
Senior Projects Fall 2020

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Animals and People

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Bard College

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Animals and People

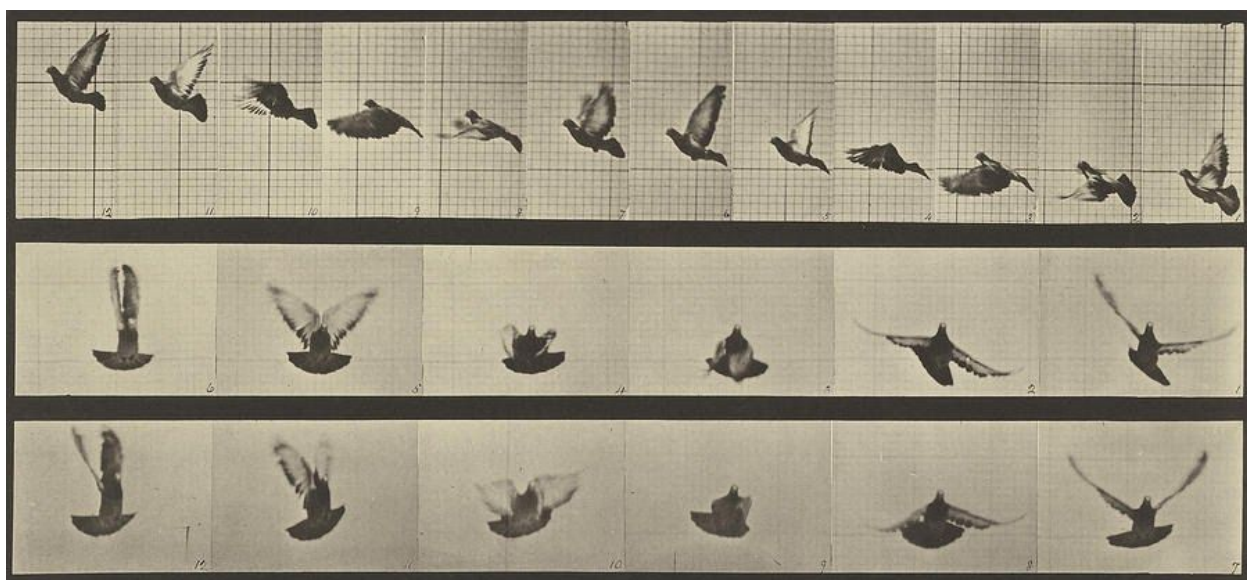
Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by Nikolas Slackman

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York December 2020

For my Father, the journalist, and my Mother, the photographer



I.

Kingston-upon-Thames, 1902

1.

“A family is a group of human beings who live under the same roof, whose aim is to increase their number by means of marriage for their establishment and the evolution of their state, and for the development of their reason and intellect.”

2.

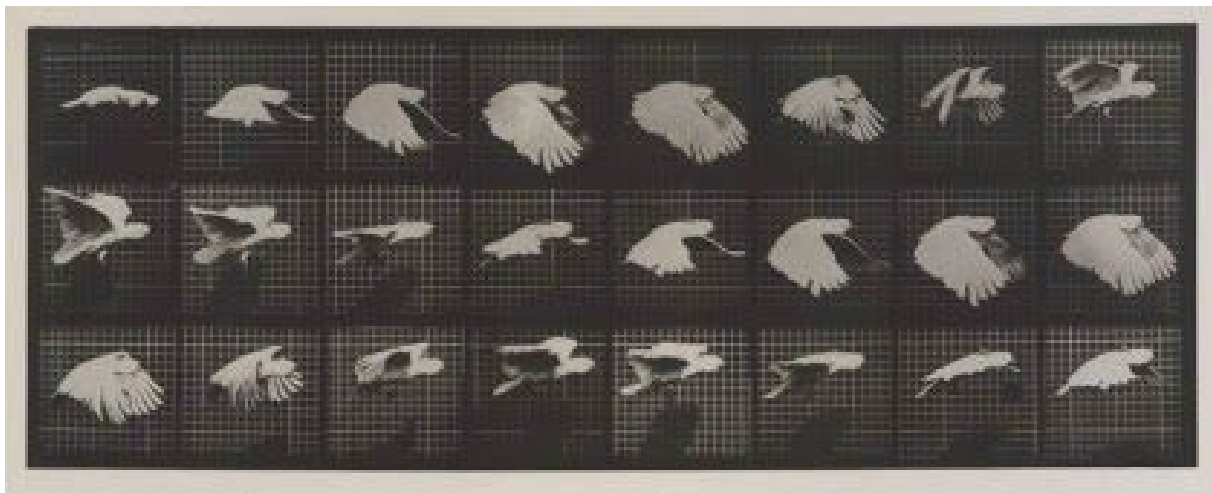
She watched him worm his way around his gun. Marey had sent it. He'd point it at the birds, fire, and have the negatives developed by night.

3.

“Weapons and horses are sold together with their hooks.”

4.

It ought to track them throughout a series of photographs, not in one image. Her cousin would hang on to this dream of incorporating peregrines into his practice until his death.



5.

She'd trip on his scraps, newspaper cut-outs he'd sloppily notched and strewn about their commons. On blaring, sleepless evenings, she'd pour over these loose-leafs for their coverage. Afterward, she'd leave them tossed and crumpled.

Chronicle: "Mr. Muybridge gave yesterday evening the first in a series of lectures, illustrating by instantaneous photography the stride of a horse. The attendance was not as large as might have been expected."

6.

Cinema had been a steer in the wrong direction; he found it steeped with populist sentiments. He would correct this, with the first step being an incorporation of the peregrine into his practice. Time in his studio, his "cell," he'd joke, sketching his maps, realigning his legacy. She watched him talk in cycles. She found, lately, that she would spend more time on this than anything else: watching. Him particularly.

7.

The Kanun is an ancient Albanian code, a display of interior motions. They move inside us. These manifestations of safety precede us in our form, our weather, our skin. This all, a wrap-around for our right to blood, to birth and feud.

8.

I didn't know I was a vampire until I became a dancer.

She'd stumbled into this phrase after a 3-pm crash. She was in the business of non-sequiturs, neologisms. A pulp sloganeer at the turn of the century; that is how she would sell herself. Given her remote position, she could work pseudonymously. Inside for hours, slowly teasing out slogans.

He had craved the light, but now lives in the shadows, she wrote. Under that: BORING

She stepped outside. He had begun to dig. This was to be Superior. He waved at her with his map-holding hand.

9.

She'd mail out his letters:

“My Dear Sir, it affords me great pleasure to inform you that the investigation of the consecutive phases of animal movements, which for three years I had conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, is ready for publication: the printing plates are in the hands of the printer, and the book, under the title of Animal Locomotion, is in the process of publication.”

10.

“He who takes the herd of livestock to pasture is called a herdsman”

“A dog causing damage is killed, but only when it is found with ‘meat in its mouth’”

“The honor of the fold resides in the bell.”

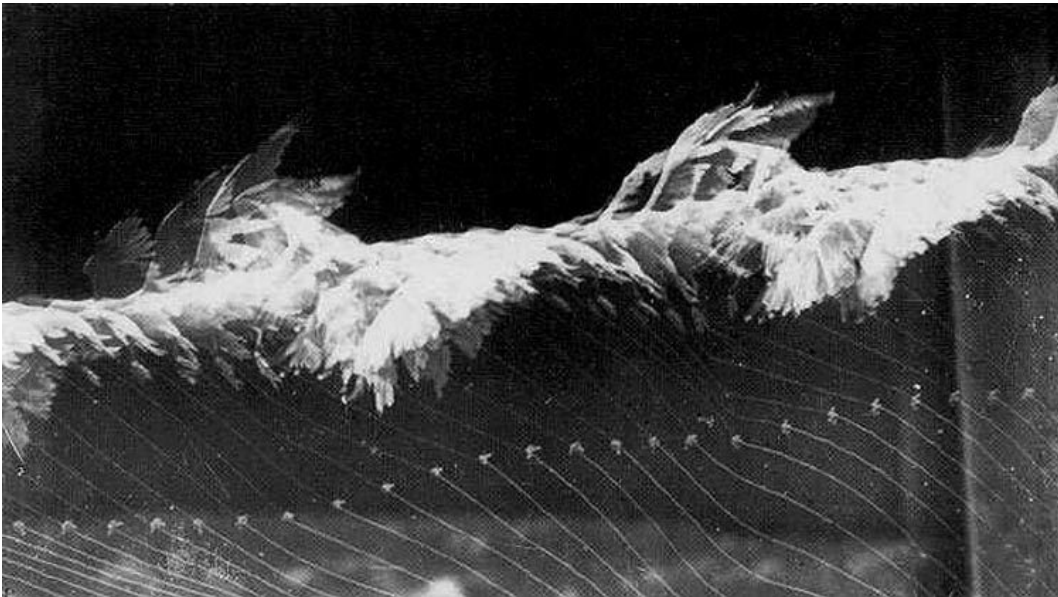
11.

Her fingers grouped under Radium's neck, barely clasping the buckle into place. The cat had run away to pull ducks from the river. This way, the bell would track it. Her step-brother, George, said it'd soon fit into their unit.

