Photography in the Middle: Dispatches on Media Ecologies and Aesthetics

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2.3 | I am Muybridge
Eadweard Muybridge retired to Kingston-upon-Thames in his native England at the age of 67, giving sporadic talks and lectures but no longer involved in photographic experimentation. What we believe to be his last public appearance, a lecture to the Society for Ontofabulatory Research, took place on 15th October 1897. This event occurred during a busy period for Muybridge as he prepared the publication of two books, Animals in Motion and The Human Figure in Motion. Yet, for whatever reason, the lecture has been virtually expunged from official histories. Thankfully details of his talk are preserved in a series of notes and impressions taken by members of the audience and since collected by Society archivists. The accounts concur that the auditorium chosen for the lecture, which offered seating for 300, in fact played host to an audience of almost double this number, on what was an unseasonably warm evening. It is notable, however, that the accounts of the lecture itself — excerpts of which follow below — prove to be somewhat contradictory.

LETTER from A.H. to Phoebe Green

Dearest Phoebe,

I promised to write and here it is, but I shall be brief as I am weary from the events of the day. I was press-ganged, you see, into attending Muybridge’s lecture for your brother’s Society. Muybridge, that’s right — still standing and still as downright peculiar! The strangest lecture it was… much of it has receded into fog already, though it concluded but a couple of hours ago. I sat next to a delightful woman, Miss Alice Johnson. She is in her thirties, I would say, and quite a prominent member of that other lot, the Society for Psychological Research. She is Mrs. Sidgwick’s secretary, don’t you know, and co-authored her Report on the Census of Hallucinations a while back. Do you recall it? How many sane and decent members of the British public have experienced waking hallucinations? Answer: 10 percent. Startlingly, many of these events are reported to coincide quite exactly with accidents, deaths and so on. The one who suffered the accident appears and speaks to the poor soul afflicted with the phenomenon. Alice was also involved in the mysterious Eastbourne experiments and tells me she was the first to spot so-called ‘cross-correspondences’ (that is, when the same phrases, images and puzzles occur to several different mediums simultaneously — spreads
like a virus, she led me to believe). You might ask why she might find
diversion in Muybridge’s routine, but she was, in fact, director of the
Balfour Biological Laboratory for Women at Cambridge for a few
years and has an acute interest in animal morphology. In fact, there’s
more to it, I suspect. Muybridge’s lecture took an odd turn into wa-
ters much closer to her more recent concerns. It seems to me, now
that I mention it, that a lot of what Muybridge was venturing actu-
ally tied up with topics psychical. Alice was most animated to see his
new slides… Personally, I regret the absence of the moving pictures,
though they really are ten a penny these days, I suppose. Guess who
Alice came with? One was that Mudge fellow, Eyeless Bill (he dis-
trusts me, I must confess). The other was the Frenchman, Bergson!
More later, Phoebe, for I cannot keep my eyes open. I must sleep. I
hope I will not dream of those last slides Muybridge showed us…

Till tomorrow...

LECTURE NOTES of Miss Pamela Coleman Smith
We have been sun worshippers, knowing him as the great god He-
lios, as he who drives his shining chariot across the earth. Tonight
he reveals himself as Charon, ferryman of Hades, the son of an un-
holy union between darkness and the night. His filthy form — mag-
nificently repulsive, gloriously terrifying! — materializes before us,
a cloudy matted beard hanging from his chin, a bedraggled cloak
suspended from his shoulders, a crooked staff in his firm hand. He is
ancient now, but possesses a dark vitality. And his eyes! Those eyes
burned in their sockets and I knew I should not dare meet them, yet I
could not resist. The particulars of his talk are lost to me. I remember
only an image, a dim lantern slide glowing weakly in the cavernous
auditorium: a dark mass of trees somewhere in California’s Yosemite
Valley, white mountains in the background. A blasted tree curves its
way up the left hand side of the frame and a black river cuts through
the land. Styx! It is here, in these dismal waters, that he reigns. Other
gods fear this middleness but its harsh flows render him invulnerable,
invincible. In the image, he stands at the edge of a wooden frame that
extends from the Stygian banks of horror. The lone crew of his vessel,
he grips an oar with which he might steer a path through the void.
He is conveyor, a link, a mediator of time and space, of trajectories
of existence. He exists in the middle, in a threshold that remains immanent to itself. He connects us to that which remains inaccessible.¹

LECTURE NOTES of Mr Frederick Flash

Mister Muybridge, Helios, the old photographer, strode in precisely on time, trailing a faint chemical scent behind him, and looking older and more haggard than his years. His visage was positively mage like, his jagged white beard set against the dark tone of his overcoat (which, even in warmth of the evening, he chose not remove), his deep set, intense eyes darted about the rapt audience. In spite of appearances, though, he is energetic, fit. He paces as he talks, continuously. And in spite of his frankly rather odd accent, he commands attention. Initially, though, he appeared somewhat bored by his own material.

In his introduction, the Society’s chair had attempted to offer an interpretation of Muybridge’s images as scientific portraits, mechanisms for newly recognizing and comprehending subjects, identities, and bodies. He told us that they expressed universal properties, an essential humanity through which we might reconsider our selves as individuals in our differences and sameness. He did not get far with this introduction before Muybridge brusquely waved him aside and launched into a perfunctory presentation aimed at explicating his electro-photographic investigation of consecutive phases of muscular actions. On this evening he chose to dispense entirely with the Zoopraxiscope in favour of lantern slides, explaining that he wished to show sequences as individual images and as a grid. Photographic images, he explained, are not simply of something, they do something, they have a function. And so, 10ft high on the auditorium wall, we were shown gridded (and, I must admit, rather titillating) images of athletic men and ethereal women. The activities of the nude or slightly draped men were often productive — bricklaying, blacksmithing, shoveling, heaving boulders — while the activities of nude

¹ Virgil, The Aeneid (London: Penguin, 2003), 121–22; Philip Brookman, Eadweard Muybridge (London: Tate Publishing, 2010). The image to which Smith refers is Muybridge’s Charon at the Ferry (21), 1867, originally presented as two albumen silver prints on studio card.
or diaphanously draped women were less easy to define — skipping, dancing a pirouette, walking and flirting a fan, pouring water, getting into bed, turning around in surprise and running away, carrying a cup of tea. Though Muybridge announced these images clearly and referred carefully to their various features without hesitation, it was clear that his mind was elsewhere. He ignored two fawning questions from the floor and, at one point losing his train of thought entirely, muttered bitterly about the loss of many of his images to a warehouse fire.

