/

 $Smithsonian\,Graphic\,Arts\,Collection,\,National\,Museum\,of\,American\,History,\,Washington,\,DC.$



image found on a finished daguerreotype plate (strangely, a kind of picture never produced by Daguerre himself). This was the first daguerreotype image to appear in print.

Other printed facsimiles soon followed. The earliest reproduction after an Italian daguerreotype, a lithograph, appeared in Rome in *Poliorama pittoresco* on 21 December 1839. It shows a still life consisting of statuettes and fabric, along with a gas-light fitting, and was copied from a daguerreotype by Gaetano Fazzini, an Italian scientist and architect who claimed to have learned the process from Daguerre himself.²⁷ It was followed by the Italian edition of Daguerre's *Historique et description* (*Descrizione pratica del nuovo istromento chiamato il daguerrotipo*), which was published by Alessandro Monaldi in Rome in 1840. In a manifestation of national pride, this publication replaced Daguerre's generic French landscape with an engraving of a view of the Capitoline Hill from the Forum, showing the piazza and facade of St Peter's.²⁸

In September 1840, the English journal *Westminster Review* also published two lithographic copies of photographs. One depicted a group of fossils and the other some coral, with both originally 'engraved on a daguerreotype plate' (one of them by limelight, a combustible compound of oxy-hydrogen and calcium) at the Polytechnic Institution in London by L. L. Boscawen Ibbetson (Fig. 6). The fossils were photographed in profile, having been formally arranged for the camera as a still life, with the draped shelf on which they sit still visible in the lithograph. The sample of coral, *A silicified pentaconaster*, has been photographed in close-up and from above, providing a detailed but slightly cropped view of the specimen as seen from an unexpected angle (Fig. 7). According to the journal:

when the impression was fixed upon the plate an outline of the image was traced upon it by an engraver in the dotting style; a print was then taken from the plate and transferred to stone, when the shading required was filled in by a lithographic artist.²⁹

These images were quickly circulated among interested persons. For example, James David Forbes, a Scottish physicist and glaciologist, reported receiving one in August 1840; Lady Pauline Trevelyan was shown some at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Glasgow between 17 and 24 September 1840. As she recorded in her diary, she 'received from Mr Ibbetson some of his plates of fossils engraved by Daguerotype [*sic*] very nice things. Look rather like careful lithographs'.³⁰ As the *Athenaeum* commented in August 1840: [...] thus works which, however desirable, no publisher could undertake with any chance of remuneration, from the elaborate detail of the drawings, and the consequent expense of the engravings, may be brought within the means of persons of very limited income.³¹

It also allowed photographic images, in this case images twice removed from the original daguerreotypes, to be sent to the other side of the world. For example, in September 1840, the same month in which they were published, Sir John Franklin, governor of Tasmania between 1836 and 1843, received copies of these Westminster Review lithographs in Hobart in Australia. As Franklin's benefactor William Buckland wrote in his accompanying letter, 'there is no calculating the importance of this invention for multiplying figures in Natural History'.³² In saying as much he was repeating the sentiments expressed in the Review itself: 'As this is the first drawing of its kind that has yet been attempted, it must be regarded as but faintly indicating the perfection that may be attained, by similar means, in microscopic drawings, after further experiments.³³ By this time Sir John would have read about the invention of the daguerreotype-'one has heard of writing by steam; but drawing by sunshine (or moonshine) is a novelty for which the world is indebted to Mr Daguerre of Paris'-in his copy of the Colonist, published in Sydney on 1 June 1839. The article asked its readers to

> figure to yourself [...] a mirror which, after having received your image, gives you back your portrait, indelible as a picture, and a much more exact resemblance [... although capturing] only outline, the lights and shades of the model [...] they are drawings [...] pushed to a degree of perfection that art never can reach.³⁴

The description is entirely imaginary, as no daguerreotype portrait had yet been made. But it did point to the commercial future of the medium.