12.

“My Dear Marey, your photo-gun does not suit me. The peregrine must be captured in a series; instead, this apparatus has tucked eighteen phases of bird into one blurred image. Obviously, I did not anticipate this patchworked flock. You had said it would work—frankly, this image is as lucid as your word. I expect compensation by the end of July.

“Apologies for the state of my penmanship. My nerves are all over lately.”



13.

“Rancor does not extend beyond the oath.”

“Lost objects and lost blood are equal before the oath.”

“Either the oath or the object,”

“The oath washes away the blood.”

14.

All four had held there since March. George would fill out the night with his probings. He'd leave her lousy with them.

“What’s he doing?”

“Building a scale model of the Great Lakes.”

“Here?”

“Well, George-”

“He shouldn’t here.”

“I won’t tell him for you.”

15.

My practice is an act of quotation, he’d say. Quoting the world, its climate. A series of the thing functions as quote. Cinema’s temporality muddies this. *I put that frankly to Edison—you’ve muddied it*. Of course, there’s sound, yet that remained distinct from his point. *Even if it were included, my work is more assured than that*.

Then he’d repeat: *even with sound, even then...*

16.

The new doctor considered her tinnitus a “cracked-circuit.” He explained the phrase with two examples:

1. Whenever her lightbulbs burst.
2. Whenever a boat blows a fuse.

Her ear candling, a solution he'd proposed, left her bed spattered with undelivered wax. Splotches covered the mattress.

Her cousin would be outside, just short of getting it right.

17.

Were one to dissect a map of Albania, the surface would lack a view of the indexical quantity of bunkers. The tight, gun-slitted quarters may give, but the enlarged compounds powerful men burrow into for nuclear holocaust would not. One would need an inverted view, one of the lands interior, to perceive these.

While the land-bound bunkers are cheap, ugly structures, they've become invisible to the people.

18.

"In the cemetery belonging to a brotherhood or a clan, the dead or murdered of another brotherhood or clan cannot be buried. If someone does this without permission of the brotherhood or clan to which the cemetery belongs, the Kanun requires that the foreign corpse be disinterred from the cemetery."

19.

George slurred some proposals.

Once you're lulled in, you won't ever escape! Something like that. You're exhausting this fiction business.

“A City of Deadly Sleep” was the title she'd been edging over.

Corn was his income—an extension of the longstanding family mercantilism. He'd watched the work elevate from base trade to this high value flood of negotiations.

His days were dwelt off, then swiftly husked as he switched into his house.

21.

Radium stripped the cushion coverings layer for layer. Its insides, feathers and other ornamental materials, clung to her. The cat could no longer escape the house without getting caught. When the bell went silent, someone came looking. She shredded the bedding, chairs, anything one could sink into. The feathers were worn for days as she interrogated the commons with her ring.

George tacked up the damage with cellulose cording, and let the filling fall where it would. He pet-named the commons “our undergrowth.”

22.

They would argue—she would never, anything. Both thought they knew about the past. Sometimes she'd listen. Mostly, she let her sound drown them out.

Occasionally, her thoughts formed as their words. It was a painful growth, the depths of which she'd chart candling.

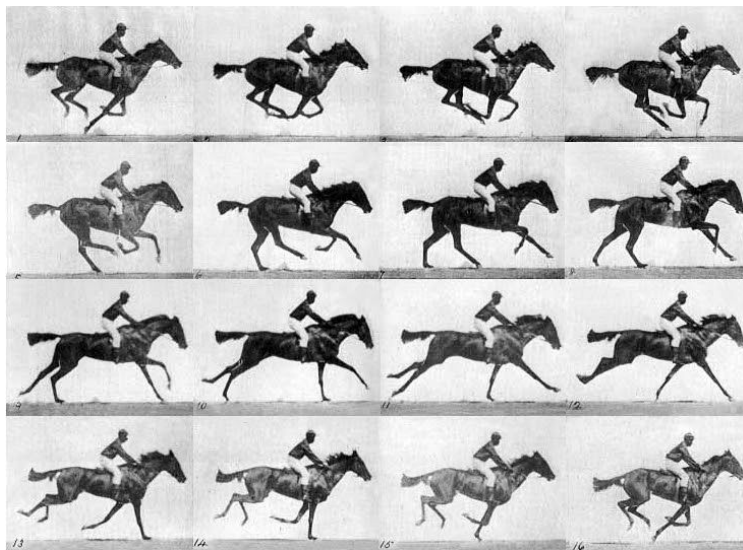
Just drip, she said, fire above, an eye on her own thoughts and feelings.

23.

He'd done some before: a cockatoo, a pigeon—nothing of consequence, an extension of all his other work at that time. They were his imprecise first tries, failing representations obscured by a blur. Imitations, he would say, without weight.

He climbed the roof to confirm Superior's completion. He looked down and smiled.

Michigan would come next, then the grid. His students had built them before. He wagered she could set down an approximation.



24.

She saw a number; nothing that was hers. All convincingly lined storefront boards. She searched with a defined, functional step.

She arrived at a staircase to the river. Something was off about the river's sound, like it was running backwards. Something's wrong with the river, she thought.

Everything sloshed overhead.

25.

California Spirit of the Times: “The grand discovery of an eye which would catch and a plate which would register the most evanescent of movements, has enabled us to discover what was concealed before, and if we fail to avail ourselves of the teachings of this superhuman professor, it will be a confession of willful perversity and an avowal of stupid, mulish ignorance.”

26.

Round two, he said, before burrowing in on Michigan. She winced at his little sports metaphor. Yet it also bore the tenderness that certain elderly people held to them, their archaic whimsy. What shimmered between them that was hers to protect. She felt a responsibility to this, to him.

27.

She'd pinned his Philadelphia works through the commons: ANIMALS and PEOPLE. She had wanted to zoopraxiscopically project these, but they apparently did not work like that. Instead, they were arranged consecutively, in rows taking up the length of the wall.

His clipped nails, unattended hairs, spittle, and other parts stuck to these masters. He'd shed all over the place. She let these parts of him stack up.

She noticed narratives arising. His studies of women produced them. Series where a woman would wake up, pray, pour water, and ascend the staircase. She recognized herself in some models, these anonymous Pennsylvanians. Not all, parts: certain slopes and contours, bone-workings.

Radium scratched behind the wall with bloodied claws, wearing herself out.

28.

“If I fire at someone and only graze his head, I must still pay 3 purses for the wound.”

“If I hit his foot, I must pay 750 grosh.”

“A wound above the belt is evaluated at 3 purses; below the belt, at 750 grosh.”

29.

Could one dress in a place, she half-wondered while lining the walls with models.

His lectures ran high, charging on a diagonally sliding scale per word. This was partially why he rarely gave them. He was certain there were men across America lecturing under his name, riding around with bootlegged plates. George wrangled a date together with a local school.

“He needs to provide,” George said.

“I don’t see-”

“Something.”

30.

A flimsy grid was forged overnight, trailed and traced to the arbitrary dimensions of the plates. This wager was at its hem.

It has a scattered charm. *Inarticulate, but we’ll make it honorable*, he said. She asked about the fit of the measurement.

You ought to be proud. This brought her back to herself, this compliment.

That night arrived with beard hairs thistled throughout the house, a guide to where he'd been.

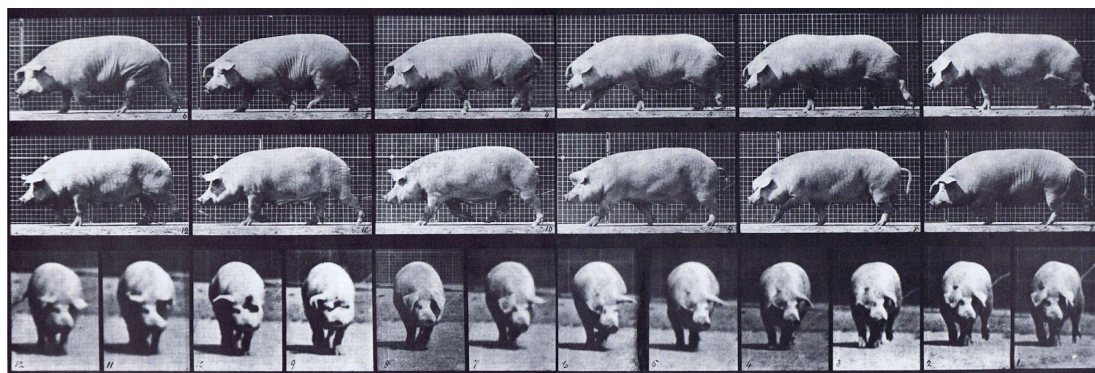
The following, there were marked duck carcasses.

31.

“A pig doing damage is killed. If a pig is found doing damage, kill it.”

“Pigs killed with one shot are their owners' loss. The second shot is paid for by the pig.”

“If the pig is killed doing damage, the damage has been done and paid for, and the owner of the pig has no further recourse, since any complaint he may make will not be heard by the law.”



32.

There hadn't been hope for Thames. Its pollution seemed intrinsic, the stream's central subject. People always rode it, industries pumped in waste. Worst of all was the smell. The legend was of dead pets local families had dumped there; bags of them for generations. This cycle of operations over one hundred years.