Of course, that our speaker for the evening was something of an eccentric hardly proves to be an uncommon trait in those that have stood before the collected members of the Society. Nor is his eccentricity especially surprising in this instance, given the somewhat infamous events of his past and the well publicized images of his risk taking ventures. However, Mister Muybridge seemed to cultivate a strange physical relation to his photographic material. As he spoke, he frequently wandered into the beam of the projected lantern slide, pausing in the centre and causing the photographed images to overlay his own body. It was almost as if he knew that his face was overlaid with facial images — faces of so many stern athletes, so many vacant ladies. On one occasion the effect was genuinely unsettling, though difficult to describe — for a brief moment what I saw appeared to be not simply the image of one head projected on top of another but Muybridge's own head transformed, dismantled, its heretofore imperceptible qualities...released.

It was, though, only when he began presenting images that were aberrations from the ideal, or tended more toward the grotesque— contortionists, amputees, the obese— that his mood shifted. The duration for which each image was displayed notably decreased, the velocity of the evening seemed to accelerate. His eyebrows twitched, he gesticulated more wildly. The body is 'overcoded', he told us, its deviance from patterns of conformity is restricted. In his photographs the grids appear to stand in for these patterns, for machines which restrict and delimit bodily perception of the world. The grids reveal that these mechanisms do not simply stop at the body itself but extend into the landscape, into a predefined, pre-photographed world in which the body operates. This, he insisted, means
that a portrait of the human cannot be restricted to the human. It must also seek to express the human’s ‘incompleteness’, its entanglements (by this point there were murmurs of confusion, perhaps incredulity, from certain sections of the audience).

If the majority of the lecture took the form of a tired performance, its finale was pure phantasmagoria. Here, Muybridge was fully animated, summoning the audience to a hush. Without fanfare, he introduced work that had never been shown before — indeed, before this evening it was generally thought that he had retired from photographic experimentation altogether. But here he revealed a bizarre late turn in his work. There can scarcely have been an individual in the auditorium unaware of Muybridge’s near death experience as a passenger on that ill-fated mail coach. And it is unthinkable that anyone would have anticipated his strange response to that crash, his recreation. I can but describe the images. From the way it was arranged, the coach appeared to have swerved violently, tipped over, and sustained considerable damage. Here, though, Muybridge and his group of assistants had not staged the crash in San Francisco or some other part of the ‘wild west’, but in what he announced as Kingston upon Thames high street. Some of the images set the action against a familiar grid, but in others the grid was absent and the mundane goings on of Kingston life interrupted Muybridge’s conventional scientific aesthetic. A number of bemused spectators were shown crowding around the crash site — a woman smoking, a police officer, a child with a balloon and ice cream gawping at the broken vehicle. A butchers shop and ophthalmic opticians could be seen in the background. Surprisingly, for an imaging technician so associated with precision, these images were poorly exposed, their details were imprecise, not quite clear. More shocking is that, a few feet in front of the wreckage, and barely perceptible in a portion of the image rendered almost entirely white, lay the naked figure of Muybridge himself, contorted on the cobbles, his luminous body entangled with remnants of a buckled wheel, parts of a door wrenched off its hinges, and the twisted figure of a horse, all four of its hooves lifted off the ground. The pro-

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2 See plateau 7 of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. 
jected image of Muybridge showed a face at once vividly contorted in pain and radiantly ecstatic. Helios.

The wizard standing before us jabbed at his clicker so quickly that the projectionist could not keep up. At the time it seemed to me (and, I would wager, to the rest of the audience) that this series of images had more resemblance to tableaux vivant than consecutive phases of a single occurrence, and yet the images also resonated with the power of a crash — with the force of impact, with the demolition of solidity — more so than the flickering images of a zoopraxiscope, more so than the cinematographic images made by those otherwise brilliant Frenchmen. As he moved to a second series, I was briefly overcome with a sort of waking concussion — double vision, a loss of taste, loss of smell. Here, in a similarly overexposed portion of the image Muybridge’s assistants (also naked) were shown lifting his body — his bodies — from the wreckage and placing him onto a stretcher, their movements and gestures formally recorded in a sequence as apparently banal as that of the woman walking, turning and ascending stairs we saw earlier this evening. Now, though, it seems clear that phases occurring in the act of turning around — turning, probing — can operate against the exigencies of the present, can invoke nonhuman temporalities, can photograph the so-called future, can accelerate the dismantling of the face, of the body, before the shutter clicks. It’s an old photographer’s trick.³

³ ‘There was a small wound on the top of my head. When I recovered each eye formed an individual impression, so that, looking at you, for instance, I could see another man sitting by your side. I had no taste nor smell, and was very deaf. These symptoms continued in an acute form for probably three months. I was under medical treatment for over a year.’ Muybridge, cited in Brian Clegg, The Man Who Stopped Time: The Illuminating Story of Eadweard Muybridge — Pioneer Photographer, Father of the Motion Picture, Murderer (Joseph Henry Press, 2007), 26–27.

FROM THE MAGICAL DIARY of Mr Conrad Paxton⁴

This evening, I attended, as honoured guest, the great Stretcher’s lecture to the Society of Ontofabulatory Research. Helios! This Giant, like the first Titans, has fallen and here he announced it! He distanc-
es himself from his moving pictures at precisely the moment they are seized and championed by the new immortals, the upstart Gods of Olympian filmed entertainment! An awful Titanomachy has already been fought and lost — I fathom the enciphered meaning of those final most splendid pictures of the coach accident. Yet still, he lives and is truly immortal! And there is yet an energy and an invention which he is compelled to pour forth, a last flourish before a long and necessary silence. The Titan, the Shaman, presents, in compendium, the work of a lifetime because he is mindful of the question of legacy. The body — his body — is removed from the catastrophe to be embalmed, preserved and packaged for its future transmission. Tonight, though, we witnessed plural bodies. Just so, there are, of course, plural legacies. There are legacies for the masses and legacies for the Initiated. We, the Initiated, know that, as operations of the Son of Ouranos, God of Magic, the Titan’s studies in motion are barbarous evocations of forces with multifarious applications. They side-step the rational and the conscious, tunneling holes in the wake world. The numbered gridding of humans and animals, frozen in time and space, only stands in for (and distracts the unwary observer from) a more subtle web, spun to detain and harness forces more profound, more mutative and acrobatical than the arithmetic powers of mere calculation and accumulation.

