River Of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West, Rebecca Solnit, San Val, Incorporated, 2004, 1417704721, 9781417704729, 305 pages. "Solnit's best book so far" (Chicago Tribune)--a boldly original portrait of the proto-inventor of motion pictures. The world as we know it today began in California in the late 1800s, and Eadweard Muybridge had a lot to do with it. This striking assertion is at the heart of Rebecca Solnit's new book, which weaves together biography, history, and fascinating insights into art and technology to create a boldly original portrait of America on the threshold of modernity. The story of Muybridge--who in 1872 succeeded in capturing high-speed motion photographically--becomes a lens for a larger story about the acceleration and industrialization of everyday life. Solnit shows how the peculiar freedoms and opportunities of post-Civil War California led directly to the two industries--Hollywood and Silicon Valley--that have most powerfully defined contemporary society..

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No film in my camera , Bill Gibson, 2000, Photography, 184 pages. Beginning his 60-year film and photo career at the outbreak of World War II on the deck of the ill-fated aircraft carrier USS Hornet, Gibson lived through some of the most ....

Helios Eadweard Muybridge in a Time of Change, Philip Brookman, Eadweard Muybridge, Marta Braun, Corey Keller, Rebecca Solnit, May 31, 2010, Photography, 359 pages. Photographer Eadweard Muybridge was above all an innovator who played a groundbreaking role in the creative transformation of late nineteenth-century American and European ....

Eadweard Muybridge the father of the motion picture, Gordon Hendricks, 1975, Performing Arts, 271 pages. Fascinating, profusely illustrated biography of Muybridge, whose groundbreaking work in photography unfolded against a backdrop of controversy and murder. Details his stormy ....

E.O. Hoppê’¬Å’s Amerika modernist photographs from the 1920’s, Phillip Prodger, 2007, Photography, 176 pages. A volume of early modernist photography reflects its creator's noteworthy views of the United States in the 1920s as a brave new nation whose grand-scale achievements are ....

Motion Studies Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West, Rebecca Solnit, Feb 1, 2003, , 305 pages. In 1872 an Englishman called Edward Muybridge photographed a horse in California and thereby invented the essentials of motion picture technology. His patron wanted to know if ....


Muybridge's Complete Human and Animal Locomotion: All 781 Plates ..., Volume 1 All 781 Plates from the 1887 Animal Locomotion, Eadweard Muybridge, 1887, Photography, 1597 pages. Volume 1 of 3-volume set includes studies of nude men and women in remarkable stopped-action
photographs by pioneering master photographer. Essential for artists, animators ....

A Book of Migrations Some Passages in Ireland, Rebecca Solnit, 1997, Science, 184 pages. The author describes her experiences traveling in Ireland, and shares her impressions of the countryside.

The captain's wife a novel, Douglas Kelley, Aug 30, 2001, Fiction, 293 pages. Mary Patten, the wife of a clipper ship navigator, finds herself in the world's most dangerous ocean waters off Cape Horn and in command of the ship's mutinous crew when her ....

Muybridge Man in Motion, Robert Bartlett Haas, 1976, Chronophotography, 207 pages.

Highlights and Shadows The Memoirs of a Hollywood Cameraman, Charles Galloway Clarke, Jan 1, 1989, Biography & Autobiography, 254 pages. Charles G. Clarke (1899-1983) was a prolific Hollywood cinematographer from the 1920s through the early 1960s. His autobiography is filled with unique anecdotes and personal ....


The world as we know it today began in California in the late 1800s, and Eadweard Muybridge had a lot to do with it. This striking assertion is at the heart of Rebecca Solnit's new book, which weaves together biography, history, and fascinating insights into art and technology to create a boldly original portrait of America on the threshold of modernity. The story of Muybridge—who in 1872 succeeded in capturing high-speed motion photographically—becomes a lens for a larger story about the acceleration and industrialization of everyday life. Solnit shows how the peculiar freedoms and opportunities of post-Civil War California led directly to the two industries—Hollywood and Silicon Valley—that have most powerfully defined contemporary society.