A new sewage system restored a sense of order. As a child, this hidden installation had protected her from the river's atmosphere. He had been born into it.

33.

“Marey—I have received your letter, and let me clarify the state I was in while sending my previous message. As you may know, I have suffered a distressing injury.

“I was entering the Texas Cross Timbers when the mustangs ran away. The driver was unable to control them. Just as we were getting to the Timbers I remarked that the best plan would be for us to get out of the back of the stage, because I saw that an accident would take place. He told me that I took out my knife to cut the canvas back of the stage, and was preparing to leave when the stage ran against either a rock or a stump and threw me out against my head.”

This explanation was a direct quote from the trial. His hand executed the words with a float.

34.

The cousin returned to Britain with six distended suitcases he’d smuggled in. She passed them off to George, who then circulated them through the front. The cousin arranged the suitcases in rows with precise spaces between each. These contained his cameras.

He’d wax upon his exploits in as many words as he could contain. Silences were less pauses, more clots in his throat.

She had lived as a reluctant cleaner until George could afford such services, and then spent days sinking into her sentences, which her step-brother had found an emptying practice. Meals, walks, and all other events that may constitute a scene did not make up her day before then. Since her cousin had begun requesting her time, he’d come to demand it all.

Everyones always blamed everything on me, the cousin said to George. As if I am the cause for everything, everyone's suffering.

One forgets that a family tree is categorically a map.

35.

Edison had the sprawl of conquest about him. Misusing the technology, her cousin said, the technology was not quite right. When he visited the factory it had seemed askew. *The sound, it needed sound. Needs.*

Further, why hadn't Edison offered to make him a model? Dancers, weightlifters, a world of figures populated his cinema, and her cousin was to be apart from it. It pained him to see these families drawn into themselves, extended without space, developing a language not his own.

36.

She was rarely of herself. Her doctor referred to this as her condition, the more intense moments of which were "episodes." She was prone to memory loss and extreme paranoia within them. *This is a genetic quality*, he'd said as if to ground her.

Her cousin had struck his foot digging. It purpled into a near-representational form. The bruise metastasized around the foot like a plaster cast, taking his shape. He would carry the foot through the day, refusing time to heal.

37.

She was told to align the cameras for the bird. Six was just enough to capture a stride. More were necessary, but would come later. He had numerous methods. Sometimes he left lines of cord out for the animals to walk over, triggering the camera. Other times he had a number of

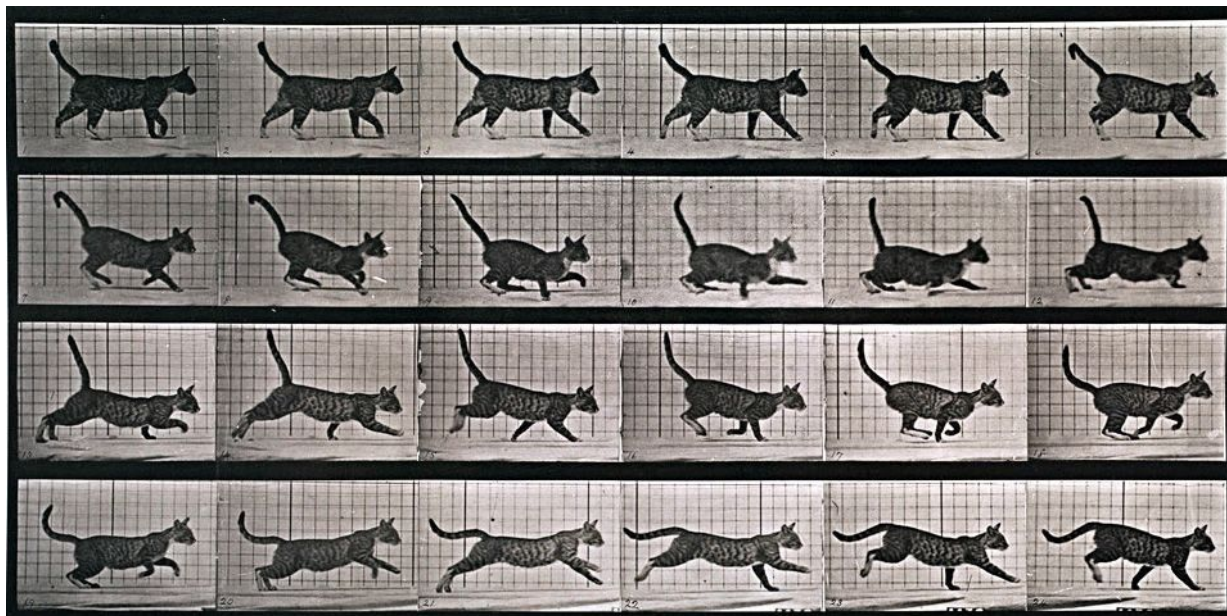
students in the room, a force which would take the pictures schematically. For this, he would need the people, but later. Right now she'd work with cords.

It had been raining constantly, so she was forced to test out the camera's indoors. She set them one after the other around the house. She started with Radium. Having the cat move past the camera over and over, through mazes, using treats or force. Eventually, it was the smells that got the cat moving, particularly the putrid ones. Radium would be more rapturously teased into motion the more dead the bait. She found herself staring more intensely at the cords than the cat.

She was less taking his place than watching his work from within it.

38.

“A woman is known as a sack, made to endure as long as she lives in her husband's house. Her parents do not interfere in her affairs, but they bear the responsibility for her and must answer for anything dishonorable that she does.”



39.

In Albania, each woman is invariably permitted a handful of rights. There are practically no circumstances in which a daughter may inherit their father's property (the land must go to a son or an uncle.) The only exception is if she swears to become a man. Then she must live abstinent, dress as a man would, and begin her life inheriting the responsibilities of a man. Those who chose this route are referred to as Albanian Virgins. They are social outcasts, and often move their belongings to live out the rest of their lives in relative solitude.

40.

George set it all forth. It was packed with odor, hairs and cording for binding holes that had been gashed from couch to kitchen, all told, across floors muddied, rotted and wet, now tacked to machines stuffing his commons. These routines are slant, downing away from the world he knows, the world. This thorned under his skin, but hers seemed dead to it.

What childhood they had shared was a lost language. *I don't know what it is I'm supposed to be*, she said. He stared at her like a dwindling audience. Her arms tightened to the bone. *I didn't mean to ruin anything.*

Swear?

41.

The peregrine is a violent breed. They were not particularly native to England, nor Philadelphia. He did not want to be shooting the bird in his hometown. He had, frankly, not wanted to return to his home, he'd told her. He would make due, create a setting within which the photographs may work.

It did not matter to him what it meant to take a picture, or rather, his brand of moving images, of a peregrine soaring over the Great Lakes. The peregrine soaring over the Great Lakes, he'd said, would be his final achievement.

How did you draw up the maps?

Memory.

42.

She accompanied him by carriage to the event. His anxiety on the carriage ride was uncharacteristic. He was enraged to find out upon his arrival that he was meant to speak at a women's university, perturbed at what he saw to be a slight against his legacy, a second tier venue for his immortal works.

He was to be the second lecturer in a series. The first, a faculty member at the university, spoke about the kissing point between personal tragedy and those of the family's past. The family's past exists as a negative space upon which one fills in the blanks with one's lips, tongue, and teeth. Moments through one's life cultivate, in which this blankness is presented, in evenly spaced intervals. Each undoubtedly achieves its end.

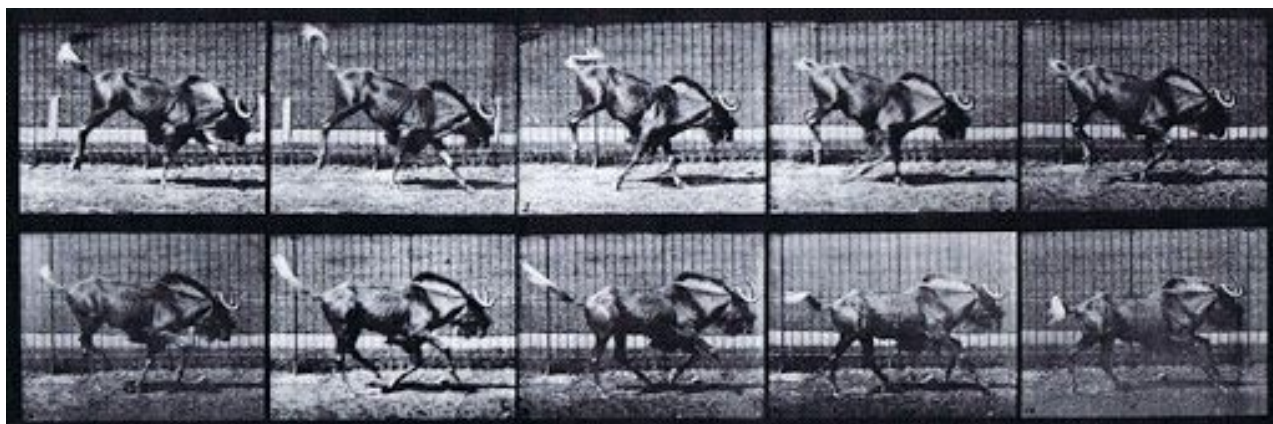
Afterward, on the carriage, he lamented about everything. His treatment, the lecture, her assistance. She had retreated into her sound, and took a moment to appreciate how he never noticed.