There is much he has not shown. Helios plans to bequeath most generously of his work and inventions to the good people of Kingston. But the other bequest — those unseen materials — will comprise his gift to me. The iceberg beneath the tip. Helios titillates the masses with — for example — his composition of the weird sisters brandishing their broomsticks by the emissions of the fumaroles of San Francisco’s Geyser Canyon (to say nothing of the devils and glyphs scratched onto various negatives already exposed to the public domain), but of the weirdness that came after, all is shrouded. This is merely a crumb of the riches promised in the shadow bequest. Moreover, he has spoken to me — in extension of this bequest — of his plans, projects to conclude his life’s experiment, and here I divulge these in this magical record.

Project the First: Insect Events. Helios proposes a further and final battery of motion studies which shall engineer sequences of
images of the movements and gestural life of insects. Ostensibly, as a pragmatic matter of attracting funding, this is in furtherance of the dream of human flight. There shall be the moments of flight in winged insects — flies, dragonflies, butterflies and moths and so forth. However, away from the light, there shall also be studies of the vibratory dimension of insect life, of the action of the stridulatory organs of the crickets, grasshoppers and various beetles. There shall, of course, also be wriggly worms and undulating serpents. But further on, and deeper, there shall be studies of the motion of other, less prosaic Animalia. Nothing that walks upon the earth, but rather things that crawl, slither, slide, totter, twist, squirm and giggle in ways scarcely conspicuous in the world we know.

Project the Second: Helios ushered me into his rooms to proudly present the Book that he has begun. It is a book of scraps, an assemblage of press clippings, reports, images, assorted dispatches and documentary materials which he has amassed over the course of his career. I called it his Book of Vectors, and he approved. The Book constitutes an exploded view of my Father’s genius. But it is many things — an illustration of components, a fabulation of a life, an authentic grimoire designed to conjure time and space, to tip them off their rails and catch and ride them as they propel all things into unknown infinity. This is a Book that gives the world a different origin and a different cause. It is a Book that will make things happen. Here will ultimately be a diagram of technical-magical practice that Helios envisages will shatter the modern world, the world of mundane industry. Behind the sensory affordances made possible by industrialized nature, industrialized time and space, is another realm, born of a third nature, time and space in triplicate (and more). This is the secret of my Father’s life and work. His whole endeavor has been a magic of movement, force and vector. Far from merely establishing an art of conjuring movement of pictures, he has achieved access to

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5 Muybridge’s Scrapbook, begun in 1894 but worked on in earnest from 1897, is the focus of Stephen Barber’s *Muybridge: The Eye in Motion* (Chicago: Solar Books, 2012), in which the book is described as an ‘anti-temporal grimoire’. Barber also discusses the ‘myth’ of Muybridge’s garden-simulacrum of the Great Lakes.
another, more chaotic and diabolical, movement beyond picture.⁶ A portraiture of vectors and bodies in motion rather than the banality of the frontally posed human face (from which Helios has unremittingly swerved all his career). This is the true meaning of Helios’ Flying Studio! Flight from the mundane into and upon the winds blowing through other dimensions of reality. Inconspicuous powers brewing in the spaces between the things we can ordinarily see.

Project the Third: The Titan’s Garden. The Book complete, my Father’s final role will be gardener of a fantastical variety. It will involve strenuous labour but he is determined it shall, from start to finish, be solely the work of his own muscle and sinew. He has schooled himself in the Theory of Gardens, beginning with Cicero’s De Nature Deorum (Of the Nature of the Gods) and plowing through a number of Renaissance authorities.⁷ In Cicero’s scheme, the sowing of crops, forestry and invention of irrigation techniques are all considered to constitute the creation of a second nature within the first nature of the Gods. This is the landscape of human infrastructures. Renaissance writers, going further than Cicero, proposed the idea of terza natura, a third nature proper to the project of the garden. To garden, as it is held by the Initiated, is to practice an occult art, to draw out the fantastical and the weird within the natural, to marshall and fashion the action of nonhuman forces in service of the glory of Initiates. To garden is to evoke the power of the weed, of fruiting, fungal bodies, as much as flower, grass and tree. For the satisfaction of the uninitiated, Helios plans to reconfigure his garden as an exact scale model of the Great Lakes of North America, but the true core of the project will comprise the interment of a germinative machine. My Father plans to bury a homunculus of himself…

LECTURE NOTES of Prof. William James
He spoke of images ostensibly presented to us on lantern slide, but they were images perceptible only to the man himself — to my eyes

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⁶ In The Vorrh (Croydon: Honest Publishing, 2007), B. Catling imagines Muybridge’s art and science to involve the search for a ‘causeway around picture’.
the projection screen simply throbbed with a prickly light, I could
detect no form within its intense field no matter how convincingly
Muybridge fired his clicker. Indeed, I cannot express what I saw to-
night by using words I would normally call upon to describe visual
phenomena. For the duration of Muybridge’s talk, the entire audito-
rium was bathed in pure light. After he had been speaking for perhaps
twenty minutes, my vision simply extinguished, I no longer found it
possible to sense whether my own eyes were closed or open.8 To me,
I seemed that Muybridge’s voice had enveloped the room, it came
from everywhere, and it was clear that I was not the only one experi-
encing such symptoms. Amidst a succession of startled shuffling, low
moans and occasional gasps from the audience, his voice announced
that the indiscernible images had been selected from two sets. The
first was produced half way across America, during a journey from
north Texas to an army infirmary at Fort Smith. The second was pro-
duced in Napa County jail.

