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Name (of company, if applicable)
Address
Phone Number

Tesseract

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by
Geoffrey Alan Rhodes

G. Alan Rhodes
23 Livingston St. Apt 2
716-316-8210 garhodes@buffalo.edu

Fade up: intertitle

"It is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop." --Auguste Rodin, 1911.

PALO ALTO, 1871, THE EXPERIMENT TRACK

FADE UP long bottom panel of MUYBRIDGE, a 47 year old man, dressed in dusty black ranchers hat and dusty black suit with long beard and HELPER dressed in black fedora and black tieless suit stringing the last of the catch lines across the lime covered track. MUYBRIDGE loads each of 12 cameras in a line with collodium wet plates from a black light bag.

FADE UP a square upper-right panel of the ultimate catch line strung taught. The far-off sound of galloping, like a clock ticking, begins.

MUYBRIDGE waves excitedly to screen left and stands back before the track. The SOUND OF GALLOPING becomes deafening. A horse enters the long panel.

FADE UP upper-left rectangular panel, frontal shot of Muybridge crying-out and throwing his hat in the air.

FADE UP SUCCESSIVELY (as the horse, OCCIDENT, trips each string, there is the snap of a wood shutter, and that section of the long panel is overlaid with ORIGINAL PHOTOS OF OCCIDENT IN GALLOP.

UPPER RIGHT SQUARE PANEL: the ultimate thread snaps and waves in the wind as the last photograph appears.

FADE UP TITLE: "Tesseract"

Muybridge exits the frame.

The photograph panels develop and fade.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. PHOTO LAB

FADE UP scene interior of developing shed (not darkroom) photographs are laid upon the table, Muybridge and Stanford, a 50ish well-to-do Californian, inspect them.

DETAIL photographs are spread upon the table PAN across images as sound of horses hooves dominates. As each photo crosses the screen the sound slows to a single hoof pounding the track.

WIDE a finger points to the gelding, all hooves raised from the track. Stanford smiles wide and exits frame to light cigar.

MUYBRIDGE looks at the photographs in series. We see his POV, he focuses on the space inbetween the photographs. He places the photos on top of eachother so that they are only separated by the film-edge line. We zoom-in so that all that is left on screen is the gritty black of the film edge gutter.

Optional Dialogue:

MUYBRIDGE
...Suspended in time.

STANFORD
A flying angel.

MUYBRIDGE
In this moment, he never touches
the ground... Forever.
(Stanford paces behind
Muybridge muttering)
But what happens between these.
What is in this gutter?

Stanford returns to take the negative of the "Flying Angel".

STANFORD
The full extension of the forelegs!

MUYBRIDGE
I wonder...

INT. MUYBRIDGE'S S.F. APARTMENT

Full Screen: PAN across series of staged photos of Flora Muybridge. The sound of female irritation comes from off screen. Pan reveals deep focus of Muybridge posing Flora (Standing, head turned left, rt. hand face down over left face up) for a portrait. He steps from behind the camera and readjusts her portraiture braces, she makes sounds of irritation again. Muybridge returns to the camera.

FADE UP THREE PANELS: Left: Flora Muybridge from the camera's perspective, Right: frontal view of Muybridge behind the camera, Middle: The ghostly reverse image Muybridge sees through the camera.

Muybridge puts his hat in front of the lens, takes off the lens cap, and uses his hat as shutter.

MUYBRIDGE
(posing Flora)
Alright... Still.

CUT TO:

ALL THREE PANELS SYNCED:

We see the hat/curtain removed and the image appear. It is a 15 second exposure. In the last five seconds, Flora moves in irritation from getting poked by a brace and we see the image trace/blur with the movement. As the hat/curtain is replaced...

CUT TO:

FULL SCREEN TABLEAU OF PHOTOGRAPHING SCENE

Muybridge removes himself from the camera hood, and removes the plate.

MUYBRIDGE
You must stay still.

FLORA
(trying to rearrange the
bracing)
This brace...

Muybridge rearranges the brace on Flora. His attitude is pedantic and paternal. She is irritated.

MUYBRIDGE
Soon I'll take pictures of you of
an instant.

Muybridge returns behind the camera and loads it.

CUT TO:

THREE PANEL SCREEN: FLORA, PHOTO, CAMERA

FLORA
I wouldn't have to suffer this damn-

MUYBRIDGE
 (un-hearing)
 Still.