Neither of them slept. It seemed like the moon had been full every night lately, she thought. Radium had coughed up a hairball; she noticed a good portion of his hair entangled within.

Michigan was completely carved out by the morning.

43.

He spent the day throwing rocks at the birds. She had never seen him like this. The neighbors came since his debris was landing in their yard. George tried to stop him, but he could not be physically detained. That evening, he hobbled away for a walk. Again, he did not sleep. This became the quality of their days for some time.



44.

"The two disputing Banners should each find a strong man, and the setting of boundaries should be decided by them."

"With a thrown rock: the one who throws the rock furthest wins that territory for his Banner. More precisely: If I throw the rock further, I take the territory from you, if you throw it further, you take it from me."

45.

Each crushing event, he said, had made its place in him, and were projected like films in his mind constantly throughout his life. They always found their recurrences obliquely, in the margins of the day.

He was scheduled to go back to Philadelphia in about a week, for legal and touring purposes. He had her promise to maintain the lakes in his absence, and she planned to abide by his wishes.

The rain had been chipping at the edges of the lakes, claying up the rims, making the holes lose their definition. Both had found it always in their nails, and would try to teethe it out and into themselves.

46.

“The tongue is soft but chews everything.”

47.

George sharpened his jeers into pleas which weaved through her day. His adjustments, non-negotiables, left her with a taut pattern of movement. She could barely walk without his lonesome needling finding its way through her. Under those conditions, her ability to write depleted. Her speech shaded into her basics, the *I have never's* and *please leave out the gruesome details'*.

48.

She was all there when the sound broke, when the ear gave out for good. There were mashed potatoes between the four of them, and she kept to hers. Her cousin was disparaging his imitators. It hadn't hurt, the pressure just thinned into an absence, a lack of silence or sound.

She looked out at the holes, wondering how they'd ever be filled with water, if they were even supposed to... and by what means? The sink?

An airplane passed by the window. *Bootleggers!* he spoke into his plate, *they'll face their consequences!*

49.

“Two men were arguing and, as their words became more heated, they started brandishing their weapons. While their blood was boiling, a pregnant woman happened to pass and, in accordance with the custom of the place, immediately tried to intervene. The two men, blinded with rage, would not accept the woman's offer of mediation; they fired their guns, but neither one was hurt. They turned their backs on each other and left, and the woman, too, went to her own house. Not long afterward, the woman gave birth to a stillborn infant. The woman told the members of her household why her child was stillborn, i.e. because of the noise of the guns that the two men had shot. Now the men of her household went to demand satisfaction from those two, and since the latter did not want to come to an understanding, the matter went before the Elders.

“The Elders took the evidence, but none of them could decide on a judgement, nor did they know how to resolve the case. One of the Elders, who was among the most experienced in cases and judgements, said to the other Elders that they should follow him. They agreed to do so. He led the way to the milk-shed, where there was a pail in which the cream had risen to the top and was undisturbed. When the Elders had seen the cream smooth in the pail, the first Elder closed the milk-shed, walked a short distance away and fired two pistol shots. When they entered the milk-shed again, they found the cream completely mixed with the milk in the pail. Then the

Elder who had led the other Elders to the milk-shed said: "A pregnant woman is like the cream of the milk. The noise of the guns jolted the woman, as it did the milk in the shed, and frightened her; after that fright, the child died in its mother's belly. Those two men were the cause of the child's death. All the Elders agreed with his reasoning and were unanimously convinced, making the two men liable for murder, since they had placed the woman in shock with their shots."

50.

He'd left her alone with George for Philadelphia. She averted her attention towards the movies. The Cinema Palace had just opened where the church had once stood. She would walk there alone.

It was an enormous American transplant, with luxury seats and piano accompaniment. Prior to the feature, a short from Edison was screened. It was filmed outdoors, and involved elaborate historical costuming. *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* lasts barely a minute, and serves to highlight a cut: one between the queen's head being on and off. The splice was crude, and the switch between the actor (Robert Thomae in female garb) and the dummy was obvious. Still, it worked. The crowd gave it their every enthusiasm.

Then, the feature. The military seemed nearly infinite. There was an entire field of men killing one another in concise, procedural gestures. A sword is raised and then gently pushed through the back. Words are muttered under soldiers' breath. In the film, there is no actor cast as a general or leader, no sense of leadership at all. Again, these techniques were honored by the crowd.

At home, she'd re-encountered the trees:

Milk

A sense of becoming shifted me over the water. I would untangle the father. This was the way I would begin, in practice. I would open the book and begin to understand another way into his stream. Within this text I will find him. Soon, I arrived at his milk, the kin of daughters. They spoke little birdie.

Blood

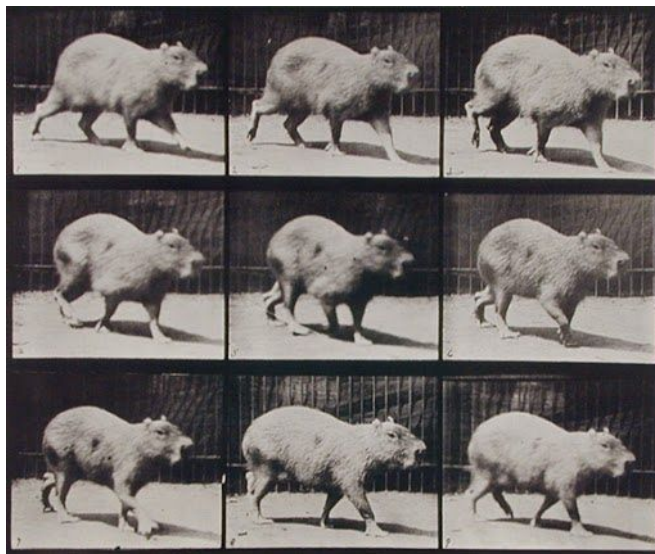
I quilted a mommy out of open space. From the stars in the solar system. She's a blanket to me. I spiraled her about myself. And buried the rest. And inside this space I created another. The blood of the other spilled out of me. She was kicking inside me, unraveling herself. A blood feud was forming, the Skin of the Trunk.

She'd written these as a child, these "stories," at a transitional age. She had pulled both out and laid them on the couch.

Noone expects you to get married anymore. All that I expect is that you act your age.

Kingston Guardian: "...could see a thumping child upon the boat. She jumped when she was told, he said, collapsing into the river. The bystander is unsure of the kidnappers' identity or features. It would have killed her had he not intervened. The only long-term physical harm is water left in her ear..."

And only now, she remembered, had the ringing stopped, but why? Who had it gone to?



51.

“Nikolle Gjoke Per Ndoka of Kacinar, Mirdite, from the Banner of Diber, as a result of some quarrel he had with fellow-villager, Nikolle Marku, shot his gun at the latter’s door, putting three bullet holes into it. The case came before the Elders and, when they had taken the evidence, they handed down the following judgement:

“The damaged door of the house of Nikolle Marku shall be taken and brought to the house of Nikolle Gjoke Per Ndoka, and the door of his house shall be brought to the house of Nikolle Marku. The door that was shot and perforated with holes shall be placed in the house of the person who shot, and he shall be liable to heavy fines if he dares not only to change it, but to plug the bullet holes for a period of fifteen years. Aside from this, he is also fined 500 grosh”

52.

“My Flora,

“This entire note exists against you. You are not the one this is for. This is not for you. It exists expressly in opposition to you. This is something that has everything to do with your demise. Because you are a different person than Larkyns, Flora, and I know what I can do to you with my words.

“It would be of no use to kill a strong man. But Harry Larkyns is not a strong man. I’ve written letters, none of which possess the power to do this.

“There is something strange about him, a ticking, a sort of unconscious ticking to him. Something about him simply ticks through his day, sweeping through you, and it is within my jurisdiction to kill this.

“Flora, the truth is you are dumb. The truth is your heart is rooted in a passivity, a quality like a cool breeze. You are something created from wrongness. I don’t know if you were born this way. It doesn’t matter how you were born, Flora. You are inextricable from your stupidity. It takes up space inside of you. I know you bear your stupidity like a child. I have watched you suffer over this limitation, struggle to move past it, despite its monstrous growth. Soon you caved into it, creating Florado, the boy, though he is hardly a boy. He’s hardly your son, and certainly not mine. He is a symptom of your stupidity. Your inability to contain it has caused him.

“I have tried to do everything I can to become an American. I have only ever made authentic decisions, and I have always followed them to their end.”

53.

Chronicle: “After the shooting, Eadweard Muybridge was disarmed, and his demeanour was calm.

“The trial of the murder of Harry Larkyns by Muybridge was conducted with an all male jury, all but one of whom were married. His lawyer, Mr. W.W. Pendegast had attempted to defend him on grounds of insanity.

“Mr Pendegast’s closing statement for the defence was one of the most eloquent forensic efforts ever heard in the State. The peroration carried the audience away, and at the close they broke into a storm of applause. He had focused on the instant of the event, of what one could decide in such a case.