Of the first, Muybridge described images that claim to show the
lower Cross Timbers, a narrow stretch of ancient woodland — in
places not fifteen miles wide — cutting off direct communication
between the interior prairies and the grasslands of the Great Plains.
He spoke at length about this dense, deciduous zone, about this slim
thicket of oaks. Inadequate for farming, unsuitable for lumber pro-
duction and unfriendly to travellers, the terrain has so far remained
imperceptible to the human desire for built forms, to the production
of second nature. It remains a middle ground, he told us, a hiding
place for packs of animals, a space used by native Indians in which
to move undetected. But as an unconscious survivor of the Butter-
field Overland Stage, Muybridge himself had journeyed undetected
through this space.9 In the middle, he had disappeared, he had be-

8 Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and

9 We estimate that Muybridge’s unconscious journey would have taken him from
north Texas (some sources state that the accident occurred north of Fort Worth,
others suggest it occurred somewhere near the Brazos river) through Oklahoma
and just over the border to Fort Smith in Arkansas. In Muybridge’s own account,
he says that upon coming to at Fort Smith, he found himself 180 miles away from
the site of the coach accident. This would probably place the incident somewhere
come a movement, he had dissolved, merged with the forces that surrounded him. It was in this chaosmosis, he recounted, that his present became overwhelmed by future potentials. It was here that his desire to transform the present according to such futures took hold and started to accelerate.

He told us of his reawakening at Fort Smith. Coming to in an infirmary bed, he felt himself poised between the no longer and the not-yet. Days after the crash, after his damaged body had been transported nearly two-hundred miles north, after he had first regained consciousness, the ‘arrangement’ of life was different to before. He had lost himself — his self (and I can only say that I believe I experienced something similar in the auditorium tonight). Life, for Muybridge, is now mobile, multiple, it no longer bears his name. His characteristic refrains — ‘I am Muybridge’, ‘My name is Muybridge’ — are at once points of order amidst this turmoil and expressions of its instability, of the fracturing of everything circumscribed by such refrains, statements of his nonexistence in any recognizable form. And yet, this sorcerer that stood somewhere before us was able to conjure with life’s multiplicity, to perform tricks with it. The images he presented to us this evening can be seen only in the periphery, by seeing beyond what can be seen, as one might imagine a conjurer to see. For a moment, I believe I glimpsed such images, magnifications of something secret, images that catch life in the middle, spectrally.

Finally, the voice that was at once a cloak and a flock, told us of the second set of images, the examples of which were again elusive, awash in a field of vivid brilliance. He claims they were produced in a cell at Napa County jail, in a space suspended between death and life, a space in which all possibilities existed, in which nothing was excluded except stability. It was written correspondence between his wife and Major Harry Larkyns that had communicated their affair, and Muybridge had travelled to Yellow Jacket Mine late at night in

in the south east part of lower Cross Timbers. The dendrological information on this area is courtesy of The Ancient Cross Timbers Consortium (hosted by the University of Arkansas Tree-Ring Laboratory), available at http://wwwcuark.edu/misc/xtimber.
order to deliver his own reply. From his cell, he had visualized the moment when Larkyns had come to the doorway. The Major had looked out into the porch, but he could see only darkness, a void. This was not an absence, Muybridge seemed to whisper in my ear, but a totality. He had grown to become imperceptible, the space he inhabited was not phenomenal but abstract.

By the time my vision had returned to its normal state, the arc lamp had long since died, and there was no sign of Muybridge.

FROM THE PHONOGRAPH DIARY of Dr E. Dunning (transcript)
I make this brief recording immediately upon my return from a most bizarre evening in the company of ‘Professor’ Muybridge. I had attended this occasion as a sceptical observer and, at first, the old frontiersman confirmed my expectations precisely — this was to be a lecture by an itinerant showman rather than a scientist. As he began I was put in mind of accounts of American revivalism and circuit riding, indeed some of what Muybridge had to say evoked quacks like R.H. Collyer and his absurd notion of psychography. For Collyer, of course, the photographic apparatus is interconnected with the human nervous system. Where photography can render visible the material but imperceptible vibrations of the ether, the brain can record and capture — in a visual form — thoughts vibrating in this same mediating substance.10 According to such theories, the brain is then the transmitter and receiver of images, and though the results are altogether questionable, some photographers have determined to capture recordings of thought.11 Psychical researchers have even speculated that the activity of the brain can induce ‘sympathetic vibrations’ in other brains — pictures of thought can be transmitted from one and received in the other.12 In short, there is a burgeoning movement, at least amongst these societies, to understand photography as an entangled media system that integrates the psychic, per-

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11 Ibid., 185. See the work of Hippolyte Baraduc.
ceptual and technical apparatuses. The experiences of this evening compel me to examine this photographic model of consciousness more seriously.

My assumptions concerning Muybridge were first thrown into doubt when it quickly became apparent that the peculiar intensity of his delivery was not a device intended to stir up the audience, but was instead the symptom of a serious malady suffered by our speaker. His voice roiled, as if he was struggling to keep it under control. At times the expressions that gripped his face were disturbingly similar to those worn by the lunatics photographed by Dr Duchenne de Boulogne, and later reproduced in Mr Darwin’s book on physiognomy. Why there was no interruption to this contorted performance, I am not sure. I can only say that — like everyone present this evening — I was horrifically rapt.

It is, of course, well known that Muybridge suffered a serious concussion of the front part of the brain so many years ago, but who knows what really occurred after the crash? At his trial there was all that talk of obsessional and irritable behaviour, neurasthenic anxiety and sudden fits of rage. It was said that his hair had turned white over night. I understand that he consulted the noted London physician Dr (now Sir) William Gull on his injuries, and that it was Sir William who prescribed a period of active outdoor convalescence, taken at a distance from the discord and conflict of everyday society. Indeed, the rumour is that it was Sir William who suggested Muybridge take up photography, that he compose himself by composing natural scenes, that he recentre his poise by capturing equilibrial landscapes. Perhaps, instead of through any explicit direction, this curative guidance was applied in the form of sympathetic vibrations — ointment for an injured and malleable brain! After all, it was not so long ago

that Sir William’s name was mixed up in psychic affairs connected with those notorious events in Whitechapel! Naturally, I jest...