In the 1870s, at a racetrack built by railroad baron Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge invented high-speed photography. With his camera, he cut time into fractions of a second and laid it out in slices. Never before had human eyes seen a trotting horse distinctly, and the photographs astounded horsemen and artists, especially when Muybridge set the film in motion and the horse reeled fluidly across the screen. Today it is difficult to understand the pictures' impact, but 2001 NBCC finalist Solnit (As Eve Said to the Serpent) vividly recreates the wonder that greeted those primitive movies. Although she points her lens at Muybridge, her true subject is the perceptual revolution of the 19th century when the railroad, the telegraph and the camera transformed the experience of space and time. English-born Muybridge launched his career in 1867 with scenes of Yosemite and San Francisco. He soon began the experiments with "instantaneous" photography that led to the famous motion studies. Except for its most dramatic moments—the murder of his wife's lover, a suit against Stanford—the photographer's life remains obscure. Insistent on writing a biography nonetheless, Solnit pads the book with an account of workers' strikes, an aside on Victorian geology and other irrelevant details. Left to speculate about Muybridge's inspirations, she attributes much to a head injury resulting from a stagecoach accident. Her claims about Stanford and Muybridge as the progenitors of Silicon Valley and Hollywood are equally unsubstantiated. If the book fails as biography, however, it succeeds as a critical essay on Muybridge's art and a reflection on the meaning of space and time. B&w photos.

*Starred Review* Cultural historian Solnit, an original and penetrating thinker with a gift for inventive metaphors and syntactical grace whose previous books include Wanderlust (2000), brings her fascination with the American West, photography, and technology's impact on the environment and culture to the story of the man who made motion pictures possible, photographer Eadweard Muybridge. An Englishman turned California bookseller, superb landscape photographer, inventor, murderer (he killed his wife's lover), and pioneer in stop-action photography and the study of animals, including humans, in motion, Muybridge is fascinating and significant, as is his turbulent
milieu. Solnit recounts Muybridge's strange life and immensely influential work within the context of the tragic war against Native Americans, and ties his achievements to the world-changing repercussions of photography and the railroads in particular, and industrialization in general. Her exhilarating argument leads her to declare that California, home of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, is the true capital of modernism, and to claim that we haven't even begun to come to terms with its legacy: our estrangement from nature and utter immersion in the mesmerizing "river of shadows," the endless stream of images generated via film, video, and computer. Masterly and creative, Solnit's far-roaming synthesis is as unsettling as it is compelling. Donna Seaman

Everyone knows about the inventions of such men as Edison and Marconi, the sorts of inventions that truly brought us to the modern age. It sounds like a stretch to claim that the man who definitively answered the question of whether a trotting horse ever completely leaves the ground also changed the world. However, Rebecca Solnit has written an original biography of the photographer Eadweard Muybridge, _River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West_ (Viking) which centers on how Muybridge, by splitting motion into split-second bits, changed the nature of our perception of time and space in a way that brought us inevitably to Hollywood and to Silicon Valley. She writes, "Muybridge was a doorway, a pivot between that old world and ours, and to follow him is to follow the choices that got us here." As biography, the book is inevitably thin. Muybridge kept no journals and there are few letters, and details about his remarkable life are hard to come by; the basics, of course, are here. Solnit says, "Most of what is known about Muybridge makes him seem a hollow conduit for his work, with only a few vain remarks to personalize the prodigal accomplishments." Rather than biography, as a series of essays on the importance of his work, the book is original and fun.

Muybridge's life and work are inextricably bound with the brand-new state of California, but he was born in 1830 over a family shop in England, in Kingston-upon-Thames. He lit out for San Francisco, where he worked as a bookseller. He made a name for himself in photography, however, which was a relatively new and demanding art. He was among the first to photograph the wilderness of Yosemite, using huge plates for images that are still dramatic. Muybridge stepped into fame with a commission from Leland Stanford, one of the famous robber barons who had made his fortune on the railways. Stanford had a hobby of raising race horses and he wanted to do it all as scientifically as possible. Some horsemen maintained that trotting horses always had at least one foot on the ground, while Stanford maintained that the horse became airborne in each stride; neither side had any way to demonstrate its position, for although one could stare at trotting horses eternally, the motion was simply too fast to make out. There is a legend that Stanford had a big bet on the issue, but Stanford was not a betting man, only one who wanted to raise and race horses scientifically. Muybridge had already had a commission to photograph Stanford's house and properties, and was asked to consider the problem of the trotting horse. Muybridge was instrumental in technological breakthroughs to make the famous series of photos happen, involving film and shutter speed, as well as the development of a way to trigger a set of cameras at just the right time. Solving the technology was only a minor part of his contribution; he went on to run the photographs together so that they became a loop of action, the forebear of the movies. Muybridge's work was so startling that it was denounced .... and cartoon parodies were printed showing a horse's legs in "authentic" wildly impossible positions. His subsequent studies of other animals and humans in motion are still in print, still a vital resource for artists.

