

The Theory of the Copy: Henry Fox Talbot and *The Pencil of Nature*

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This paper explores how Henry Fox Talbot's enigmatic mid-nineteenth-century "book" *The Pencil of Nature* staged a key moment in media history. By working through some of the key themes that framed Talbot's conception of the copying process, it is possible to examine a vital moment in the historical drama of mechanical reproduction. In this paper I argue that, departing from Walter Benjamin's formulation of the copy, Talbot's emotional investment in the copying process effectively imbricates the modern image in an affective field of historical memory, securing the meaning of the copy for futurity. *The Pencil of Nature* demonstrates in its relation to images, and to the copying process, a particular mode of collecting, constructing, cultivating, and transferring meaning. Reading *The Pencil of Nature* as a manifestation of lyrical, etymological, and antiquarian modes of nineteenth-century thought, this essay negotiates how Talbot nostalgically and sentimentally positions the reproducible modern image, prefiguring image production systems in modernity and postmodernity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, and Historical Desire



Fig. 1a

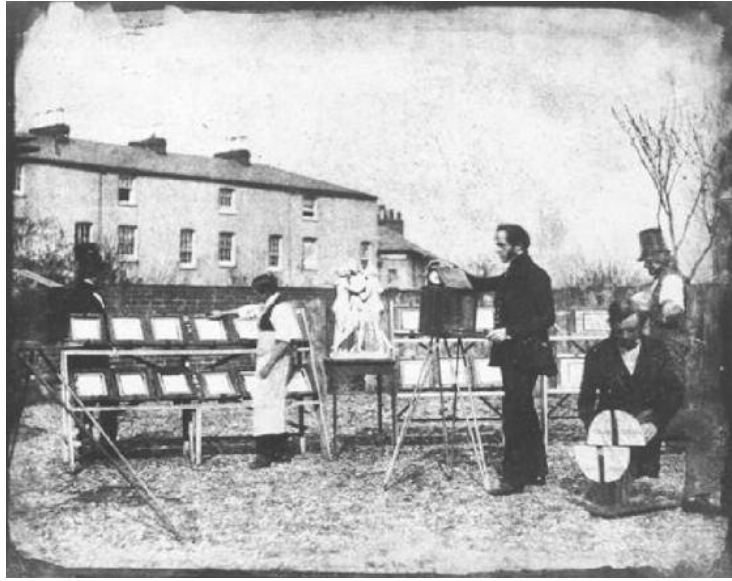


Fig. 1b

Fig. 1a, 1b. *The Reading Establishment*. Attributed to William Henry Fox Talbot. Attributed to Nicolaas Henneman. [The Reading Establishment]. 1846. Salted paper prints from paper negatives. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *ARTstor*. Web. 17 Dec. 2015. Digital Image.

In the above image is pictured Henry Fox Talbot (located on the far right in the tall black top hat) with his team of workers producing copies of *The Pencil of Nature* in 1844. This “book,” that would come to be termed the first book with photographs, was initially produced in limited editions, printed and manufactured by Talbot himself. In *The Pencil of Nature* we are given a unique historical artifact that allows entrance to an early period of image production where it is possible to examine a vital moment in the history of media and in the unique conception of historical being that Talbot brings to the copying of natural and artificial objects. This essay argues that by un-anchoring *The Pencil of Nature* from its relation to “photography” and through investigating the theoretical meaning and import of Talbot’s copying process, a key moment in the history of mechanical reproduction may be observed. To do so it is important to explore the complex authorial relations that Talbot invests in *The Pencil of Nature* and the historical forces that structure the text. Without attending to these interests, the basic meaning of his copying process and the meaning of Talbot’s “book” tends to be wildly at odds with the unique logic, field of scholarship, and interest in historical memory that Talbot worked with. In *The Pencil of Nature* the twenty-first-century reader, scholar, or critic is invited to engage in not the “meaning” of photography but rather, I would argue, the historical desires that produced, molded, and articulated a historically unique representation of language and im-

ages in book form. *The Pencil of Nature* may be understood to function as a tool to position our understanding of the reproducible modern image etymologically, nostalgically, and sentimentally. The following essay will endeavor to elicit how Talbot's text inscribes meaning in the modern image and helps orientate the future history of mechanical reproduction and the nineteenth-century book.

1.2 Talbot, Benjamin, and Meaning

Writing of mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin addresses the photographic negative and how it positions knowledge claims: "From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the authentic print makes no sense" (224). Here Benjamin emphasizes the key to this brief study—that the copying of Talbotian images provides a vital pre-history to the historical drama of mechanical reproduction. I believe that it is possible, writing from Talbot's conception of the copying process, to alter and complicate Benjamin's claims concerning mechanical reproduction by investigating mechanical reproduction within a small, historically local site of intimate, interior copying. I will demonstrate that Talbot, by investing affective relations and a logic of historical processes into the machine process of mechanical production, brings to the practice of mechanical reproduction the ancestral spirit of historical being and the associative logic of affective moods.

In *The Pencil of Nature* there is, I argue, not a single unitary genre at work, but a variety of generic constellations fusing, re-forging, and emanating outward from the sites of knowledge claims and discourses that are involved in the writing, copying, manufacturing, and reading of this archival object. *The Pencil of Nature* is, by turn, a contemplative poetic account of lyrical moments inspired by Wordsworth; the claiming of Lacock Abbey (Talbot's ancestral home) and its environs for a quintessentially small elite of geographers, geologists, antiquarians, and proto-English Historians; an exercise in lay illustration to be used as an archival repository for the naming and cataloguing of historical objects (including cities, sculptural fragments, and architectural studies); a handbook for the birth of a new scientific approach to mechanical illustration and artistic production; an attempt to locate theological or deistic effects in a recognizable and empirically viable point of reception; and an intimate text that borders memoir, familial history, and the unique local heritage of Talbot, his family, and their relation to English history and to posterity.