In any case, for Muybridge, who was as he reminded us this evening, ‘the first photographer the US Army hired directly to document a war’, the landscape has its own turmoil, its own conflicts. There are spirits in all lands, he told us — ghost armies, guerilla forces that move invisibly through the ether, like the telegraph messages that transmit reports on war to the rest of the world. The trick to photographing such phenomena, Muybridge told us, is not to be distracted by a search for the spectacle of war but to focus on documenting ‘war’s raw ingredients’, its vibrations, its vectors. It was his intention, he announced, to conduct an experiment this evening to do just that.

Based upon my experience as one of its unwitting subjects, I can say that the experiment seems to have been designed to render the vision of those collected in the auditorium as ‘pure’ as possible. Employing strange equipment with which I remain unfamiliar, Muybridge isolated the elementary conditions of vision by bathing our retinas in uniform and homogeneous white light. Greatly perturbed by this experience — like most others in the audience — I must admit to enormous difficulty in articulating the results in visual terms. Indeed, I can only echo what my new friend Dr Massumi reported as an ‘absence of seeing’. The experiment caused me to enter into something of a fugue, a state of ‘unexperiencing’ as Massumi so astutely put it, accompanied by a sense of the loss of self...of space...of time. And, of course, it would not be right to suggest that visual perception occurs purified of other senses — with these taken into account...the ordeal intensifies — hallucinations ensue...a fog...a powerful indeterminacy...there is a kind of swimming, not really of objects,

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16 In 1895, various American newspapers reported that a medium had identified a distinguished London physician as the perpetrator of the ‘Jack the Ripper’ murders. Speculation has surrounded Gull’s involvement ever since.

but rather, to quote Massumi again, ‘a vague, surfacelike field of objectlike or formlike tendency’.\(^{18}\)

At its foundation, its total field, vision is... weird. I can only conclude that concrete, objective perception must always launch from this vibratory chaos. It comes later. The actually seen is always, instead, an ‘oversight’, a reality generated by patterns, rhythms, and movements.\(^ {19}\) Empirical vision transforms the affective intensities swarming ‘beneath’ the empirical — the endarkenment of the ‘infra-empirical’ — into habitual vibratory instincts.\(^ {20}\)

M. Bergson, who eagerly accosted me as we filed out of the auditorium, described this transformation as perceptual fabulation, where fabulation is a palliative myth, a necessary, though limiting, fiction. Perhaps, then, the photograph as document, as evidence, is precisely a palliative vibration, an anaesthetic fabulation in this sense. It hallucinates the vague shiftings of the total field of vision into actual objects, fusing and establishing truths from chaos, working to anchor and secure an empire of veridical vision. But our perceptual attention is incessantly doubled, backgrounded, by a fugue, by the fog of the imperceptible from which it emerges. Visual experience is, Massumi told us, ‘the event of a forced passage from the infra-empirical to the added reality of the empirical, then back...’\(^ {21}\)

Back down into the rabbit-hole of the intensive. My impression is that members of the Society are concerned with another kind of fabulation — an aesthetic ordeal that induces misfires and malfunctions, that falsifies established truths, that cuts the anaesthetic to solicit pain. An ordeal, as Massumi says, in which ‘the pain is the beauty (of the world emergent).’ Horrific beauty...

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**LECTURE NOTES of Miss Alice Johnson**

Before the commencement of the evening’s talk, I was interrogated to a tiresome extent by A.H. — such a tedious woman, must in future avoid — seated to my right. All this was brushed aside, with

18 Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, 145, 146. This section is inspired by Massumi’s essay ‘Chaos in the “Total Field” of Vision’ from the same volume.

19 Ibid., 155.

20 Ibid., 160.

21 Ibid.
Muybridge’s entrance. He certainly cut a fine and imposing figure, wild-haired and bearded in the unruly fashion of a Desert Father or itinerant Messiah, and garbed in broad-brimmed hat and velvet cape as he strutted onto the stage and took up his place at the lectern and by the screen, cutting the air with his pointing stick. I was quite taken aback by his introduction: ‘Good evening, I am Muybridge,’ because I almost thought he would continue with those notorious words, ‘I have a message for you…’ (!!!) Of course, this immediately brought to mind Frampton’s theory that ever since the fateful shooting and murder of a rival in love, almost 23 years ago to the day, Muybridge has been possessed by an ugly spirit which has driven him in the attempt to restore his life’s equilibrium, to exorcise this demon to the abyss from whence it came and entered him.22 This, it is Frampton’s intuition, is precisely the explanation for the man’s obsession, for his furious generation of untold thousands of image sequences. He was invaded and is unfree from the imperative of stopping time in the bid to echo and overpower the sheer charge contained by the traumatic moment in which the gun was discharged. ‘I have a message for you…’ Muybridge is the message and the medium, a speeding bullet snatched from time as harbinger of all death, all incursions of the Great Outside.

Indeed, the talk got under way with Muybridge talking those assembled through the minutiae of his working procedure, and the results achieved therefrom, in several such image sequences. Muybridge is an absolutely fascinating speaker, on occasion given to somewhat crude colloquialisms which disrupts and stutters his routines but to overall powerful effect, creating spaces in articulation which mirror and resonate with the spaces between his separate images. At every turn, one is simply never quite certain which direction the discourse will take with the result that every sentence seems to swarm and ring with shadowy unspoken others. At times, Muybridge appeared to be