Shortly thereafter, on 19 September, Franklin would also have read a reprinted American essay in the *Launceston Advertiser* telling of Talbot's competing invention of photogenic drawing ('the phantasmagoria of inventions passes rapidly before us [... resulting in] a revolution in art'), and shortly after that, on 18 January 1840, would have learned from the *Colonist* that a daguerreotype had been taken in London by a visiting Frenchman.³⁵ By March of 1840 Australian newspapers provide evidence that the language of photography had become part of the vernacular, with the *Hobart Town Courier* using the word 'daguerreotype' to indicate the

'extraordinary resemblance' between Hobart and Cape Town.³⁶ All this, once again, before any photograph had been made on Australian soil!

This, then, is how many people first encountered photographic images: as newspaper reports, technical descriptions, or projected fantasies, or in the form of engravings or lithographs based on photographs that were published in popular or specialist magazines. For these people, their first photograph was an imaginary image or a second-order reproduction, with the copy coming before any original had been seen. As far as this public was concerned, the copy *was* the original, with photography presented as a process *about* the generation of such reproductions, before it was anything else.

If we were to continue this line of inquiry we might find ourselves noting that the mercantile identity of a photograph was in fact adopted from a conceptual framework of values already established by the print trade well before photography was invented. In January 1839, for example, when photography was announced, there were already seventy-two printsellers working in London, serving a growing middle-class market anxious to buy engraved reproductions of contemporary paintings. So lucrative was this market that the copyright for a painting was sometimes worth twice the cost of the painting itself. In June 1846, for example, the Art-Union reported that 'for the four pictures painted by Mr Edwin Landseer this year, he received nearly seven thousand pounds-ie. £2400 for the paintings and £4450 for the "Copyrights".³⁷ Print publishers were known to commission paintings so that engravings could then be made after them; in effect, the desire for a copy came before the original, thereby confusing that very distinction.

A similar economy existed in France. In 1841 the Romantic painter Horace Vernet published a pamphlet in which he pointed out that, 'the painter has two means of drawing pecuniary gain from his picture, namely: the sale of the picture itself, and the assignment of engraving rights'.³⁸ As if to prove his point, in the following year he received 2000 francs from Jean-Pierre-Marie Jazet for the right to engrave his *Napoleon reviewing the guard in the Place du Carrousel*, painted in 1838. Importantly, Vernet's text argues that a painter produces both a 'material object' and an 'intellectual object'—that is, both a painting and an image—and that these are separate commodities that can, if necessary, be sold to different parties.

As discussed earlier, Stephen Bann has looked at the situation in France during the nineteenth century, and concluded that the aims

and aspirations of early photographers were generated from within the conceptual limits of contemporary art practice, especially as these were demonstrated in the very competitive business of making reproductive engravings and lithographs.³⁹ The history of the pioneering photographic experiments of the French brothers Claude Niépce and Nicéphore Niépce bear out this proposition. These experiments, beginning with paper soaked with chloride of silver and moving on to glass and metal plates coated with a solution of bitumen of Judea (a naturally occurring light-sensitive asphalt), were initiated in 1816 by a grant offered by the French government to improve the reproductive capacities of lithography. In keeping with this inducement, the earliest extant photographs made by the Niépce brothers are light-generated copies of ink-on-paper engravings. In 1822, for example, Nicéphore reported being able to make an inverted copy of an oiled engraving of Pope Pius VII placed directly on a glass plate coated in bitumen and exposed to sunlight.⁴⁰ Similarly prepared and exposed pewter plates were subsequently etched with acid to increase the depth of the impression, allowing ink-on-paper positive prints to be pulled from this photographically inscribed metal matrix. One print that has survived, Cheval avec son conducteur [Horse led by his handler], dating from about July 1825, features a copy of a seventeenth-century Dutch engraving by Dirk Stoop.