“The jury discarded entirely the theory of insanity, and meeting the case on the bare issue left, acquitted the defendant on the ground that he was justified in killing Harry Larkyns for seducing his wife. This was directly contrary to the charge of the Judge, but the jury did not mince the matter, or attempt to excuse the verdict. They said that if their verdict was not in accord with the law of the books, it is with the law of human nature; that, in short, under similar circumstances they would have done as Muybridge did, and they could not conscientiously punish him for doing what they would have done themselves.

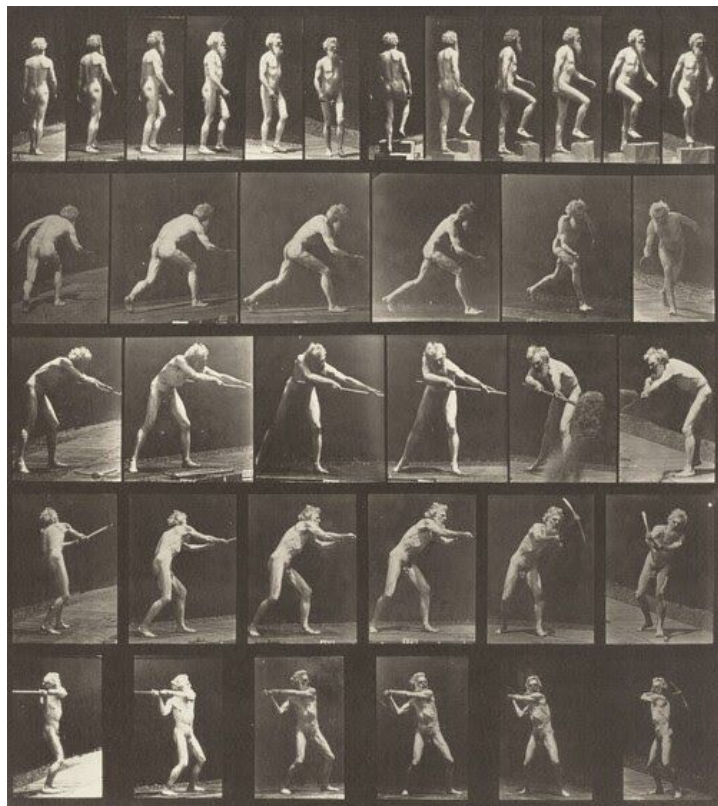
“At the sound of the last momentous words a convulsive gasp escaped the prisoner's lips, and he sank forward from his chair. The mental and nervous tension that had sustained him for days of uncertain fate was removed in an instant; and he became as helpless as a new-born babe. Mr. Pendegast caught him in his arms and thus prevented his falling to the floor, but his body was limp as a wet cloth. His emotion became convulsive and frightful. His eyes were glassy, his jaws set and his face livid. The veins of his hands and forehead swelled out like whipcord. He moaned and wept convulsively, but uttered no word of pain or rejoicing. Such a display of overpowering emotion has seldom, if ever, been witnessed in a Court of justice... He rocked to and fro in his chair. His face was absolutely horrifying in its contortions as convulsion succeeded

convulsion... Pendegast begged Muybridge to control himself and thank the jurymen for their verdict. He arose to his feet, and tried to speak, but sank back in another convulsion. He was carried out of the room by Pendegast and laid on a lounge in the latter's office. He had no recollection of the incident afterward.”

54.

“Blood is blood and a fine is a fine, says the Kanun”

“Blood is never avenged.”



II.

1.

There was a way she followed herself.

Or maybe it was a guest, one which moved her, forwarding her speech and step, controlling her... life? Fine. It would intricately encourage her: you could be the only son, *the merchant*.

Noone had judged her step-brother to die so carelessly, to leave her with the whole weight of the man.

2.

“These are the words said by Gjergj Kastioti to Leke Dukagjini on the occasion of an assembly of the land.

Leke Dukagjini did not want to accept this judgement. In order to convince Leka that “Blood sucks blood,” he decided to exchange two infants, as soon as they were born from two families and clans: one from a fine and wealthy family, and the other from a common and poor family. The noble infant was given to the poor mother and the poor infant, to the noble mother, and they were left thus until they attained the age of reason.

After the children had learned to walk, they began to go to the parks to play with other children. The child of the poor family, raised in the house of the wealthy, wallowed in the mud and was always dirty, no matter how often he was changed and cleaned by the members of his household. The child of the nobility, raised in the poor family, always was neat and clean, and when he played, he would hold a stick and pretend to be riding a horse.

Kastrioti and Leka continued to observe the behaviour of the two children. “Leke” said Kastrioti, “are you convinced now that blood sucks blood?” Leka watched well what was

happening, but he did not change his mind, and he considered the matter of the children as a kind of game.

“Leka,” Said Lastiotti, “follow me; I want to lead you somewhere.” And taking the two children by the hand, he started out on the road and went to the cemetery. Kastrioti had the graves of the ancestors of the two children opened, and from them he took two bones. Then Kastrioti pricked the fingers of the two boys until a few drops of blood were drawn out. He took the bone of the poor child’s ancestor and brought the noble child’s bloody finger to it, but it did not absorb the blood. Then he took the bone of the noble child’s ancestor and brought the poor child’s finger to it, but it did not absorb the blood.”

3.

Most agreed suicide was less the word (only she called it that) than insanity. George’s body showed traces of the river. Why? Everyone knew not to drink from there—why he had was an unaccountable blind spot.

In order to maintain her standard of living, she would take his place, cozy into his compartment of the merchants.

The cat had died, too. She had contracted maggots in her mouth and anus (the doctor could not be sure which first) and was poisoned lest she be eaten from the inside out. The merchant buried her next to the corroded hole that was to be Superior. She had considered the more traditional approach of bringing dead cats to the river Thames, but decided she was not a British cat. She was American in spirit, and was given a private burial for the life she ought to have lived.

Then the merchant lived alone until her cousin returned.

4.

It was a soft arrival. His gaze was glazier, more confused, but his smile came from a natural calm. It looked off, as if some elongated child had aped his manner.

He was absolutely demented now, she could tell. She only resented that it had happened so far from her. She hadn't gotten to watch the moment the life dropped out from under him. Now she'd have to watch him sink.

5.

He was wrong about the nature of his practice. Cinema contained *as much* potential for quotation, and far more sufficient means to do so. Yes, his work was a performative displacement of motion, but both were. He had likely mistook the sterility of his photographs for an enhanced reality, quotation for imitation.

What mattered was that he was wrong. She would lie in her silence with mocking thoughts: *even with sound, even then...*

6.

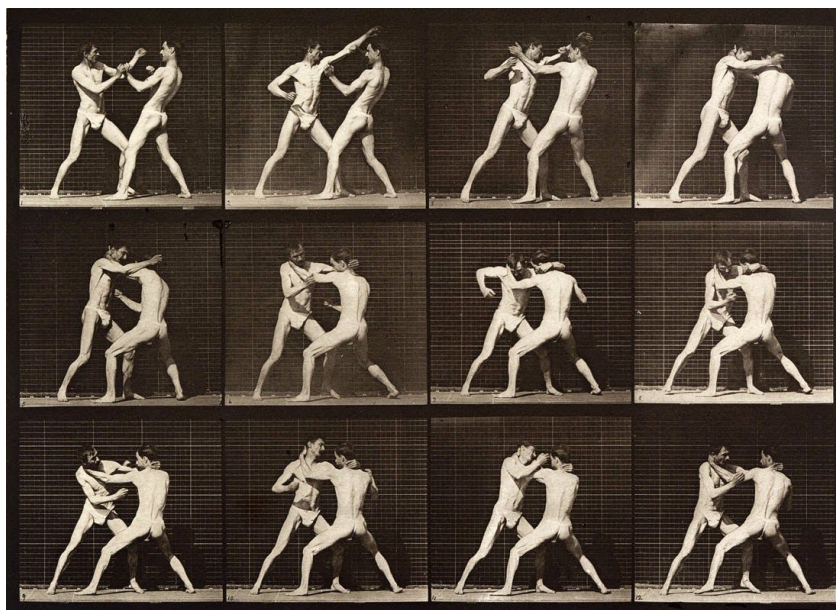
"Degrees of relationship result from blood or from kinship."

"Degrees of relationship by blood result from the side of the father; degrees of relationship by kinship result from the side of the mother."

7.

His wife's letters were about his office, carelessly as anyone else's. He did not care to hide these pleas, apologies, certificates penned in her rigid hand. Recent notes from Marey were vitriolic. Each violence held in the company of the others. Her cousin seemed unwilling to let these papers move him any particular way.

How wonderful, he spoke, sitting by the side of the river. All he needed was the water of his childhood. *What a marvelous thing, how wonderful it is!* He sat by the water for hours at a time, letting his patterned reflection come before a breeze blew it apart. Over and over, it would return to him as something luminous and new.



8.

The neighbor kids would taunt him (there were neighbor kids now.) Their favorite thing to do would be to leave a can on the stoop filled with springs, or “snakes” as they called them. They would do this in fifteen minute intervals, giving him enough time to forget. After days of this, it permanently seared into his brain to stay away.