1.3 Interrogating the "Copy"

The principle fields that this essay will engage with will be concerning the nature of the "copy," Talbot's etymology of images, and Talbot's historical Romanticism. Through these three thematic regimes I will demonstrate how Talbot constructed this text as a longing, recapitulation, and archival expression of historical forms. I will also discuss how Talbot's process of "copying" nature initiated complex relations between knowledge claims, associative poetics, and historical consciousness. Finally I will explore how Talbot's work interrogates the

meaning of “the copy” in relation to media production and economic forms in the nineteenth century.¹

Notable to this essay will be that I am not addressing the technical procedures that go into the calotype process as there are numerous insightful texts lavishly documenting every twist and turn of Talbot’s mechanical processes. This study is also not principally concerned with Talbot’s relation to the history of photography, a history that has been abundantly discussed in both specialist and non-specialist scholarship. By the late twentieth-century theories of Photography’s universal instrumentality as a means of representation and as a structure that informs and creates meaning becomes nearly all pervasive in the way photography as a radicalized new technology structures and informs history. Indeed, much of this scholarship finds its originary historical teleology in Talbot and Louis-Jacque-Mondé Daguerre’s work.² As an alteration or complement to this dominating wave of scholarship concerning (or referencing) Talbot’s work, in this essay I attempt to untangle the threads that comprise Talbot’s “book” and explain how, through an excessive reading of the “photograph,” Talbot’s work in *The Pencil of Nature* has been misdirected to its unitary nature. By locating

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1. My work here may be seen as in dialogue with Vered Maimon’s “Displaced ‘Origins’: William Henry Fox Talbot’s *The Pencil of Nature* and Sonia Hofkosh’s “Early Photography’s Late Romanticism.”
 2. From this early juncture the concept of “photography” would progress, originating in the work of Daguerre and Talbot, to generate a considerable literary and scholarly history over the next centuries. In the production of this history of a new media, photography becomes synonymous with models of veracity, pervading legal and journalistic fields of discursive authority. Photography would eventually be termed the “ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood” (Sontag 68), and as “a contract with what has ceased to exist, a contract with death.” (Barthes 356). Barthes’s and Sontag’s evocative and universalistic method of interpreting photography is a perfect crystallization of the “deep” meaning that came to be associated with the medium by the latter twentieth-century. The scholar Nancy Armstrong in her work *Fiction in the Age of Photography* (1999), states that: “By extending our field of vision and yet presenting consumers with something already seen, the calotype [The name Talbot gives to his photographic print] simultaneously incited and thwarted a historically new desire to make contact with the world itself—a desire for documentary evidence of some person, place, or event—or what might be called archival desire” (15), and “the photograph is the purest of archival documents . . . its seeming frankness and internal unity identify it as an ekphrasis for the archive itself” (16). Armstrong, Barthes and Sontag each emphasize the instrumental power of the photograph in the nineteenth and twentieth-century. Sontag emphasizes the imperial breadth of the photograph, Barthes emphasizes the affective domain of seemingly unending emotion that underlies the photograph’s formal qualities, and Armstrong emphasizes the photograph’s role in the production and distillation of the creation of Realism and generation of “archival desire”—this instrumentality becoming a dominant rhetorical trope, emphasizing the predatory scope, power, and potentiality of the photograph.

Talbot's work as an originary point for the teleology of "photography," the complex historical forces and unique relation to copying nature that Talbot's work engages with have been largely obscured. Talbot is, in these terms, not constructing "photographs" but making copies of natural and artificial being to ground knowledge claims and transmit emotionally charged, historical imaginings onto future generations. By duplicating natural and artificial objects with light on paper, Talbot is concerned primarily with a particular mode of collecting, constructing, cultivating, and transferring meaning.

1.4 Talbot, Mechanical Reproduction, and Media

Talbot's work, situated in the early years of mechanical image production and mechanic mass-production of images, provides a crucial early source code for understanding how to read the nature of media and of mechanical reproduction in the industrial and post-industrial era. Benjamin quotes Valery as to the importance of technological innovation on the arts:

For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art. (217)

Benjamin quickly adds to this sense of revolutionary cataclysm emphasizing how mechanical reproduction denies meaning as aura is lost through the power of technologies that generate copies in place of "unique existence":

One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. (221)

What is perhaps most notable in Talbot's work involved with the calotype process and the photoengraving of his calotypes in book form is exactly how intent he is upon conserving meaning and instilling spiritual authority upon his "copies of nature." In this sense, Talbot's work does not *detach* the reproduced object from the domain of tradition but attaches a plurality of copies *into* the domain of tradition. Talbot is perhaps most centrally focused in *The Pencil of Nature* upon attaching his copying process to tradition. Rather than serving as a "tremendous shattering of tradition" or as a "detaching force" in Benjamin's formulation, I will argue that Talbot's copying process is ultimately a tremendous *unification* of historical being where the copy becomes invested with all of the ghostly residue and sentimental affects of the original. Talbot, by interring the lost world of memory into the modern image, gives to it a sense of futurity. He unifies these discourses in his copies of nature as a process of conservation. Talbot's particular mode of English Romanticism instills in the future of the

“modern” or reproducible image a distinctly antiquarian longing for the past. Talbot, in terms borrowed from John Guillory’s conception of the growth of the media concept, is instilling an organ of tradition with the ability to reduplicate prior forms of meaning.³ Rather than a “shatterer” of tradition, Talbot emphasizes a particular metamorphosis of early-nineteenth-century Romantic rhetoric as he brings to the calotype procedure a particular conception of communication.