22 ‘I submit that that brief and banal action, outside time, was the theme upon which he was forced to devise variations in such multitudes that he finally exhausted, for himself, its significance…So that we might add, in our imagination, just one more sequence to Muybridge’s multitude, and call it: Man raising a pistol and firing.’ Hollis Frampton, Circles of Confusion: Film Photography Video Texts 1968–1980 (Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), 79.
PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE MIDDLE

on the precipice of a great and shattering disclosure to be whispered directly and intimately into the ear. At other times, he seemed as if talking to us from a great distance, quite elsewhere. I also, I must admit, lost track of time. I recall Bergson muttering approvingly of Muybridge’s decision to dispense with the animation of his image sequences on this occasion (his true art, said Henri, was the photographic, which admitted the eye into the unseen, the virtual and did not scoop it ever onwards). Then, I was given over to reverie, drifting back in my mind to our recent Eastbourne experiments. Our efforts there were most decidedly influenced by the earlier work of Jan Purkinje, the esteemed Bohemian scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society. Purkinje, of course, professed great admiration of Muybridge’s work and its possibilities for advancing morphological and physiological understanding — it is in this very connection that I found myself attracted to this evening’s lecture. Purkinje did himself manufacture his own stroboscopic motion picture device, the Phorolyt, and later, its successor, the Kinesiscope and argued persuasively for the merits of these machines in demonstrating the motion of a wide range of phenomena, from the beating heart, to the movement of fluids, from the growth of plants to the progress of battles. Most crucially for our purposes, Purkinje immersed himself in the study of subjective visual phenomena, which he contrived by the exigency of intermittently flashing light — first by candle flame, and later by a variant of his spinning machines — directly into the eyes of his subjects. The effects were remarkable — subjects reported a veritable catalogue of after-image effects and even synaesthetic phenomena. Colour, form, peculiar structures and glyphic formations, all in flux. The potential for such states in facilitating psychical research — specifically, the study of telepathy and extra-sensory perception — was all too clear. And it was under such auspices that I yoked Shelford Bidwell, also Fellow of the Royal Society, into the experiments at Eastbourne. Shelford was already engaged in photic conditioning of subjective states, carried out through his investigations of Bentham’s top — a machine for rapidly spinning high intensity flickering light into the eyes, by means of a very bright light bulb placed upon a motorized rotating disc within a box. The subject situates eyes (closed or open) by an aperture into the box and is, in due course, encour-
aged to detail his or her sensory experience. Bidwell’s subjects report ‘ghosts’, after-images similar to those described by Purkinje. It is my confirmed belief that we have, by these means, accessed a field of vision which is perfused by the ethereal dimension and in which psychical phenomena are to be encountered in abundance.\(^\text{23}\) To spin light into the eyes of a subject is to render that subject a medium, in contact with larval becomings, with the action of spirits. It is to render the subject a Seer, capable of picking up and transmitting the correspondences we have delineated so crudely in other, earlier circumstances. How else to explain the spiritual contagion we encountered at Eastbourne? Where, again and again, subjects reported the self-same forms in formation... Where merely to project some thought or image into the flicker was to find it given issue in another’s consciousness? And what of the enigmatic background to such visions (and auditions) — the deep blackness that some describe, or, further along, the swirling white fog? It is from such extremes that the paradoxical, oddly formless, forms ensue...reminding one of the distinction between those who inhabit Tsalal, the island of darkness in Poe’s Pym narrative, and those who dare to push on into the white vortex...From these reflections, I was pulled back into the lecture hall in a way which chimed in strange fashion with my daydream, by my friend Mudge, seated to Bergson’s right. William — poor blind soul — complained of great pains in his head which he attributed to the rhythm of Muybridge’s lecture. And, indeed, Muybridge, I now discerned, was working himself into a tremendous lather, urging on his assistant to proceed the slides at an enormous pace. But in place of pictures, there were instead...explosions of sheer light... intermittent illumination of the hall with sun-like force. Muybridge’s discourse had degenerated into indeterminate yelps and cries. As he spasmed and fell to the floor in the grip of some grand mal, the evening was brought to its convulsive conclusion. It is all connected, everything. Everything is connected by nothing, by the immense abstraction hovering about all that lives.\(^\text{24}\)

\(^{23}\) See John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*.

LECTURE NOTES of William Mudge, Esq.\textsuperscript{25}

I dictate these notes in the comfort of my rooms. I say comfort, but I will not go so far as to say safety, when nowhere is entirely ‘safe’ for me now, despite the presence of Hugh, my faithful assistant and scribe. God bless Miss Alice for seeing me home when, considering the state I was in, I could scarcely have managed by myself. I am considerably more grounded now, and will secure myself in my present surroundings with further drafts of brandy should the need arise. Although I attended Muybridge’s lecture fully apprised of the risks involved — I went there with the expectation that I might learn something to my advantage precisely in connection with my recent experiences — it is never pleasant and never gets easier to be wrenched so into adjacent realms as if I were a rag doll. Curse this affliction! Bergson’s words to me after the lecture were a balm, however, and give me some cause for optimism. I will get onto those shortly, since they demand to be recorded if he will not put them to paper himself, but first I must set down some contextual account of the proceedings earlier in the evening plus associated reflections.

Frampton’s musings on Muybridge’s career are most worthy of note. Let us start there. He contends that the fellow’s work is not, as has often been declared, antagonistic towards time. Obsessed with time, yes, but not ranged against it, or at least against all forms of time. Muybridge excoriates the lower dimensions of temporality; that is, the human. Frampton draws our attention to the early landscapes, pictures from California’s Yosemite Valley and suchlike — images, clearly, I have never seen for myself, but which Hugh has described to me and which I gather are suitably magnificent. He says of the waterfalls depicted that they comprise ‘images of a strange, ghostly substance that is in fact the tesseract of water: what is to be seen is not water itself, but the virtual volume it occupies during the whole time-interval of the exposure.’\textsuperscript{26}

Further, in images

\textsuperscript{25} This Mudge is an amalgamation of William R. Mudge, ex-photographer and Second Massachusetts Infantryman, who was shot through the head and lost both eyes at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia, in 1863, and Racine Mudge, who seeks the help of the psychic detective, Dr John Silence, in Algernon Blackwood’s story, ‘A Victim of Higher Space’ (1907).

\textsuperscript{26} Frampton, Circles of Confusion, 76.
made of a Panamanian hunting party, during his Central American sojourn, Muybridge deliberately forces the sighted to inspect human figures that are smudged and smeared beyond their natural boundaries, as if he intended a violent dismantling of the personalities of those depicted. The truth is, in Frampton’s view, that the artist sought this blurring of the empirical and the actual in all he did. Muybridge cleaves to what might ordinarily be thought to be impossible in the photographic arts. He intends to seize objects in their entirety. That is, as Bergson would say, and as Frampton intimates, to capture their virtuality, which includes the dimensions of higher space and time. This ‘impossible’ is also the goal in the San Francisco panorama, and, through an altered approach, in his sequences of animal and human motion.