Sometimes they spoke to him from behind a large bush. They told him they were god. It seemed to comfort him, and she didn't really have the energy to intervene.

9.

At night, she watched him explore the backyards boundaries. He was either trying to escape or find someone. Eventually, she had to trace the yard with large rocks to keep him from colliding with the neighbors fence, and put some around the holes so that he wouldn't fall in.

What happened to all our space?

In the day, she would take him on losing walks. He would always forget its contents the moment they finished. Except for the people—he would remember them. He always wanted to be with the people.

10.

Her work clothes had a unisex fitting. A certain suit jacket, a hat she could divert into.

It was within these that she began to recall her family, the whole assemblage. This unit she'd once found countless could gradually, at least in essence, be summed up.

It took this fear: *maybe I'm not thinking at all unless I'm thinking about my family.*

11.

"Relationships stemming from the side of the mother are called 'The Tree of Milk.'"

12.

The merchant understood her mother's side of the family through anecdotes. Her tone recalibrated towards one from childhood, a past marked by clumsy failures. Her stories, all overrun with oafish patriarchs and cruel disciplinarians, were told for groups familiar with the narratives, participating in their telling over meals. She and her step-brother would soak up these stories as they were recounted.

13.

“The ‘meal of blood’ occurs when the mediators of reconciliation of blood, together with some relatives, comrades, and friends of the ‘owner of the blood’ go to the house of the murderer to reconcile the blood and eat a meal to observe that reconciliation.”

“Before the matter of the blood is settled, before the necessary guarantees are given, and before the terms of payment of the blood-money are specified, the tables for the reconciliation meal are not set and no food is eaten.”

14.

Selling corn came so naturally. Why was it that George always seemed drained afterward? Well, because the work opposed him. She could simply channel her pulp sloganeering. This was actually much easier. A certain malleability to spoken language fit her nicely, rounded her out.

15.

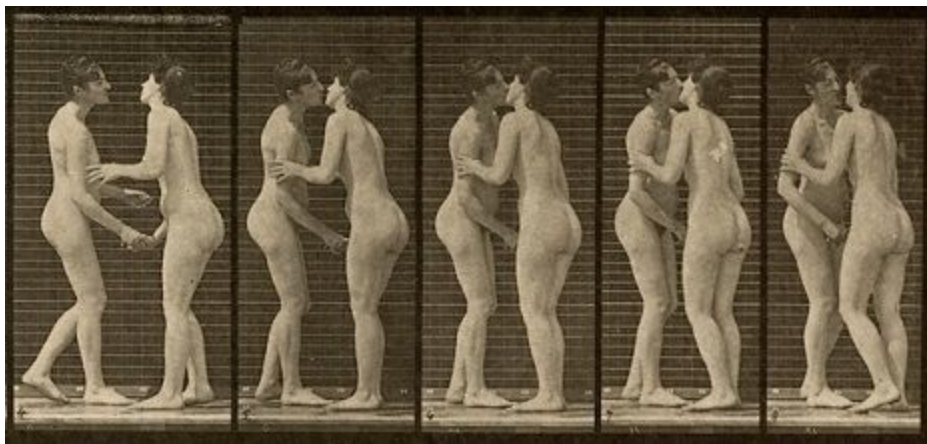
The Pennsylvanian: "...the part most interesting to University men is the delineation of the athletic sports, foot-ball and base-ball, running, jumping, vaulting and wrestling. Nearly every well-known University athlete of the past two or three years has served as a model in the nude, many of them showing magnificent physiques, and exhibiting exquisitely the play of every muscle. The facial expressions in successive intervals of some feat of skill and strength, is a study in itself."

16.

Pseudoscientific. This had been his practice, one of pseudoscience. She flipped through his book, muttering curses at the page.

She'd learned about his shrewd practices, about his treatment of the models, all through his letters (which were all she could bring herself to read.) The women had been prostitutes. This had been the convention of the day, for one hoping to take nude pictures. The men had been athletic students—pitchers, hitters, teenaged men. This, as well, was convention.

He would play up whatever one's social functions were. If one was a man, he would behave completely as the athlete. If one was a woman, she would run errands, chores. Once, because the women were prostitutes, he'd decided to feature a lesbian kiss:



17.

A woman came to the merchant at work. A young historian with a deep interest in photography, and the burgeoning art of film. She had seen the merchant's great cousin give his lecture at her university, and had since become entangled in his history. *I wanted to know what it was like taking those photographs. All of those instants creating an instant in time.* She wanted all of this from her.

The merchant liked this space of power, her sway over the fascinated. Soon, the historian began conducting interviews and research at her home.

18.

There was her mother's sister. She had always been rebellious towards the family, but still she was the one who lived with their grandmother after she'd become demented. Before then she'd had an interest in the arts, and became a tilemaker with her husband by 1868. By the 70's, he had opened his own business, and began making truly astonishing work in the 80's. She was a sculptor who worked in scagliola, an old form of creating counterfeit italian sculptures with plaster. At some point, early in this process, their grandmother saw her creating a sculpture of a cherub-marked fireplace. Ecstatically, she exclaimed *you're just like a man! You're working with your hands just like a man would.*

19.

"Relationships stemming from the side of the father are called "The Tree of Blood."

20.

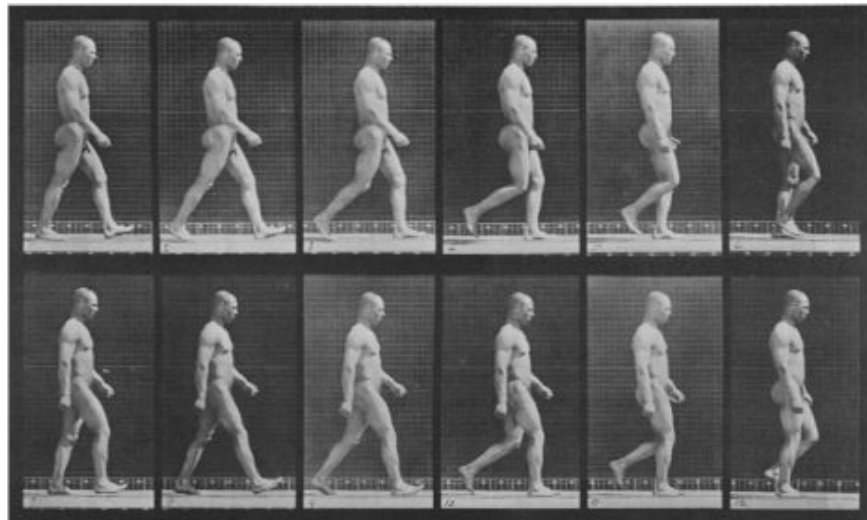
Her father's mother had been in hospital for some time. During it, his brother, David, who had lived with their mother all of his life, was relatively absent. (This a half-truth, that he lived with her all his life. There was a point when he was kidnapped by his father, a point when he went to university, and another point when he joined a cult.) She was in a hospital next to her parents house in Kingston, and he had only stopped by briefly. He arrived in make-up, and her father had discovered then that David would dress like a woman sometimes. To what extent was left unclear. Her father demanded that David remove the makeup before they saw her, but he insisted she wouldn't notice and she didn't.

21.

The grid had come about for Bailey. The grid, a decoration the cousin used to give his works a sense of science, reality. But his earliest photographs from University of Pennsylvania did not even suggest that their intellectual value was to be gleaned from the measurements of one's movements. All they served as were visual descriptions.

Bailey was a mixed race pugilist, and her cousin's only black model. He was the model the grid was first used on.

The historian asked about the merchant's flimsy imitation, and lost interest when she learned it wasn't real. *Real?*, asked the merchant.



22.

“The mediator of blood accomplishes his task, he is entitled to compensation.”

“Once the guarantors of blood assume this responsibility, they do not abandon it.”

“The blood-money must be given to the family of the victim through the guarantors and never directly by the murderer.”

23.

The weather was all clouds and fog, dimming the interior. Their lights would flicker, the power unstable.

The Historian would ask questions, often about him:

“What is he like?”

“Really what... how he behaves? Or...”

“His process.”

“I wasn’t there. Not for his significant works. When he was somewhat demented, when he would dig, yes. He never entrusted me with-”

“What were his ambitions?”

She was silent for some time, worming around the chair.

“The cinema.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Or, I don’t know. I’m sorry... yes.”

She couldn’t speak to the historian without a fiction taking form.

They hardly ever saw one another squarely. There would be the one facing straight ahead, and the other eyes floorward, a toenail wedged between the boards.

24.

Not much came through to him of people, least of all gender. Everyone’s was unsettled, hinging upon the styling of one’s hair (knotted or loose), their clothing, the light. Once, he asked the historian if *he could speak up, please*, causing her eyes to swell a bit. The merchant had to keep him in the other room after this.

The merchant was always his mother; that’s who he always mistook her for. Except after the power first went out, when he resorted to calling her *you*.

25.