2. Etymology, the Late-Romantic Imagination, and the Copy

To read Talbot’s work can be a frustrating, if occasionally enthralling, experience. It is not exactly *reading* in itself since much of the “writing” tends to take the form of short notes, directions to other amateur photographers or antiquarians, and often seems to function as a form of shorthand to help establish and place the representations themselves. The images themselves in *The Pencil of Nature* are also strangely resistant to identification. Many of the figures portrayed in *The Pencil of Nature* only touch on the edge of representation and a bare list of the contents provides ample evidence of the classificatory nature of this collection of images in book form. Talbot chose for inclusion (of twenty-four plates): two busts of Patroclus; seven architectural studies of ancient or noteworthy historical buildings; four copies of art works; one cityscape (of Paris); three catalogs of objects (china, books, glassware); three lyric descriptions of Lacock Abbey; two close studies of textural detail (a bit of cloth and a leaf); and three irregular studies (the open door, the haystack, and the ladder). Only in his study “The Ladder” does he include human beings. This elusive landscape may be navigated with the help of Talbot’s historical period and the particular logic that is built into *The Pencil of Nature*. I would like to begin this process of image-and-text deconstruction by attempting to tease out some of the details of Talbot’s historical method of envisioning the copying process. Seminal to my analysis are three ways of reading Talbot’s copying process.

The first reading is the process of etymological scholarship that Talbot was engaged with in his *English Etymologies*. I believe that Talbot brings with him to *The Pencil of Nature* and to the photogenic process much of the underlying logic of etymological processes *and* that etymological processes of constructing meaning can be used to appreciate how meaning is constructed with the advent of the copied image and its deployment in numerous complex media applications. Etymology as an important way of reading history, of grounding cultural

3. Guillory in “Genesis of the Media Concept” grounds the teleology of media as an aspect of the early attempt to “conceptualize communication (and subsequently the media concept)” (328) in the work of Bacon. I am re-using (or re-mediating) Bacon’s “organ of tradition” as Guillory re-purposes Bacon’s discussion of language and communication. In this essay I am also re-purposing Hegel’s usage of “re-duplication”: “The things of nature are only immediate and single, but man as mind reduplicates himself” (35).

normativity, and of asserting the links between present languages and ancestral languages provides a unique insight into how Talbot's thought functioned in relation to how historical meaning could be (or must be) constructed. The second reading is the role that late-Romantic rhetoric had upon Talbot's historical imagination and how he understood the copying process. In Talbot's case, late-Romantic thought emanated principally from Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, from each of whom Talbot takes an important aspect of his authorial and technological mission.

2.1 The Linguistic Echo-Chamber of the Past: Etymology and the Meaning of Images

In the preface to *English Etymologies* (published by Talbot in 1846, four years after *The Pencil of Nature*) Talbot emphasizes the delights and hidden secrets that the close understanding of the secret history of a word presents for the philologist:

Indeed it often happens that in seeking for the origin of a single word, a much wider field of inquiry opens before the eye, and if carefully pursued, ultimately leads to the most unexpected conclusions, bearing upon the history, belief, manners, and customs of primitive times; and sometimes with such a force of evidence as to leave no doubt whatever of the mind of the inquirer of the occurrence of particular events, or the existence of peculiar customs, respecting which History is entirely silent. (vi)

Translating Talbot's investigation and pursuit of unexpected conclusions, his plates, copied from Nature's hand, lead back through the multiple intimate pasts of the reader or author's English ancestry, English lyric poetic traditions, and ancestral imaginings of the primitive past, emphasizing Talbot's racial, linguistic, and nostalgic vision of antiquity—an antiquity, that through its redolent metaphorical power allows access to paths neither rude nor barren: “nor rude nor barren are the winding ways / Of hoar antiquity—but strewn with flowers.” (*English Etymologies*, front matter). Here Talbot quotes from Thomas Warton's sonnet “Written in a Blank Leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon.” This passage exemplifies Talbot's relation both in *English Etymologies* and in *The Pencil of Nature* to the etymological and antiquarian relationship between the image or word and the historical background necessary to properly unearth its meaning. In Talbot's antiquarian philology, the inner etymological logic of chosen words, signs, or images unlocks the buried debris, artifacts, and resonances of former histories, not in a dry empirical manner of geologic ages or material echoes, but in the lyrical emotional strata of prior civilizations and their primitive roots and proto-cultural markers.

Talbot in *English Etymologies* attempts to unlock the secrets and missing histories of the English language. Talbot's philological work, whether in Ancient Assyrian or with the English language, is establishing a unique machinery of meaning-making: that “meaning,” to be true, right, and natural, must be grounded in a series of prior events, each of which helps produce the yield which is the

contemporary meaning. This is an economy of symbolic desire—where the past must be endlessly re-copied for the present to articulate its image. Talbot, similarly, is engaged in *The Pencil of Nature* with a uniquely English etymology of the image, producing, through the numerous portrayals of intriguing historical monuments, a backward gaze that will orientate the contemporary audience to recognize and understand the nature of the image as it has been copied by his technical method. When Talbot, afraid of giving away his process, sues to maintain the copyright (the right to “copy” as it were), he is not solely attached to an economic or commercial interest, but to a scholarly process of knowledge making that instantiates in the photogenic image ancestral claims to meaning, value, and affective experience.

