

WARP AND WEFT: A TEXT

*Fragments from a conversation between Terry Winters,
John Corbett, and Jim Dempsey, sans attribution*

Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* was the first published book of photographs. Talbot's book is based on the conceit that the images are nature's own drawings. He called them "photogenic drawings"—optical and chemical reproductions, grey-scale pictures of the world. The photographs looked like drawing in terms of tonality, but the images were produced by light as an almost instantaneous visualization, as "sun pictures."

What Talbot's images obviously lack are handmade marks. That elemental technology offers other registers of feeling and form. These drawings are simple, a sequence of selective events—nature "in her manner of operation." The end result is a picture, a proposition.

It's a compound nature in a constant process of elucidation, where the artificial and the natural are alternate forms of an extended continuum. One is guided by intelligence, and the other by even more mysterious forces. Information is a shared characteristic although it's often seen as a product of human activity. Information also drives the natural world through a wide range of signals—pheromones, systems of transmitters and receptors.

Nature is not something "out there." There are degrees of separation and the membrane is very porous; we occupy a relative position and need to be aware of our affects and effects.

Nature is a manufactured category. We use it to demarcate an exterior territory, but that's a construction. A more radical approach allows nature and culture to occupy the same expanse.

When asked if he worked from nature, Pollock replied, "I am nature." Within today's media-scape, "I am culture" seems like an equally legitimate position.

These drawings relate to some kind of experimental fiction. They are speculative and describe something that *could* exist. They propose that initial and invented images offer a glimpse of other situations, other possible worlds.

There is a sense of a fifth dimension, perceived only as a shadow form cast by an allusive entity.

Sun Ra said that the future was the shadow form of the past passing through the present. Intimations of the future come by means of shadowing. The photographic negative produces "sun pictures" by means of shadow. Visible images are produced through the presence and absence of light. In some sense drawing is similar with every mark covering over the white of the paper. Darkness and material are added to describe another kind of radiance.

It's a call and response. The way ice forms in nature, materials build and circumstances change and suddenly there is a shift of shape and meaning. At the freezing point and boiling point, there's a phase transition. These drawings have that quality. As progressions, the drawings are often determined by boundary conditions. They're loaded with marks and information, which shift and become signs, figures.

The approach is oblique: an off-balance pursuit devised to produce novelty and surprise.

There's buoyancy to the indirectness, whereas design would sink it, pull it under. It's a question of intention and attention: action that allows for a full range of expressive possibilities.

There is also an element of science fiction. William Burroughs' advice was to "Storm the Reality Studio and retake the universe."

Drawing is a perfect visualization tool. It's essential for mapping complex concepts like a 4D cube. You can more easily understand topological space when diagramed. Drawings illustrate the behavior of forms difficult or impossible to describe with language.

Space here is multiple and alive. There's an oscillation between positive and negative, a place that hovers in between, or is both, and different at the same time.

It's the dissolution of those categories. The field is charged and everything is both object and space. The collapse of those divisions allows for another kind of representation to develop. Abstraction is used as a process to generate real world images. Identification becomes speculation.

The word "atmosphere" is important here. The drawings don't fit the definition of the super-flat, the exploration of the picture plane, any of that Modernist rhetoric. There's space in them always, but not articulated by

conventional means of vanishing points and vectors. These hypothetical objects occupy space within an atmosphere. It's an inferred place.

The atmospheres correspond to perceptual reality and the illusionistic spaces of much Western painting. Abstraction can exist inside that same virtual and fictive realm.

The drawings appear to grow and develop out of each other. They seem to evolve and have a generative, developmental drive.

Water finds its own level; these drawings find their own level. One of the essential characteristics is that they might not be balanced. These drawings can be unwieldy and unfixed, but they develop along necessary pathways. They grow—like Sea Monkeys!

Material builds and the emergent imagery generates and occupies the pictorial space.

There are rules, a framework that is somewhat broken. It's a random walk.

Typology—that's one thing that connects the drawings with the collages. There's a comparative quality, where there's a grid or a set of variations. Like a set of genomes, coded, discrete bits of information are best understood within a group where articulations of difference can emerge. The grid is not always flat, but can fold in on itself.

Some aspects of a grammar appear, categories of behavior, networks, vectors, edges. To see different topological aspects of space or activity, those components can be assembled differently and can access subjects that would not otherwise come into view.

Difference Surface is a group of 20 drawings. There are classifications of form and inferences of systems. Within these drawings and also between them you find variations on a theme. The group is a lexicon or alphabet in itself and the semiotics operate on several levels. Each is differently organized—or disorganized.

Surface is important in the drawings. The variety of paper and the range of material density; graphite takes on qualities of surface, matte and sheen, making black areas seem black in different ways.

Surface conditions influence how marks develop and ultimately how they're seen. This happens within a very narrow bandwidth as opposed to the paintings where the range across the chromatic scale and between marks is so enormous.

That notion of close tones. When you're listening to Tony Conrad playing microtonal music, the closer two tones get together the faster a beat will happen and the further apart they are the less interesting the interaction between them. The coolest stuff is when they're really snug, almost the same, you can get all sorts of variants. Here in the drawings you're forced to see more in the image because of the reduction.

Within a narrow bandwidth there is a wide array of marks: the inflection, scale, and gesture. They're handwritten, cursive.

The reduction on some drawings comes from working through rather than holding back. Rather than setting predetermined limits, layering builds and negates the existing surface as work proceeds.

There is no erasure. It's all positive space and continuous forward motion. The image is being built step by step and the evolving picture develops over time.

External conditions change and a transformation occurs. It's unstoppable like the root that forces its way through the pavement.

A scenario is set in which there's no room for repetition. The pictures develop out of local conditions, which are always changing. It's the same river twice situation. Cezanne said: "Here on the bank of the river the motifs multiply..." That multiplication of motifs is the work's narrative.

The weight and pressure of those motifs build until they collapse or transition into an unexpected abstract likeness.

The collages start with an idea of lamination. A series of superimposed elements which compose a complete set. The drawings push that notion further. An overlay of information builds and the components become inseparable. A sense of wholeness develops. There's a textile-like quality: a warp and a weft. To be subtle is to be finely woven.

With the collages, there is a series of complete things, one on top of another.

The collages are germinal but the drawings give an unfamiliar kind of visual dissonance, or relative levels of dissonance. It's not dissonance between one color and another, but between different systems of information. One system that's about lines moving a certain way and another about knots that are bundled a certain way. When they're mixed together, something transformative happens.

The notebook collages are one work. Together they constitute a project, a category of thought. The collages function in parallel to other bodies of work.

If we imagine the collage pages as having a notational relationship to the other work, it turns the conventional situation on its head since drawing is usually thought of as having a preliminary relationship to painting, sculpture, photography, or film. Here we have collage in that relationship to drawing, which is especially interesting because the drawings are proposals themselves.

The collages are both parallel and preparatory. They contain pictures of things, and the component parts are layered yet separate. The collages are more of a notational thinking using namable elements as reference points.

The drawings are more complicated, more intricate, and can't be taken apart. They are more difficult to describe or clearly identify. Shapes have names, a hexagram or a loop, for example, but they become elements in the picture as subjective phenomena.

Drawing is a direct device for inscription, material evidence of gesture and touch. There is always a diagram, a medium, a surface, an operating principle—the potential powers for imaginary forms and animated pictures.