He removes the cap and shutter, the picture begins, Flora remains still for a 45 second exposure.

MUYBRIDGE
 Photographs that capture an instant. Shorter than the seconds of a clock. As short as a thought, an emotion. I could capture the moment a young man falls in love. Or the moment of a soldier pulling the trigger in murder. Those invisible moments made visible. Irrevocably gone, yet preserved forever. ...finished.

SINGLE PANEL: TABLEAU OF ROOM

Flora immediately extricates herself from the braces and begins to remove her costume dress. Muybridge replaces the lens cap and removes the plate, and walks it, in a light bag, to an adjoining room off screen.

FADE UP: LEFT PANEL, MUYBRIDGE IN THE DARKROOM, THE DOOR CLOSES TO BLACK, BUT WE HEAR THE SOUND FROM THE ROOM, AND SEE THE PHOTOGRAPH AS IT DEVELOPS AS IF LIT FROM AN INWARD LIGHT.

FLORA
 (loudly, to Muybridge in the other room)
 How do you know what you'd get. I mean, if you can't see the moments, how do you know what you're taking a picture of?

She lays her gloves and cover on the table. A hand reaches out to grab hers. LARKYNS is revealed hiding behind the curtain. She slaps his hand.

MUYBRIDGE
 That's it. It's exploration, uncharted territory. You don't know what you'll find in that abyss until you shine light on it. Exploring time.

Larkyns pushes his head out from the curtain and is shooed back.

FLORA
 (standing suddenly and
 interrupting)
 What time do you have to leave?

MUYBRIDGE
 I catch the train to Calistoga at
 8, and then wagon train to the
 Modoc encampment from there the
 next day. I should leave soon.

Larkyns smiles and grabs Flora's leg. In the darkroom, we zoom in to the developed photo, just taken, of Flora; there is a perverse look on her face.

FLORA
 Be careful.

SPLIT SCREEN: TOP: MODOC WAR MONTAGE, BOTTOM: FLORA & LARKYNS MONTAGE:

BLACK SCREEN

FADE UP: Middle Right Square Panel, Muybridge seated on train in motion, an unwinking stare on his face.

FADE UP: Top Left Panel: detail of a letter being written to Flora. The Muybridge voice over of the letter begins here, and serves as conterpoint/punctuation for the following panels.

FADE UP: BOTTOM PANEL, FLORA AT HOME WITH LARKYNS MONTAGE

They dance in the bedroom laughing, then land together on the bed. Dissolve to: Larkyns listening to her growing womb. Dissolve to: Flora receiving baby from wet-nurse, Larkyns standing by. Dissolve to: shot out door, Flora waiting tensely with 3 month old for Muybridge who is walking up to the house. He stops in the doorway. Flora is framed, with child, Pieta (Boticelli) like against a wall of photographs of her. Muybridge looks at her with desperation. Flora's expression changes from fear to defiance. Mubridge takes two steps into the room and stops.

CUT TO: FULL SCREEN, POV Muybridge.

Multi-Panel view of Flora with child slowing down zoetropically, so that she becomes single frame moving to single frame. The other panels show changing details of the photographs on the wall. None bear the immediate emotion of the real image.

We see Muybridge's eye blink in slow-slow frame by frame motion.

CUT TO: Triptyche of Muybridge: three panels, before, during, and after his moment of decision when he turns and leaves. Each panel is presented as stills that suddenly jump into motion. Flora is left standing with a crying child.

Cut to: Muybridge on train.

TOP PANEL CONTINUES: A Man-With-A-Movie-Camera style montage of Muybridge photographing the war. He is everywhere, carrying, aiming, loading, and firing his camera like a gun. Cut to: stereo-scopic photos by Muybridge of the Modoc Indian War. Out of each picture, Larkyns stares (digitally superimposed), curling his mustache. Cut to: Muybridge on train.

MUYBRIDGE

(voice over reading letter
throughout previous panel
montages)

My dearest Flora. You, my wife, know better than anyone my devotion to my profession. A photographer walks the fine line between scientist and artist. I have chosen this hard path to challenge myself, and to challenge the world.