Muybridge led off his talk this evening with what was, it has to be said, a rather diversionary introduction to a number of motion studies. I found it difficult to engage with his detailed dissection of the various components of the horse’s walk, canter, gallop and so forth, interspersed with desultory reference to slides of an art-historical nature. Why will he not directly venture what is at the core of his endeavours?! Why is everything of value these days shrouded in such atmosphere of secrecy?! Spit it out, man! It must be patently obvious to one and all that these studies are not even faintly concerned with people or beasts in themselves or the damnable way in which they move their legs. As they have been described to me, they clearly set out to scrub away faces, identities, places, all the peculiarities of personality and moment. Is not one of the functions of the Cartesian grids precisely to expunge such singularity of character? The goal of the motion studies is to illustrate the inventive, illusionary capacities of the eye. They expose, precisely by disrupting and problematizing it, the eye’s complicity in narrative identity, in foisting coherence and continuity upon the chaos and multiplicity of the world!\textsuperscript{27} The imperative of mundane vision is to sensibly connect together all phenomena, to summon ‘time’, ‘space’, ‘matter’ and ‘movement’ from the void. Pragmatic human constructs. In fact, let us state it bluntly, the human sensorium is a box of illusions, dedicated to an unconscious

\textsuperscript{27} Frampton, \textit{Circles of Confusion}, 78.
and imaginary falsification of the world about us as ‘complete’ and intelligible precisely as it appears to be... Muybridge’s lesson — why will he not put it to us outright? — is that the eye fabulates; the eye, in partnership with the brain, rushes to paint in every inconvenient gap and chink, to make things fit so that we can confidently venture forth and act in the world. The eye makes reality ‘scan’, just as the poet compels his fancy to conform to the rules of versification. And this, is it not, is exactly why the Society of Ontofabulatory Research invited Muybridge to speak? What is ‘Ontofabulatory Research’ and what is its Method? This is exactly their domain (even if Bergson exhibits disquiet and quibbles with the specific inflections they give to this notion, ‘fabulatory function’, in their usage). Yet still their Secretary, in his opening words, will not aim direct. Muybridge’s radical programme — shout it — is the re-institution of the intervals in things, gates outwards, to hobble a dominant vision suborned to unconscious and habitual imperatives which have ceased to serve mankind. His image sequences are scansion’s disaster. Not to ‘stop’ time — no! — but to escape Chronos, the time of the eye’s all-too-human scansion. To admit the weirdness of the cosmos, to fold out the mundane senses and force their evolution unto a higher order — this was the inner demonstration concealed by Muybridge’s outer demonstration this evening. A demonstration of the mystery and mysticism of a temporality inimical to the human, inimical to the very fabulatory function itself, at least as both Bergson and Muybridge conceive it.

I have already alluded to some of Bergson’s leading ideas. This gentleman decries the industrialization of time and space as it manifests itself in a certain cinematographic colonization and canalization of reality. It is true his sympathies lie with Psychical Research rather than Ontofabulatory Research — this was the tenor of his remarks to me after the lecture. For Bergson, we few souls are at war with a scientific, mathematical metaphysic which believes it best serves

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mankind’s interests but which will not admit of certain facts inconvenient to this belief. In fact, the topic of interest is uppermost in Bergson’s preoccupations. Science has hitherto, in the manner of the Greeks, pinned all its hopes on the calculability of reality. Everything hinges on measurement. In this belief, it does a great disservice to the mind by reducing it to the brain. Here is the error — the brain, as Bergson has it, is merely an ‘organ of pantomime’. The brain, he said, ‘directs our thought towards action’, its function is reality-alignment and ‘in doing this it canalizes, and also it limits, the mental life’. The brain is simply a sensory-motor organ, a collection of mechanisms which concern themselves with movement, gesture and attitude. It is the organ by which our thoughts come into contact and friction with the world of things, by which we attend to and ‘insert’ ourselves into the world. But the brain is not itself the creator of thoughts and feelings, images and ideas. In fact, it blinkers us as it binds us to the ‘direction in which we have to go’, a movement and direction which sediments itself through habit into the cerebral cortex. The cerebral mechanism, believing it serves our best interests, masks off, screens out, the greater part of what potentially might be perceived and thought upon. It only calls up to perception what is most relevant to the task at hand and thus it is stupidly utilitarian. If we have sudden moments of ‘disinterestedness’, as during an accident or similar moment of great intensity, then we are sheared away from mechanical bondage to useful action and can access a more ‘panoramic vision’. Perception expands to admit more of the ‘immense field of our virtual perceptions’ which lies imperceptible on the fringes of our attention. It is at the fringes, of course, where Psychical Research finds its true site of exploration. In short, by what means might the habitual mechanisms of the brain be bypassed in order to access what lies beyond? What disasters of the mechanism can we contrive so that we can be emancipated from slavery to our low, cerebrally engrained ‘interests’ and can move to fulfill our higher, spiritual interests? And here is where I — and Bergson with me — spy Muybridge’s merit in his drive to what I have termed scansion’s disaster. From the human to the divine! (But it is not so simple — wait, and I will tell…) Space and time divide us bodily and mentally, but the mind is only partly attached to the body and to this space and time — there is another
part which mixes with and encroaches upon others. Here is the pos-
sibility of what Bergson calls ‘intercommunication’ and which we
call ‘telepathy’. As Bergson has it, ‘consciousness overflows the or-
ganism’. The organism is, in one way, a disease which roots us in the
human. Can we disorganize ourselves? By what accidents? As I shall
remind you momentarily, I have personal experience of the kind of
accident I posit...