Talbot powerfully evokes the anxieties and the profound need of philological re-construction of the past. Talbot is concerned with the obscurity of the past and how to ensure that “important words” are fully “illustrated” so that their status as “provincialisms” or “obsolete terms” will be offset by rigorous scholarship: “It is well known to philologers that many of our most important words stand in great need of illustration, the common notions respecting their origin being unsatisfactory, and often manifestly erroneous” (v). In his *English Etymologies* Talbot is intent upon constructing and unifying the meaning of a present word with its multiple histories. To read *The Pencil of Nature* and receive the full residue of meaning that Talbot constructs in the text, one may hold up the often elusive or dry images to the mirror of Talbot’s larger historical plan, particularly in relation to a theory of etymological dialectic and the construction of historical meaning. Talbot channels the needs of this historical will in exaggerated terms:

Etymology is the history of the languages of nations, which is a most important part of their general history. It often explains their manners and customs, and throws light upon their ancient migrations and settlements. It is the lamp by which much that is obscure in the primitive history of the world will one day be cleared up. At present much that passes for early history is mere vague speculation: but in order to build a durable edifice upon a firm foundation, materials must be carefully brought together from all quarters, and submitted to the impartial and intelligent judgment of those who are engaged in similar inquiries. (vii)

The difficulty of transferring etymology to the reading of the text is part of the complex algebra of historical meaning that Talbot builds. The copy, through its elaborate process of meaning-making interposes itself as a medium of historical transmission between the copied image and the viewer/reader. The copy (here the copied image), in this sense, precedes the act of mass-production where meaning, value, and lyric capital are transmogrified by mass mechanical procedures. Here the historical subject is articulated through its ability to read, decode, and construct the historical copy. The pre-modern, undisciplined, gentleman scholar engages not with “true” or “factual” materials, but with evocations of an always-missing fictional historical continuum. In order to build a “durable

edifice” of temporal order, the line of transmission must be constructed, understood, and “copied.” In *English Etymologies* we can see how Talbot attempts to reach to the “primitive” origins of culture and society. In *The Pencil of Nature* Talbot may be seen to construct an etymological plan whereby a symbolic system of meaning incorporates itself in the present. Here classical and medieval pasts penetrate and orient the meaning of present being. Talbot (like mid and late-century Victorian thinkers such as Tennyson, Arnold, Rossetti, Carlyle, Pater, Kropotkin, or Marx) orients the present around a complex logic of prior meanings. Benjamin places early film making as a site of cataclysm and revolutionary alienation from previous eras of “authenticity.” Talbot positions the photogenic copying process within a context of philological excavation and reconstruction.

Talbot is interested in presenting an enlightened, technologically modern contemporary age that is firmly wedded to a larger historical superstructure—an enlightened age following upon primitive source material that may be linked together in a ladder of narrative construction: the nineteenth century’s historical imagination functioning, via Talbot, in another outgrowth of narrative meaning. The gothic medieval, Scots’ revivalist, old Anglo-Saxon, Celtic primitive, Arthurian mythic, late-Roman decadent, pagan polytheistic, uranian erotic, classical democratic, byzantine polymorphic, Arabian exotic or Italian Renaissance provide a working template of historical copies for the nineteenth-century imagination—the present and its mechanical images functioning as the lucrative ghosts of prior vanished economies and potent tools whereby contemporary politics and philosophies may be remade through the copying process itself.

2.2 The Romance of Memory, the Representation of History, and Sentimental Image Making

Talbot’s relationship with Scott’s historical romances is a focal point for understanding how *The Pencil of Nature* would have been produced within its historical moment and how Talbot uses history to ground meaning in his tracings of light on paper. Scott’s emphasis on local knowledge and the “copying” of regional dialectics and local histories provides the model from which Talbot imagines light tracing the likeness of natural phenomena through his photomechanical process of reproduction, remediation, and similitude. Talbot devoted an entire work to Scott, *Sun Pictures in Scotland*. From Scott’s work Talbot inherited a particular Romantic conception of Scotland and of British folk history. Robert Maxwell explicates the importance of Scott’s work for the British antiquarian and for the British historical imagination:

The antiquarian ethos popularized by Scott encouraged historical thinking, then was further amplified by economic and technological innovations peculiar to the period. Under these circumstances, the dissemination of a body of work made out of words helped destabilize traditional text-image relations. (45)

Maxwell here hints at the complex inner relation between desire for the past, for that which is lost, and the need to possess the complete meaning. However, contrary to Maxwell, we can push forward the thesis that Talbot's copy rather than destabilizing "text-image relations" stabilizes the relation between the copied image and the natural image. In other words the image, guaranteed by the mystic belief in the camera's sagacity and its inherent relation to Natural law, produces a new stabilization of the relation between the image and the object itself. As the book with images desired to realize reality, it projected its own reality upon the object and thus the object became something that could be possessed.⁴ The image (via Talbot's historical imagination and the chain of signification that his philological method lends to the realized image) accumulates resonance, sentimental incorporation into a field of affective processes, and rich historical detail.

Scott bestows to Talbot a particular relation to the image of nature and to its historical implications and helps ground the particular image-logic that Talbot utilizes to position sympathy and motivate meaning-construction. In *Sun Pictures in Scotland* Talbot emphasizes this relation as his "book" effectively attempts to mimic Scott's methods, working as a travelogue of Scotland, an imaginary travelogue to Scott's writings, and a homage to Scott's oeuvre.

By dwelling upon the repetition of particular images (Lacock Abbey, images of Scott's Scotland, Oxford, or miscellaneous specimens of archival interest), Talbot solidifies the ghost of memory, crystallizing the emotionally affective memory into a highly particularized, idiosyncratic, elite object that reveals its underlying symbolic system of meaning to those initiated into the particular languages of signification that Talbot's circle possessed. By bringing the phantom of nostalgia into an early specimen of pre-mechanical reproduction, Talbot establishes the image-lineage of the living representation to its deceased, ghostly relatives.