Solnit has used the life of Muybridge to gather information on widely dispersed subjects that she ties into the biography with wonderful facility. Wyatt Earp, Mary Pickford, and Thomas Edison are all here. There are digressions about the invention of the time zones, the resettlement and slaughter of the Indians, Hewlitt-Packard, and much more. Solnit's wide-ranging account makes it feasible that Muybridge was the father of the moving image, and that from his work descends the age of images in film, television, and internet. Read more &rsaquo;

Rebecca Solnit has created a provocative masterpiece! This is not a simple biography about one of the great innovators of the field of photography. It is a richly, intellectually layered work that explores the big ideas of time and our relationship to it; the fusion of politics, science and industry in the 19th century; and links today's Silicon West to what we call the Wild West of our past. She possesses
exceptional writing skills. This is book well worth reading by those seeking inspiration to invent the future, or for those who wish insight into the concept of progress.

Rebecca Solnit achieves two things in this book. First, she gives us a vivid portrait of a pioneer photographer, despite the paucity of biographical detail available to her, and spells out the significance of his achievement. Secondly, she evokes the perceptual universe of the 19th century. Solnit encourages us to imagine what it must have been like to see for the first time that which is too fast for the eye to discern (such as the pattern of water droplets in Muybridge's motion studies); or to travel for the first time at a speed that removes the traveller from her surroundings (train travel); or to receive news of an event as it happens (the telegraphic announcement of the transcontinental railroad link).

Like many people, I had seen Muybridge’s motion studies before, but had never considered the man behind the pictures. Solnit presents a compelling portrait of a man who is at the same time probably certifiably nuts, a genius years ahead of his time, a lousy husband and father, and a murderer. As Solnit points out, his groundbreaking work was really the basis for motion pictures and much of other technology we take for granted today.

I wasn't especially interested in Muybridge, but this book is a good deal more than that. Though not stinting on detail, Solnit's writing and intellectual abilities provide a grasp of the transformations of time and space that occurred in the past century and a half; she addresses, and conquers, the challenges of making another age vivid and profound as has no book I've yet encountered. “She writes like an angel,” one critic said, and it's quite true; through her supple and sensitive prose she reflects on Muybridge's life and times, examining them from every angle, and in so doing gives a clinic in how history of any kind may be most richly approached.

Certainly much more than a biography, this book on Muybridge is full of other subjects. Solnit angle on time is quite special, as it comes back again and again. We tend to forget how everything has thoroughly changed since the victorian era. This book confronts our acquired attitudes and what we take for granted today.

Few authors have tied together the many facets of the post civil war, pre-modern West as well as Rebecca Solnit. Her literary vehicle is a man as strange as his name, Eadweard Muybridge. Of course you can also read this book to learn about the early days of photography and the technology which preceeds motion pictures. For either reason this is an excellent biography and will serve the inteerests of many readers.

River of Shadows "Solnit's best book so far" (“Chicago Tribune”) is a boldly original portrait of the proto-inventor of motion pictures. The story of Muybridge—who in 1872 succeeded in capturing high-speed motion photographically—becomes a lens for a larger story about the acceleration and industrialization of everyday life. 320 pp. Full description

River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West is a work of striking beauty and unique perspective. Ostensibly a biography about Eadweard Muybridge, a photographer and cinema pioneer, River of Shadows delivers much more than that. Its illustrations alone make it worthy of review; the first chapter features a motion study image of a nude Muybridge in the bottom right-hand corner of each page. When the pages are rapidly turned (as in a flip book), Muybridge appears to be running.

His trajectory ripped through all the central stories of his time—the relationship to the natural world and the industrialization of the human world, the Indian wars, the new technologies and their impact on perception and consciousness. He is the man who split the second, as dramatic and far-reaching an action as the splitting of the atom.

Her sweeping narrative situates Muybridge within the history of California as a place of technological innovation and epitome of westward expansion and reinvention. Solnit, a highly original voice with an eloquent prose style, has published numerous works focusing on California artists, the American
West, and landscape. River of Shadows benefits from her keen understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history and reflects back on the author’s other subject interests.

Solnit is a generalist. While her approach to Eadweard Muybridge's life and work may not completely satisfy those seeking a definitive biography of the man, she offers a larger context for Muybridge and his accomplishments. River of Shadows transcends the narrow audience of photographic and cinema aficionados and engages those with broader cultural, historical, and philosophical interests. And readers have responded favorably, with book sales nearing 110,000 at last count, the Village Voice and Los Angeles Times voting it one of the best nonfiction works of 2003, and the National Book Critics Circle nominating it for its Award in Criticism.