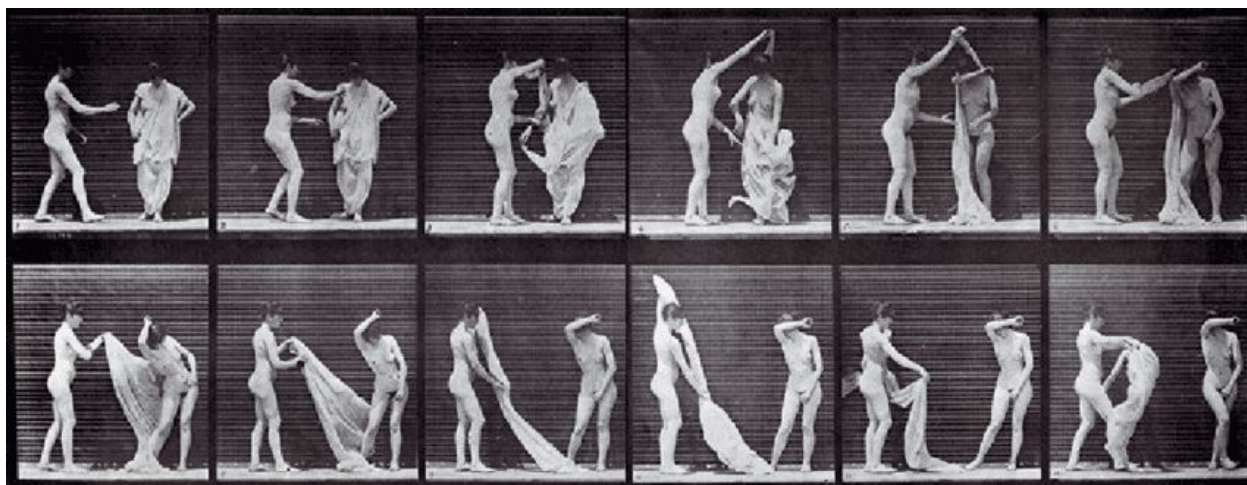
Her father’s grandmother immigrated to London in 1842 as an Eastern-European Jew, to escape persecution. She believed her family would immigrate shortly after, but many either died in a series of pogroms or found temporary but fleeting refuge in Albania.

The tolerance her family found in this county, which generally did not approve of Jews, can be traced back to a fundamentally Albanian concept, *Besa*. This creates a legal precedent for

one's honor and hospitality. The word roughly translates to “faith,” but is often interpreted as “word of honor.”

About a century later, during World War II, thousands of Jews were snuck into Albania and taken care of as an extension of *Besa*.

But this was an unsustainable comfort which failed to protect the family for long. The Christians told the Jews that the law would not save them, while the Jews said that the law was the only thing that could.



26.

Her mother and aunt would tell stories of the demented grandmother. Sometimes, when she wanted to avoid social gatherings, she would cover her head with a napkin or a blanket. Once she had tried to escape and ducked behind a lamppost after she had noticed them following. They would laugh, tenderly remembering her failure to escape, to hide.

The merchant would cry at these stories, and they'd comfort her: *it's okay, you just don't understand. You always mix up other's experiences with your own! Don't cry, don't...*

There was a cutoff point for the adults as well, a dead zone in the progression of the grandmother's illness, where stories would no longer emerge, where the image would not quite come into focus. Once they'd reach this limit, the story would come to a sharp close.

Her father had said that he'd once heard a demented old woman asking people on the street *a flet shqip*, which means *do you speak Albanian?*, but directly translates to *do you speak eagle?*

27.

Truthfully, she didn't know much about her mother's brother, his nook of the family from which her great-cousin hailed. They'd kept their distance.

Her brother was a merchant who'd once had ambitions to become an actor, calling his profession his "golden handcuffs." This lack of fulfillment is what eventually killed him (on both sides, most of the men died of failure.)

The wife, had she been born some years later, could have surpassed him. Instead, she rerouted all of her passions towards the church.

Their children hated both of them.



28.

She'd less fled from marriage than halted far off, each point of entry a plunging track. In its absence, she had curbed her drives toward corners, panels, feeling out anything that walled her in.

Conversations with the historian were now lit by leftover ear-candles. *Perhaps they will create a deepening mood*, the merchant hoped before they certainly did not. The cousin could be heard shuffling through the kitchen's darkness.

The historian was addicted to soft drinks, sharing them generously. She never swallowed water on purpose anymore. Packs and packs came, to the point where it began to take up nearly half the fridge. She'd said that she could feel the pace of her blood adjust.

This was to be fed to the cousin every morning, to keep him malleable, and the merchant drank some of them as well.

This particular drink was used to treat scurvy in French soldiers. Always with her, the lineage of things, laying out their places and parallels.

29.

Inside of the house, she had found a photograph of a baby. On the back of the photograph was written "Little Harry"

30.

"If an adulterous pair is sought and discovered, the widowed woman or the girl who became pregnant would be burned alive on a dung heap. Or she would be tied between two heaps of burning wood and made to reveal the name of her accomplice, or else she was left to

burn between the two fires. If they succeeded in extracting the name of her partner, he would be caught and the two would be executed together.”

31.

She gave her cousin a bracelet: MY NAME IS ED. I HAVE MEMORY ISSUES.

I have memory issues?

32.

He had begun to ask god (the neighbor kids) to kill him.

“God, kill me.”

“Ed, it is not your time.”

“Please!” He would moan with a tinge of melodrama, eliciting odd laughter.

“No, Eadward. Now is not your time.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

33.

The historian's impulse was never to confess; the few stories she told disarmed the merchant with their measured callousness. Both's value to one another expanded with each concession.

For example: the historian hated her son. *No*, she'd said, *not hate, I just can't love him*. She'd felt refused of this emotion by some invisible principle. She could not even remember the birth. She'd been sedated by a mix of scopolamine and morphine, a standard procedure.

Perhaps if that pain were present in my memory, something would be there for him.

Surely this woman hated her child, the merchant thought, but to have completely forgotten the pain?

34.

“If someone kills a pregnant woman and, upon opening her body, it is found that she was carrying a boy, the murderer, aside from paying for her blood, must pay 6 purses for the boy; if she was carrying a girl, he must pay 3 purses for the woman.”

35.

The merchant broke into nervous fits in the historian's absence. A picking of her arm hairs, an abrupt smacking of whatever hard surface happened to lie before her. She felt sewn into her progress, her motions forward, each return. The gaps between were dark, the space of her shuffling cousin, his foul archive. She just found the woman's assurance habitable, a place she could rise into.

That said, each word reflected off of her, every *never* and *please*.

36.

The other merchants joked about how boring her stepbrother had been, how obstinate. She, on the other hand, was overcome with the things inside of her, with attributes. The men had deliberated and come to this conclusion. They confided in her: As a woman, would you...

Would she prefer...

Would you rather kiss someone or have a baby? Or rather, what would you call it, what you do?

37.

Do you smell that? Power outages had slowly broken down the sewage system. The humidity pressed the stench of the river all around. *It's archaic, almost*, the historian said, drawing in this drifting smell. It possessed their heads like rot.

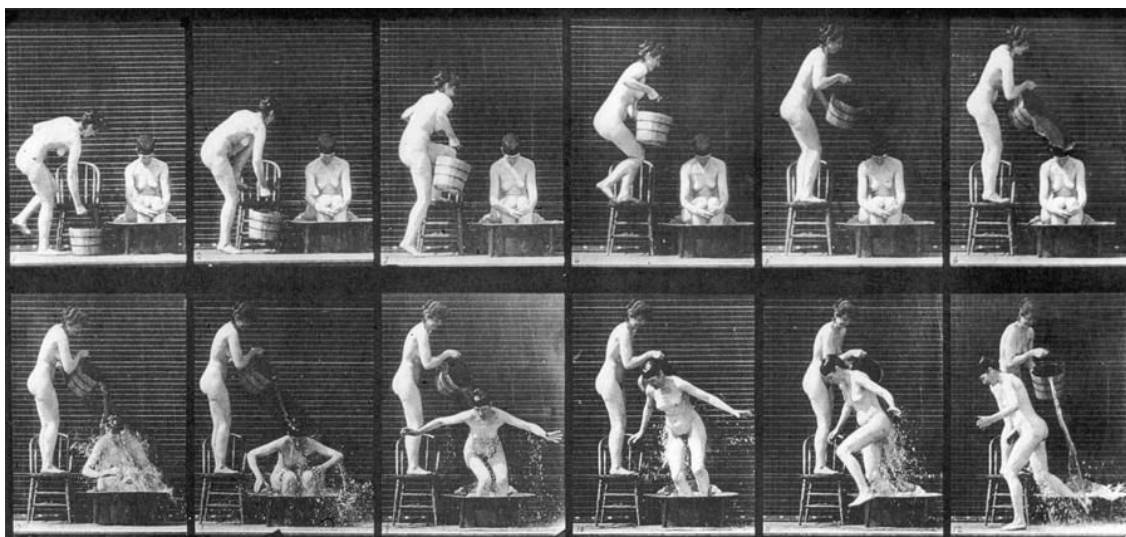
That night, in a loose jawed recline, he let the supper drool into his beard. She had never had to make someone eat before, no-one this fragile, this missing.

The front door was now padlocked. He stood against it, mouth pressed, muttering for the people. His posture suggested a thin tide running against him, keeping him barely stable.

She found prayers cards from his archive. Those of baby Jesus and Mary brought breast-feeding to mind. How easy, how natural that must feel!