I am now enmeshed in an arduous photographic exploit. The documentation of these Modoc Indian fighters, and their rural american infantry counterparts in this barren dessert land is abstract. I long for the technical innovations I know are coming. To capture these killers in their moment of passion--or their moment of death... That imperceptible moment when everything changes. What discoveries might lie in the study of those as yet invisible instants. What would the man, pulling the trigger, say when able to view his own face in that moment of violence. What would the governments and leaders, sending these men to their death over a strip of dessert land say if they could see the irrefutable evidence of the exact moment of their soldier's deaths?

MUYBRIDGE(cont'd)

Instead I take the same steady shots, with each person sitting rigidly still, any movement a blur in time.

I carry your photograph with me. The soldiers all assure me you are beautiful, and so I pass that on to you. Do I detect the fragment of a smile in this picture? I think I see the beginnings of a love rekindled in the kind set of the eyes. Your beautiful flush of cheek. The slight brutality of your rigid bearing, and slight sensuality of your legs. I say these things to you as your husband, and as a man who wishes to bring back the early days. Where have we gone so astray? On my return, I'd like to sit down and talk. We could pull out the old pictures. Remember. This year away from you has been a year of longing. I look forward to my return next month, and to the sight of you.

Yours always, my love,
Eadweard.

Top and Bottom Panels culminate with Muybridge on Train, matching the continuing far right panel. Each Panel shows different perspectives of Muybridge arriving in Calistoga.

CUT TO:

TOP LEFT PANBEL: EXT.

Muybridge checking his gun, walking to a mining shack.

BOTTOM LEFT PANEL: EXT.

Muybridge knocking on door in the dark, he speaks to an unseen answerer (dramatically illuminated by the light from within) and waits.

FAR RIGHT PANEL: EXT.

Larkyns arrives at the door; he is silhouetted and the light from inside dramatically illuminates Muybridge in high contrast. Muybridge speaks unheard, pulls the gun from his coat, and points it at Larkyns.

ALL PANELS MOVE TO SLOW MOTION.

FULL SCREEN

The action of firing the gun is zoetropically extended, so that it slows, frame by frame, inching towards the shot, until ending in black with the sound of the shot.

INT. JAIL

Muybridge sits on a bench against the jail cell wall staring intensely before him.

FADE UP PANEL: A clock seen through the cell bars. It ticks in time with following panel.

FADE UP PANEL: The Moment of murder, from the gun being pulled out to firing. It is like a slowing zoetrope, never quite reaching the moment the gun fires. But frame by frame it moves, ever slower, to the moment just before.

[possibly insert previous scenes of train ride as flashback in panels]

This flashback is broken (wiped) by the entrance of a dark suit and briefcase (the Lawyer [Pendegast]), the briefcase is set down in front of Muybridge.

LAWYER

Mr. Muybridge, I'm a friend of
Leland Stanford.

Muybridge looks up.

SPLIT SCREEN: THE TOP HALF IS THE COURTROOM SEQUENCE INCLUDING paneled flashbacks, THE BOTTOM HALF OF THE SCREEN IS A VERY SLOW TRUCK THROUGH MUYBRIDGES LABORATORY, INBETWEEN THE TWO HALVES IS A LONG VERY NARROW PANEL SHOWING A LONG SHOT OF MUYBRIDGE WALKING THE STREET TO FLORA'S APARTMENT.

TOP SCREEN HALF: INT. COURTROOM

We see again a similar perspective of the lawyer, his head off-screen, only a dark suit visible, the briefcase nearby on a table where Muybridge sits, looking down. The lawyer is speaking to an off-screen jourey.

LAWYER

The defense will argue a temporal period of insanity. After a moment in which all changed, permanently, where one moment no longer led to the next, but the defendent's life was permanently shifted to a new track. There was a moment in which all bearing to the ground, to this sanity we take in our daily lives so for granted, left him. In this state, time nor the expectations of society meant anything. ... This man will never forget the moment of murder, nor will he ever recover from the blow to his life as he understood it. But this respected photographer, made famous in the capturing of a magical instant of a horse with all hooves off the ground, still has his work. Let him return to his work.

(To Muybridge)

The prisoner has a noble, honest heart; his life's work is done, and he seeks now only an honorable grave in which to lie down to blissful forgetfulness for all his troubles...

I cannot ask you to send this man forth to family and home-- he has none. Across the arch of his fireplace where once was written the words 'Home, Wife, Child, Content and Peace,' there now appears as a substitute for all, in black letters, placed there by the destroyer, the single, awful word DESOLATION.