2.3 Wordsworth, Affective Correlations, Emotional States, and the Preservation of Moods

Talbot's images work through an intense etymological relation with the historical thing itself, realized partially through language and as an attempt to anchor the logic of images in a "deep" collective history of a particular sense and sensibility. Talbot in his plate "The Open Door" (see fig. 2) points toward this associative reading of psychological, sentimental, and historical fictions. The image represented here, is not serving as a scientific or empirical description of reality but as the evocation of another living space or point of being where the ghost of personality, subjectivity, and labor is called to by the tracing of light upon paper as the copying process enfolds authorial aura, sentimental nostalgia, and folk wisdom into a singular image.

4. As Phillipa Levine states: "Knowledge became appropriately enough an expression of property" (60).

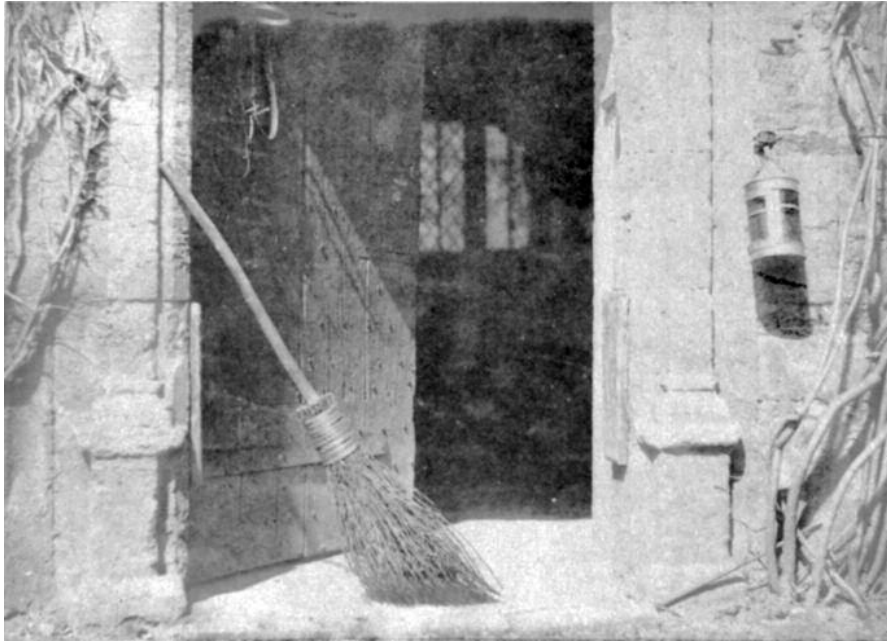


Fig. 2. *The Open Door*. Talbot, William Henry Fox. Before May 1844. Salt paper print from paper negative. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *ARTstor*. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. *Digital Image*.

By locating his images in the field of the autobiographical, the local, and the familiar, Talbot attempts to introduce into the faithful copy of nature the affective logic of the psychological historical self. Wordsworth in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* states:

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded.
(172)

Similarly, as Talbot layers a variety of unique generic forms amongst his “copies of nature,” he attempts to engender a particular conception of historical, temporal, spatial, and economic being.

Wordsworth, by treating isolated figures or objects, teaches habits of association and a methodology for the inculcation of spontaneous depth. Talbot, by organizing the image in a field of longing, nostalgic loss, historical regression, and cloying sentimental intimation, attempts to yoke to the logic of the manufactured archival image an associative field of programmatic meaning. *The Pencil of Nature* teaches how to see the image, how to reproduce the image, how to share the image with one’s individual coterie, and how to market the image. By

bringing the copied image into the most intimate, and universal of settings, Talbot may be seen as naturalizing historical rhetorical structures. Talbot's text tries to teach the complexity of an alchemical ritual and a professional skill-set to a small coterie of like-minded savants, adepts, mechanics, technicians, nobility, and providential Romantic devotees.⁵

Talbot on the first page of his work writes:

The Author of the present work having been so fortunate as to discover, about ten years ago, the principles and practice of Photogenic Drawing, is desirous that the first specimen of an Art, likely in all probability to be much employed in future, should be published in the country where it was first discovered. (2)

Here Talbot addresses the calotype process as a form of "drawing," emphasizing that this is a new "Art," one which will be much "practiced" in the future, and that while possessing universal aspirations it is also supremely related to a particular locale. Talbot emphasizes that the work is now in its "infancy" and that

[i]ts progress will be more rapid when more minds are devoted to its improvement, and when more of skillful manual assistance is employed in the manipulation of its delicate processes; the paucity of which skilled assistance at the present moment the Author finds one of the chief difficulties in his way. (2)

Talbot recognizes the import of this process of duplication and photogenic illustration. He also understands its close relation to engraving and illustration. Talbot attempts to unify mechanistic technology with affective poetry as he imitates Wordsworth in his discussion of the new calotype's relation to the mind and to the remembrance of emotion:

Such, then, was the method which I proposed to try again, and to endeavour, as before, to trace with my pencil the outlines of the scenery depicted on the paper. And this led me to reflect on the inimitable beauty of the pictures of nature's painting which the glass lens of the Camera throws upon the paper in its focus—fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away. It was during these thoughts that the idea occurred to me—how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper. (77)

In this passage Talbot unites Wordsworth's associative poetics with a mechanistic technology that will "copy" the sensation, and, in Talbot's conception of this process, may be able to store not only light or darkness, but affective, emotional impressions as well. Talbot here is not interested in merely copying natural phenomena but in copying mood, and the affective relations that the image produces in the aesthetic experience of natural perception.