Another of Jesus crying blood. Penned below: *Safe travels, love!*

She ran the faucet, tugged his hair under. Do ghosts carry their living scent, or that of their corpse, she wondered.



38.

“Once the hearts of the members of the family of the murderer and the family of the victim have been reconciled, they drink some of each other's blood.”

39.

The river's stench became overwhelming. These smells sent her cousin into senseless panics. Their fridge had lost its power.

The packed weather had reached its final pulse. The storm had come.

I know what you did to your fucking brother, what you did to me, you fuck. You absolute nasty sneak, you fucking creep motherfucker!

She could no longer tell who it was he thought he was speaking to.

I want to see people! Just the sight of you kills me!

She let it. Some revenge had found its passage in her.

Radiums bones had been lost by morning.

40.

She'd taken a razor to his beard. Hours all wasted in the sink, and now it was beginning to overtake the river's smell. It came off in chunks. His cheeks, chin, none of his contour had been so bare since youth. Shucked, his features sagged, his overbite showed.

I want to die. Let me leave, please.

It's not your time, Ed.

Okay.

There was no contention in him anymore, but a paceless rhythm, rocking. She covered his wooden posture with her touch.

He looked into the window. His sight developed slowly to the dark reflection rising off her glass.

It's Uncle David! Hello Uncle David!

The cousin waved, empty handed. She waved with him.

Hello.

41.

Her grandfather had exhibited what today might be called “schizophrenic tendencies.” Her father said he was the product of what happens when you break a man down, erase his rules, and overlay another set upon him. *This mixes people up, breaks them*, he'd say, tearing up, *for good*. He took time to find his father through a series of journeys across a number of different countries. He had died from an opium overdose in a far flung state of the Americas. They found him in the bath folded in on himself. This lack of closure never settled in her father, who himself had responded to the event by bringing her into the world.

42.

Her patience gave out. She'd made a decision at four in the morning. She couldn't stand to wait in the same house as them, so she placed the cameras and letters into the holes, to keep the suitcases as far as possible before selling them. Of course, this only set them deeper in her,

and now they were soaked. Okay, fine. Here's where they'd be, that's fine. She filled the lakes back up with mud.

What to say? *The neighbor kids stole them, probably.* At the news, the historian had retreated somewhere internal. The merchant stiffened, felt her heart flood with the mistake of it, as a gentle splice came between them.

She would trail her cousin about the backyard. He would compulsively snap off their branches and unstem the leaves.

43.

Do you think about your family?

More often than I used to.

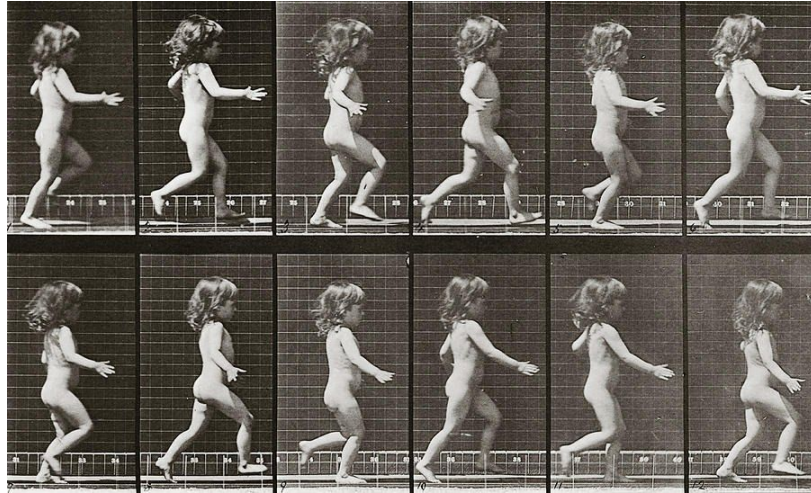
Somehow the unpowered fridge insulated her soft drinks, making it more of an oven.

The historian would throw questions that tied her up.

She told a story of how her mother, while pregnant with her, had begun to produce spirit drawings. *To escape the violence of parallels.* She believed she was a medium, one who was to be in touch with the dead, who would allow the dead to cycle through her and reappear in her paintings as completely non-representational curves. The family had no words for what they saw as formless arcs, so it mocked them. This must have been tumultuous. In the end, the process culminated in two creations: a series of paintings and a baby. The baby wound up taking precedent, perhaps by force of procedure. She would never go on to create another painting after the merchant's birth, only returning to design to help her friends create storefront boards. Apparently, her Grandmother, whom the Mother claimed was rarely derisive, once said, "It's fine what she did, but her sister, the sculpture, is the real artist, and even then..."

The historian now accepted how little she'd gained from this archive, these collections...
Muybridge's life was in America, that's where the story was. These twos were barely a life at all.
She would leave it to rest after this.

She watched the merchant's tongue wring out its lines, an emptying sound which filled
out the commons and kept them still.



44.

“Two small glasses are taken, filled halfway with water or raki. Then one of the friends ties together the little fingers of the two parties and pricks them with a needle, causing a drop of blood from each to fall into the two glasses.”

45.

She lay in bed fingering the hollow pains gnawing at her, pressing in and out of the ear, watching the window for her cousin. After the initial adrenaline of half-deafness, of freedom from the ring, she now felt lop-sided, a spinning feeling guided by a steady throb. The language projected out of her felt dizzied, yet the feedback was abounding. Her speech had become quite

elegant. People admired her intelligence. She was always so quiet, they *didn't know she had it in her*.

She had no idea what she had in her—something must soon show from there, right? And then what?

46.

Her step-brother had caused her early arrival into the world by jumping upon her mother's stomach. This is what had caused her water to break, and a midwife had to be rushed over at a moment's notice. In a panicked judgment, she overwhelmed the mother's senses with scopolamine. While this drug was prescribed to laboring mothers to forget the pain, it left them completely unhinged. The father and midwife were forced to tie her to the bed with cords of cloth so she would stop clawing at her stomach, cursing at the unborn child. Her convulsions deepened through her flesh, into her bones, every part of her present. She rose and sank, bucked and crashed, her violent spasms repeating to the point where the father, as he watched, could catalog each of them and did. Given her constraints, there were only so many movements she could make, only so many registers her voice could reach. He chose to watch with remove, as if she'd achieved a pain beyond his capacity of understanding.

When the girl came out, she was not breathing; she had ingested too much water into her lungs. The doctors went on to dish out death sentences through her youth, a child always on the verge. She did not present sickly or noticeably premature. Rather, she was incredibly flexible, without much muscle to her. It made it hard to sit up, sit still, be one. Her mother was forced to give her medicines to build her up. She would drink these not knowing what they were doing, and never asked her mother what they were.



47.

Then her cousin made headway. She had searched the holes, their surroundings—he was off.

He can't put on his own clothes but he knows how to escape.

The historian heard her heave and contract, completely mixed.

Based on trusted anonymous reports, the state deemed her unfit to care for him.

The state watched her words fly out, eyed their span and arch, before freezing them in motion, stringing them together as proof, evidence. The verdict was unanimous. They'd cut him off from her.

48.

What her condition will yield:

Your nails, hair, and spittle as soft bullet holes about the commons

Your plates as earths, trees, and waters, broken and observed with ghoulish remove.

You: hands raised, entering the world, ready to receive your due.

Your swift, more-or-less hairless motion out.

Everything else about you draining from the house.

The wrong relations gummed and scribbled into our blood.

An instant which led you to the mud, to lakes that are not lakes.

The collapse of words under and over the roof.

You living your last lie before passing into the family.

49.

“After mixing their blood in this manner and stirring it well, the two men exchange glasses and, with their arms linked, they hold the glasses to each other's lips, drinking each other's blood. Guns are fired in celebration and they become like new brothers, born of the same mother and father.”

50.

He was buried in a grave marked “Maybridge.” No children came from this side of the family.

The other side, the brothers and sisters of the great cousin, had a few children of their own, each of which married off into Jewish and Albanian lineages respectively. We cannot trace how they met or under what conditions, and here is where our view tapers off.



MUYBRIDGE, PHOENIX

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This would have been impossible without “*KANUNI I LEKË DUKAGJINI: THE CODE OF LEKË DUKAGJINI.*” Thank you to Shtjefën Gjeçov for collecting and arranging the text, and Leonard Fox for translating it. It provided the groundwork for this story and maybe a quarter of its sentences.

Similarly, Rebecca Solnit’s “River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West” was an invaluable resource in learning about Muybridge’s life and providing the necessary context for this story to work, as well as an index full of remarkable journalistic quotations. All of the quotes from Muybridge that I didn’t make up (those on page 4 and 13 are the made up ones—all others were slightly modified) were from that book’s index. All of the newspaper articles I quoted came from it as well, omitting the following.

The quote from page 34 came from here:

http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/archives/detail.html?id=ARCHIVES_20050208003

The remarkable centerpiece about Muybridge’s trial, which goes from pages 25-27, came from here:

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031492/1875-02-18/ed-1/seq-2/>

All of the pictures included were taken by Eadweard Muybridge, except for the one on page 7, which is by Étienne-Jules Marey.

Thank you to Thom Andersen for making “Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer.” I would have never actually written about Eadweard Muybridge if I hadn’t seen your film.

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