Solnit avoids tediously compiling the biographical details of Muybridge's life, preferring instead to illuminate only its most auspicious and revealing episodes. She sketches a portrait of his middle-class youth in rural England of the mid-nineteenth century, a time coinciding with the development of three transformative technologies that paved the way for worldwide industrialization and personal innovation: railroads, telegraphy, and photography. Muybridge arrived in the United States in his early twenties and immediately embarked on a journey of self-reinvention, positioning his commercial forays into book and print sales as "leisurely" pursuits and evolving his name from Edward James Muggeridge to Edward Muygridge, then Edward J. Muybridge, then Helios, and finally the patrician Eadweard Muybridge.

Two violent personal incidents detailed by Solnit provide a complicated view of the artist. In 1860, Muybridge suffered a serious brain injury as the result of a gruesome stagecoach accident and, according to contemporary accounts, was a changed man thereafter. Solnit compellingly argues the link between Muybridge's brain injury and the distinct artistic style and mode of technological innovation he exhibited thereafter. She also charges the brain injury for the second tragedy of Muybridge's life: his 1874 murder of Harry Larkyns, the lover of his wife, Flora. In a bizarre turn of events, Muybridge was acquitted for the murder, despite his plea of not guilty by reason of insanity. Whatever the etiology of his psychological problems, Muybridge's drive not just for self-transformation but for self-preservation cannot be denied.

Muybridge's estimable genius for commercial opportunities and self-promotion showed itself most clearly in his relationship with Leland Stanford, former California governor, founder of Stanford University, and funder of Muybridge's historic motion studies, which Solnitviews as the turning point in his life. Stanford and Muybridge were the perfect odd couple. Stanford was a wealthy railroad man and "scientific horseman" interested in horse breeding and equestrian gaits. He initially commissioned Muybridge to photograph his prize-winning trotting horse, Occident, to solve a popular debate about whether trotting horses ever...

The world as we know it today began in California in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This extraordinary assertion is at the heart of Rebecca Solnit's brilliant new work of cultural history. Weaving together biography, history, and fascinating insights into art, technology, landscape, and philosophy, Solnit has created a boldly original portrait of America on the threshold of modernity. During a period of feverish creativity that commenced in 1872, Eadweard Muybridge succeeded for the first time in capturing and reanimating high-speed motion on film—the crucial breakthrough that made movies possible. He also continued his series of breathtaking photographs of the monumental landscape of the American West, served as official photographer of the grueling war against the Modoc Indians, and, in a blaze of publicity, stood trial for the murder of his wife's lover. In Solnit's taut, compelling narrative, Muybridge's life becomes a lens for a larger story about the transformation of time and space in the nineteenth century. With dazzling erudition and a rare mastery of the interlocking histories of art, technology, politics, and commerce, Solnit shows how the peculiar freedoms and opportunities of post-Civil War California led directly to the two industries—Hollywood and Silicon Valley—that have most powerfully defined the contemporary world. River of Shadows Solnit's most captivating book yet-wide-ranging in its allusions, daring in its connections, always surprising in its conclusions.
Rebecca Solnit writes extensively on photography and landscape. She is a contributing editor to Art Issues and Creative Camera and is the author of three books. She has contributed essays to several museum catalogues including Crimes and Splendors: The Desert Cantos of Richard Misrach and the Whitney Museum's Beat Culture and the New America. She was a 1993 recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Eadweard Muybridge has become a cliche of art museum fare. You know the genre: old black-and-white strips of a man (usually naked) walking, a woman (often also naked) pouring water, a dog running...who was this man? Why did he take so many thousands of strips of objects in motion? If we think hard, we may recall that he settled a bet: Does a trotting horse ever lift all four legs off the ground? Yes, we recall, it does, and Muybridge provided the evidence. Thus satisfied, we cast him back into the recesses of our minds.

Here's a salient fact: Muybridge's employer, for whom he resolved the horse question, was named Leland Stanford. When Muybridge first encountered the problem, the necessary photographic technology simply did not exist. His photographs opened new scientific and philosophical questions, not unlike Harold Edgerton's decades later. Had he never met Stanford, he might have already secured a small place in photography's pantheon. He suffered from a life-changing (and possibly brain-affecting) accident, murdered a man, conducted studies of clouds, presented one of the most honest and enlightened views of the West, may have helped inspire Modern art, and conducted later work that clearly inspired the story-board of the cinema.