5. See Hofkosh's discussion of Talbot and late Romanticism, 296-97.

3. The Copy of History

3.1 *Talbot, the Representation of Persons and Sculptures, Choices of Subject, and his Historical Endeavor*

Talbot, in his “Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art” that precedes the presentation of the plates in *The Pencil of Nature*, concisely anatomizes the “picture” that “light” creates:

The picture, divested of the ideas which accompany it, and considered only in its ultimate nature, is but a succession or variety of stronger lights thrown upon one part of the paper, and of deeper shadows on another. Now Light, where it exists, can exert an action, and, in certain circumstances, does exert one sufficient to cause changes in material bodies. (4)

Talbot grounds this anatomization of “pictures” and light” by stating that he came to this “philosophic idea” while he was not a traveler but a “wanderer in classic Italy” (5). Talbot, in his sketch of the discovery of the calotype process, locates himself as a wealthy, classical enthusiast who is both scientist and romantic wanderer, one who sets his discovery in an exotic land of old culture, and yet who must return to England to realize his scientific project. Talbot invokes the classical to guarantee the historical meaning of the particularly British antiquarian spirit that he brings to the grounds of Lacock abbey, and to the haystacks, book collections, china, and statuary that decorate and culturally inscribe its character, class, and management.

Talbot’s photographs and the accompanying text of *The Pencil of Nature* move back and forth through several generic categories. Talbot states that this process has “no analogy to anything in use before” (76) and then he renders Nature as a benevolent, law-giving entity, suffused with God’s laws. Talbot states that the photographs are “impressed by Nature’s hand; and what they want as yet of delicacy and finish of execution arises chiefly from our want of sufficient knowledge of her laws” (76). Talbot would have the reader “trust to nothing but actual experiment” (80) while “the Camera throws upon the paper in its focus – fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away” (77). Talbot seems to understand this new process not as a mechanical process but as a natural *learning* of Nature’s laws; yet the artist/technician must perfect themselves and their knowledge of this new science if they are to learn her language. The language of Nature, for Talbot, possesses an ineluctably luminous etymological character. The language of Nature may be read backwards through a work of derivative meaning, past objects guaranteeing each other through a chain of signification just as the etymologist’s work moves forward from Ancient Assyrian (in Talbot’s historical purview) to the modern languages of the present. Talbot notates these historical desires and his relation to the classical past by his usage of a bust of Patroclus (see fig. 3). Talbot’s usage of classical statuary emphasizes the way “history” as a malleable and complex nineteenth-century fiction is a key guarantor of meaning in *The Pencil of Nature*.



Fig. 3. *Bust of Patroclus*. Talbot, William Henry Fox. 1842. Salted paper print from paper negative. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *ARTstor*. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. Digital Image.

Talbot emphasizes the importance that the calotype process has for the study of sculpture: “it becomes evident how very great a number of different effects may be obtained from a single specimen of sculpture” (24). Through his usage of this piece of sculpture, Talbot layers multiple levels of meaning to the copying process. In this image he associates the copying process with archival studies, classical history, and the particular story of Patroclus’s death by Hector and Achilles’s ensuing rage. Talbot attempts to convey to the calotype process the spirit of antiquity and to convey to the practical, skill-set of the calotype process the capability of portraying venerated objects. Talbot is intent on showing the reader the special powers of his calotype process for affective illustration of the past and as a way of effectively cataloguing their historical, cultural, and monetary, value. By alternating between the “classical” and the “folk,” between the exotic past and the local past, Talbot brings to the local the Romantic glamour of the global. Talbot’s copy here negotiates the violence of the heroic past and the nostalgic tranquility of the idealized rural past inventing a fictional “history” that is imbued with memory, emotion, and longing.



Fig. 4. *The Ladder*. Talbot, William Henry Fox. Before April 1845. Salted paper print from paper negative. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *ARTstor*. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. Digital Image.

In “The Ladder” (see fig. 4) Talbot briefly engages with the representation of human beings but only in a study that orients itself toward objects and the contemplative association of moods and the delineation of the mechanical process itself. Talbot accompanies this plate with a fascinating discussion of the role that these pictures of human beings will provide:

If we proceed to the City, and attempt to take a picture of the moving multitude, we fail, for in a small fraction of a second they change their positions so much, as to destroy the distinctness of the representation. (42)

Here Talbot succinctly underlines the need to train reality to attain mastery and control or otherwise to fall prey to destruction and the “distinctness of the representation.” To copy the human form is to require discipline and to promise distinction. The indistinct becomes the enemy of the fully realized copy, the individuated modern subject can only be realized through application of a meticulous process that enables the technological and spiritual prolongation of character as realized through this record of ancestral being. The familiar, intimate, and native ancestry of the past transmits its proprietary inheritance for the modern image,

the modern family, and the continuance of character, inheritance, and ancestral class, culture, and genealogical logic. Philology and mechanical image-making are here engaged in the unearthing, cataloging, and untangling of the mysteries of the disappearing past to augment the increasingly individualistic and complex ideological foment of the nineteenth century. Talbot's copy mediates the dialectical relation between the modern individual and its rapid de-collectivization of the modern subject vis-à-vis the effects of modernization.