Muybridge knows full well that the photographic frame cuts a
slice from reality, and thereby places a limitation upon our percep-
tion of reality. However, merely to join up many such slices and run
them together in what passes for pictorial ‘animation’ is not sufficient
to overcome this limitation. This, too, he has come to realize. Every
cut, every frame, creates a seen and an unseen. But what is unseen is
not also utterly absent. The frame does not cease to ‘communicate’
with what lies outside itself even if might seem to suppress it. What
is outside — the Virtual, the Whole, duration — ‘insists’ in every im-
age, threads through all images and communicates the higher space
and time of the spirit to it, immanently. As one commentator has put
it, the ethereal spirit — unseen nothingness — which is synonymous
with Bergson’s duration, ‘descends into the system like a spider’.29
(We begin to suggest the ambivalence we feel towards this circum-
stance…)

I am talking, of course, of the insights of hyperspace philosophy.
It is Hinton, in his articles and romances, who has best articulated
the compelling notion of those dimensions beyond the three that
together form a kind of prison conditioning human knowledge and
the sensory-motor organization of the body. When Frampton speaks
of Muybridge’s efforts to reach towards the tesseract, he draws on
Hinton’s neologism for the non-Euclidean geometry of the hyper-
cube. By imagining the tesseract, which is the cube’s extension into
the fourth dimension (just as the cube is the square’s extension into
the third) Hinton postulates that we might more readily aspire to the
spiritual, ethereal condition of higher spacetime. With our ‘flickering
consciousness’, the contingency of things, their changefulness, is all

29 These remarks on the frame lean on Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1* (London: Continu-
um, 2005), 17–19.
that we see of the Mystic Whole, the Aetheric Medium which encompasses and traverses all space and time. Our zoopraxical or cinematic consciousness is a mere ‘flicker-effect…a ticking, a tickling, a tintinnabulation on the edge of our perception of a whole that is ethereal, virtual’. This is the whole — the spider — that with its web, its network, conditions and enables all lower spaces and times.

I can personally testify to the veracity of Bergson and Hinton’s philosophical ruminations. And here I come to my own predicament. I was once ignorant of my bondage to lower dimensions, before I took up Miss Alice’s invitation to participate in the now infamous ‘Eastbourne experiments’. I will not go into the particularities of those experiments — they are well known enough by now. Suffice it to say, that, in the wake of Hinton’s invitation to exercise the abstract imagination with the aim of unfolding the tesseract in thought, in addition to the effects of Miss Alice’s employment of intermittent illumination to elicit certain psychical states, a condition was created in my body which facilitated temporary passage into the ethereal body, that is, the tesseract of my body, as four- or five-dimensioned object. This imagination which surpasses image, this abstraction which exceeds the pictorial capacity of the mind, is the ‘scaffold’ by which, as Hinton correctly estimated, a person might ‘slip’ elsewhere, into some adjacency, some fuller state of being. Hinton has insisted, as corrective to his earlier cognitive emphasis on conception, that this is a matter of affect, of feeling — even belief or worship — more than it is of intellection. It is a mystical communion, the soul’s part of the mind, that was loosed in me by events at Eastbourne. In this, as I initially rejoiced, my blindness is an irrelevance. There is nothing of this higher spacetime that can be seen, only felt. Only intuited. Once there, one feels oneself to mingle and circulate with beings of other orders, and to communicate. There — I have said it. At Eastbourne I underwent an education which enabled me to travel the dimensions!

Here is the nub…To travel in this manner is to pass over into a realm which promises soul’s ease, contact with the Divine. But it

30 Milutis, _Ether_, 51.
can be horrible, so horrible, too. There rose before me, and plagues me yet, the very great danger of losing myself between dimensions, of surrendering my human frame for wanderings which I fear will soon result in my utter obliteration.32 Just as I, on such occasions, can think and feel the co-presence of other-dimensional beings, so I am thought and felt in return, by turns to be seduced and repelled. A world of angels which shift into monsters at the drop of a hat!33 Ecstasy and horror combined, salvation and vastation in the One, in the Outside! For this is the fact of the matter... such occasions have not abated since the experiments. They occur with increasing frequency, and my absences from the world we know grow in duration. There are a whole host of subtle triggers which compel my sideways slip. Very often it will be a sound, a rhythm, a particular resonance or vibration. This very evening, as Muybridge’s lecture reached its climax, I felt the pressure building in me, first signaled by a terrific migraine. It was the rhythm and cadence of his voice, the rising and falling, and the frequency with which the slides clicked over, experienced by me as fireballs in my mind... Muybridge described a collision, a dreadful accident, and I experienced this accident of space and time, unfolded as tesseract, in my very soul, tugged out of my body and from the lecture hall into that place of temporal and geographical confusion which I have sought to describe. To be stretched over all times and spaces simultaneously, to be transgressed so by hosts of angel-monsters, living-dead blobs... This is my predicament to-

32 ‘Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities. It likewise seemed that all the known things entered into the composition of other unknown things, and vice versa... Foremost among the living things were inky, jellyfish monstrosities... I saw to my horror that they overlapped, that they were semi-fluid and capable of passing through one another and through what we know as solids. These things were never still, but seemed ever floating about with some malignant purpose. Sometimes they appeared to devour one another, the attacker launching itself at its victim and instantaneously obliterating the latter from sight.’ H.P Lovecraft, ‘From Beyond’, in Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H.P. Lovecraft (London: Gollancz, 2008), 391.

33 Racine Mudge talks of his terror at ‘seeing people and objects in their weird entirety, in their true and complete shapes... It introduced me to a world of monsters.’ See Algernon Blackwood, ‘A Victim of Higher Space’, in Tales of the Mysterious and Macabre (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1967), 394.
day: I CANNOT CONTROL MY ENTRANCES OR EXITS!! Vastation! Muybridge becomes a buzzing, whistling horror. I feel my face and frame distort vortically, whirled into fragments and recombined in the elsewhere. I came to...I had fortunately been undetected in my lapse from mundane reality, since Muybridge himself, I gather, had experienced an episode of his own (akin to mine?) which drew all attention. Bergson saw me shaken and I eventually confessed all, everything I have already imparted to Miss Alice. Bergson proclaimed me blessed — he admonished me to find, with his assistance, some way of controlling my entrances and exits, some way of regularizing the process. And here, perhaps, Muybridge may be my saviour. Some therapeutic, spiritual application of the photographic sequence?? Does he know what he is doing?? In the meantime, there is only alcohol which frustrates the action of the etheric vibrations and keeps me in my body...Enough.

34 Ibid., 391.