Although Nicéphore Niépce also made experiments with images formed in a camera, the copying of existing pictures remained central to his work. In September 1827, for example, Nicéphore went to London to visit his sick brother, Claude, taking with him several examples of his heliography (as he called it). According to Robert Hunt, writing in 1844, Nicéphore ended up leaving behind at least seven photo-engraved metal plates, made using three different processes, as well as two paper impressions printed in 1826 from yet another plate (a heliographic copy of a seventeenth-century engraving, *Cardinal d'Amboise*) (Fig. 8).⁴¹

Six of Niépce's plates were engraved with copies of existing prints. This did not at first seem like a possibility for daguerreotype photographs. Made on silvered sheets of copper exposed to fumigated iodine and mercury, daguerreotypes resulted in images so delicate that, according to one experienced pioneer, they could be damaged by 'the rubbing of a fly's wing'.⁴² As already mentioned, Daguerre had worked on the complicated process's realisation since 1824, joining in a partnership with Niépce in 1829 before officially announcing his invention ten years later. As Niépce reported, '[Daguerre's] process

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (France), *Cardinal d'Ambroise*, 1827. Copy of a seventeenth-century engraving by Isaac Briot of Cardinal d'Amboise, French cardinal and member of state. Ink-on-paper print from heliogravure, 17.2 × 13.2 cm (image). Courtesy of Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône.



François Lemaître (France, engraver), after Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (France), *Chapelle des Feuillants*, 1827, in Augustin Liébert, *Galerie du Luxembourg*, *des musées*, *palais et châteaux royaux de France*, Paul Renouard, Paris, 1828, plate 8.

Ink-on-paper print from etching and engraving after Daguerre's painting *Chapelle des Feuillants*, 1814, 50.0 × 33.0 cm (sheet). Collection of the author, Wellington.



and mine are completely different', Daguerre's being 'connected more with perfection than with multiplying prints'.⁴³ Stephen Pinson has even associated Daguerre with 'a suspicion of the multiple', the artist apparently being nervous about unauthorised copies of his own paintings in the context of continuing debates about copyright legislation in France.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Daguerre was an artist very familiar with reproductive engraving, having had one of his own paintings distributed in engraved form in 1827 (Fig. 9), and supplying drawings and painted sketches for the production of at least thirteen other facsimiles in various media.⁴⁵ In addition, his diorama paintings had been reproduced in London as rudimentary wood engravings on the cover of the *Mirror of Literature, Amusements, and Instruction* in 1826, 1827 and 1828.⁴⁶ Having one's images copied in another medium was not just a normal aspect of artistic practice; it was a commercial necessity and one in which Daguerre actively participated.

The daguerreotype process provided only a unique photograph that combined both negative and positive in a single object. Daguerreotypes were therefore not capable of reproducing their own image numerous times, unlike Talbot's paper photographs. And indeed, in a story headed 'The Daguerrotype [*sic*], or Solar Engraving', a journalist writing for Boston's *Christian Register* in July 1839 quoted London's *Athenaeum* as saying that it is 'all but impossible that impressions from them [daguerreotypes] could be multiplied after the manner of an engraving'. Interestingly, although we are told that Daguerre himself reiterated this impossibility, the story goes on to remind its readers that 'M. Niepce [*sic*] not only declared that it was possible, but produced specimens of such multiplied copies'—the seven or more specimens left behind in London in 1827.⁴⁷

In fact, within a year of this report, several enterprising photographers were attempting to turn the otherwise unique daguerreotype plate into an engraved matrix capable of generating multiple ink-on-paper prints. In Vienna, for example, Joseph von Berres reproduced five illustrations from etched daguerreotype plates in his August 1840 book *Phototyp nach der Erfindung des Professor Berres.*⁴⁸ An earlier article about his technique was translated and published in England, France, Germany, Italy and the United States, and also attracted attention in the Netherlands. In October 1839, the *Times* reported on some similar efforts by Frenchman Alfred Donné that allowed as many as forty impressions to be made from a single etched plate.⁴⁹