3.2 How the Dead Construct the Present: Talbot, Lacock Abbey and the Ghost-Image

In "Cloisters of Lacock Abbey" (see fig. 5) Talbot gestures toward the ghosts of prior ages, negotiating in his new "art form" a complex relation to the dead:

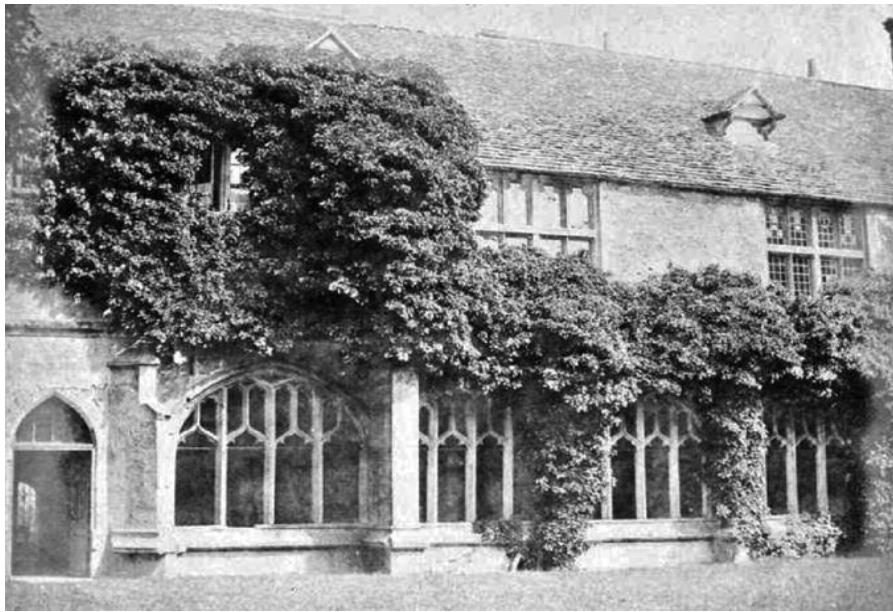


Fig. 5. *Cloisters of Lacock Abbey*. Talbot, William Henry Fox. 1842. Salted paper print from paper negative. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *ARTstor*. Web. 17 Dec. 2014. Digital Image.

Accompanying this plate, Talbot gestures toward the retreating image of hallowed halls, saintly works, religious cults, and feminine anchorites engaged in solemn, penitential works: "Here I presume the holy sisterhood often paced in silent meditation; though, in truth, they have left but few records to posterity to tell us how they lived and died" (46). Talbot brings to this image a sense of historical presence, endowing shadow and light with historical traces. By presenting the image as material object and as a representation of a historical artifact, Talbot links the copying process to religious suffering and ritual temporal orders, tying the modern to the medieval. For Talbot, the ghost-image is the halo of meaning

that surrounds the historical artifact. The ghost of meaning may possibly be seen as the central focus of Talbot's work here, the camera obscura or the artisan's drawing hand merely working as a tool to evoke memory itself, the object existing principally in a field of preceding ages, temporal memorial structures articulating the meaning and representation of natural media. The copying process, by formally eliciting the nature of the original, preserves this ghostly residue of meaning and transfers from the original historical object to the future bearer of resemblance this range of signification. Talbot, by orienting the past as a guarantor of the present, ties technological progress to mysticism, science to divinity, his personal family history to proto-England, and the antiquarian spirit to the marvels of the new and the complex technological and political dynamism of nineteenth-century material and ideological change.

4. Conclusion: Economies of History and Association: The Copy and its Signification

The Spectator's 1844 review of Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* forcibly recognizes the centrality of Talbot's work in the calotype process and its effects, or potential portents, upon multiple economic fields:

The Pencil of Nature affords abundant evidence of the utility of the Calotype process—to the traveler, in fixing the scenes he visits; to the naturalist, in presenting a faithful representation of living and inanimate objects; and to the world at large in preserving the features of those dear to us. Nor should its value to the artist be unnoticed, since the limnings of the Pencil of Nature demonstrates the importance of a due knowledge and observance of the distribution of light and shade in delineating every object. (qtd. in Schaaf 197)

This review immediately recognizes the instrumental nature of *The Pencil of Nature* as an advertisement for a particular path of artistic, economic, and touristic value. *The Pencil of Nature's* utility as an instrument of industry and of pleasure is immediately recognized through the complex scrim of rhetorical tropes, historical allusions, and inside-information that Talbot uses to structure the text. Talbot, as Gentleman Scholar, antiquarian, Assyriologist, scientist, inventor, poet, politician, linguist, and botanist synthesizes in *The Pencil of Nature* the coded germs of each of these species of knowledge. *The Pencil of Nature* thus becomes something other than a book as the relation of text to image becomes a strange manner of synthetic authorship. The copy, for Talbot, is a manifest longing for connection to the past and possession of the future. Without this shared historical discourse of technical, institutional, and social engagement, the "copy" in its new guise would not be "new" and how one reads it would remain elusive.

Talbot's rhetorical style, historical mandate, and nostalgic antiquarian Romantic historicism position the site, portent, and future of the copy. In Talbot's correspondence with Hon. William Thomas Horner Fox-Strangways between the years of 1824 and 1829, this aspect of the Amateur, and the Amateur-Collector is shown in all its intense, proprietary nature:

Dear Henry . . . Wallis has finished your copy of the Madonna for 40 sterling & it has come to me as soon as varnished and dry. What shall I do with it? I will pay him. It is quite worthy of your Zingarella & is the best copy I have seen of the picture. I think it quite beautiful & with the Zingarella will make a beautiful pair. He has a most peculiar talent for copying Correggio. I do not like his Raphaels. There is a good old copy of the fornarina to be sold for 30 Louis. I dare say 15 would secure it, in the house of the man who has the Leonardo. Better than any modern copy I have seen. The old copyists must have had some traditionary skill from the old masters or else they finished their copies by the side of the originals instead of taking them home as they do now. (qtd. in Lloyd 60; italics mine)

In this letter are contained many of the key terms that envelop *The Pencil of Nature*. The “copy” here becomes emphatically the copy of art, and particularly, the copies of great art to be made for decorative purposes that will be sold. The letter illuminates the complex desires that motivated the early-nineteenth-century art collector—the desire for beauty and the desire for “the good copy.” This letter (written some time before Talbot had perfected his calotype process) manifests a fundamental conception of the aesthetic, economic, and cultural value of a highly accurate mode of representation that is not dependent on being a great copyist.

Talbot by copying prior types of media effectively interposes the calotype as a copying method to duplicate (and replace?) prior media forms—forms which themselves acted as copies of “Nature.” Talbot “reduplicates” in the Hegelian sense both objects themselves and the affective moods and memories that are associatively linked to the “originals.” By interposing his calotype process as an intermediary between the “truth” of original historically embedded objects and their representation as copies, Talbot establishes the powerful truth-claims of his procedure. The copying process, by making a copy of a piece of architecture, a collection of books, a page of an ancient manuscript, or a sentimentally evoked scene from peasant life, powerfully notates the complex history of media production that is entangled in Talbot’s work. In Talbot’s words, this copy of a copy is destined to augment antiquarian desire: “To the Antiquarian this application of the photographic art seems destined to be of great advantage” (32).

Talbot’s historical moment helps structure our reading of *The Pencil of Nature*, and is, in turn, particularly useful in understanding the economic and institutional forces at work in writing or reading *The Pencil of Nature*. Talbot’s work in *The Pencil of Nature* was radically conditioned by the deep influence that Talbot’s personal and intimate life had on the material and aesthetic grounding of the work (as an appendage of Talbot’s relation to his wife and mother in particular⁶); and socially and professionally, as Talbot’s circle of friends, colleagues,

6. Robert Lassam describes the interdependence of Talbot and his familial milieu: “Whenever he was away from Laacock [Talbot’s family’s historical home] his wife and assistant continued to make calotypes” (16), and “His mother was especially delighted with all he had achieved . . . It was she who publicized his work and who pushed him into making prints of the photographs she thought would prove popular;

and professional rivals positioned the copying process in relation to science, economics, or art. This is eminently manifest in Talbot's relation to amateur societies and to the concept of the amateur for the production of knowledge in nineteenth-century intellectual milieu.⁷ Amateur Societies functioned as a place where the communal creation of photographic design (in the mid 1850s) could be nurtured and the early years of photographic development could mature and reach fruition.⁸ The Societies (by mass-producing Talbot or other's copying process) produced the movement from hand-made copy of nature to mass-produced and mass-circulated image of reality. Nature here, in its transformation from an organic, mysterious, ancestral dynamic becomes fused with the representation of images guaranteed by the faith in the mechanic process. Talbot's work in *The Pencil of Nature* is ultimately focusing not on a single human relation or upon the image of the past, but upon a shared object, observed by a group of like-minded scholars, allowing each of them to possess the un-possessable. Here the path of flowers is a chain of economic and historical forms, each tied to each. Within this milieu, one can glimpse how the intellectual concerns manifest within *The Pencil of Nature* are emblematic of a particular way of envisioning multidisciplinary, intellectual universality, and late-Romantic historicism permeated by the intellectual promiscuity of a unique group of artist-scientists whose work merges with the outgrowth of entrepreneurial capitalism, technical innovation, and discovery.⁹

Talbot, by bringing together a wide spectrum of historical scholarly lineages in *The Pencil of Nature* and orienting these diverse scholastic methods, extends his work toward a close group of intimate acquaintances (family members, fellow amateurs, notable members of the gentry, rising members of the newly developed bourgeoisie, Queen Victoria herself, and other close contacts, friends, and competitors) and locates the "copy" (and the process of light making copies of itself on paper) as a unique method of communication.¹⁰ Talbot emphasizes the im-

demanding, in one letter, that he 'Pray do some more landscapes or other things from nature'" (16).

7. Phillipa Levine details the significance of these amateur societies for the growth of the social sciences in the nineteenth century. She emphasizes the high degree of shared knowledge and of collegial feeling that permeated these specialized societies (7).
8. See Lori Pauli's introduction to *19th-Century British Photographs from the National Gallery of Canada* for a brief introduction to the Photography Club that initially feuded with Talbot and Buckland's pointed description of Talbot's social network and its rupture in terms of the calotype process (103-116).
9. Levine emphasizes the importance of the polymath, and the informal, yet highly regulated professional scholarly societies that would eventually give birth to professionalized, institutionalized departments in the modern research university.
10. See lists of Talbot's correspondence, Queen Victoria's response to his work, and Herschel's ceaseless involvement in Talbot's artistic, scientific, and entrepreneurial development in Schaaf 147-61.

portance of the copying process as a means of knowing Nature, of assigning meaning and form to History, and of locating the image in a Wordsworthian understanding of affective emotional identification.

The movement from illustration by hand to the photo-mechanical copy and thence to the era of mechanical reproduction and the multiple avenues of control, privatization, systematization, and large-scale mass-production of copies can be found hidden in the unique copying process that Talbot enshrined in *The Pencil of Nature*. Talbot's copying process and its relation to history pulls back the narrative curtain on how the copying process came to inform twentieth and twenty-first-century information duplication. Imaging future histories based on the uniquely Victorian imaging of past histories provides a useful template for how the copy guarantees the correct production of meaning. From cloud computing to standardized practices for electronic personal collections; in databases, library systems, and in museological development; in the ubiquity of personal photography, internet sharing of recipes or technical skill sets, and governmental records—archival desire and the relation to the copy is mobilized and applied as the copying process produces endless new reduplications of the past.

Talbot's work, unlike the early-twentieth-century film that Benjamin deconstructed, exists in and projects a vastly different historical consciousness. *The Pencil of Nature* with its nostalgic, antiquarian ethos, accentuates the difference between Benjamin's high-modernist bomb and Talbot's late-Romantic "path of flowers." The copy here is tied to the unification of history in the creation of Talbot's multi-modal nineteenth-century book and in the affective and associative power that Talbot bequeathed to the copying process.

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