(Back to Jurey)

LAWYER(cont'd)

But I do ask you to send him forth free-- let him take up the thread of his broken life, and resume that profession upon which his genius has shed so much lustre-- the profession which is now his only love... Do this, but this, and from every peaceful household, and from every quiet home within the state there will come to your verdict the echo of a solemn and a deep Amen!"]

THE FOLLOWING PANELS FADE UP IN THE TOP HALF OF THE SCREEN TO EVENTUALLY COVER UP THE COURTROOM SCENE

FADE UP PANEL: again, the zoetropic images of the murder.

FADE UP PANEL: The train ride.

FADE UP PANELS: the series of Occidental photographs, as in the beginning.

CUT TO:

TOP HALF: POV MUYBRIDGE

He looks past the lawyers form to the clock on the wall. It zoetropically slows (less frames) until stopping. The Lawyer continues off screen.

CUT TO:

TOP HALF: INT. COURTROOM

As the Lawyer completes his closing speech, Muybridge breaks down, crying in his hands.

TOP HALF: EXT. COURTHOUSE

Stanford stands speaking with the Lawyer. They shake the judge's hand. Muybridge approaches.

STANFORD
Congradulations, Eadweard.

MUYBRIDGE
(pulling Stanford aside)
I have had some ideas concerning the capturing of Occidental's motion.

In the long thin panel stretching through the middle of the screen, Muybridge has arrived at Flora's apartment.

FADE UP TOP RIGHT PANEL: It is a continuation (a missing piece) of the long thin middle panel showing the home and window through which Muybridge looks.

FADE UP TOP LEFT PANEL: INT. MUYBRIDGES BEDROOM:

FLORA lays alone on the bed looking sick with her baby. She looks up and sees Muybridge standing at the bedroom window, staring unblinking at her. She is paralyzed in fear and stares back.

FADE UP TOP MIDDLE PANEL: POV FLORA (through window to exterior): MUYBRIDGE stares blankly without blinking, turns and leaves without expression.

TOP RIGHT PANEL: CUT TO: INT. SF Apartment BEDROOM: POV MUYBRIDGE (THROUGH EXT. WINDOW): a zoetropic image of his wife, there on the bed with young child; long flickers between frames take place.

All panels end in sync with Muybridge turning and leaving. We see him, in the long middle panel return the way he came on the dark lonely street.

BOTTOM HALF: INT. PALO ALTO LABORATORY

This extreme slow truck into the laboratory takes place in the bottom half of the screen throughout the preceding top half panels. We track in past cameras in stages of construction, layed out photos of things in motion, and other Muybridge photos showing motion: waterfalls with timelapse, San Fransisco Panorama, To a table where Muybridge sits. There are both photos of Flora, and Occidental layed out in sequence on the table. There is a notice of death for Flora Muybridge. Muybridge sits, staring intently at a clock on the wall. We cut to his POV, and see the second hand's exaggerated motion. The number of frames per second reduces, until it is a synced, one frame a second.

INT. PALO ALTO LABORATORY: TRIPTYCHE

In three panels, Muybridge is depicted constructing the zoepraxiscope. At first each panel is just stills of the activity. Then each panel begins to flicker in framed motion and stop, leading up to Muybridge lighting the lantern and loading the images of Occidental.

FULL SCREEN: The ghostly zoepraxic image of the horse in motion.

PALO ALTO, 1877, THE EXPERIMENT TRACK

There are now 24 cameras set up, two helpers, and the track is longer, with a full grid set up behind it. Muybridge's hair is now white. He is loading the cameras. Two reporters are sitting nearby. Stanford is with them.

REPORTER1

What's this all about, John?

REPORTER2

Equestrian studies.

We cut to a wide view of the track with Reporters, Stanford, Muybridge, and Helpers all in view before the cameras and the track. A series of jump-cut montages, of all the different equestrian photos, with buggy, without, gallop, canter, hurdle jumping, climaxing with the falling of the rider. Intercut is the removing and replacing of plates, now no longer wet collodium, but dry gelatin.

INT. PALO ALTO LABORATORY

The Helpers are laying out the prints just taken for the observing of the reporters. Stanford is pointing out elements and speaking.

FADE UP: PANEL OF REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK.

Reporter1 is taking notes.

STANFORD

24 photos a second. 1/500th of a second "shutter speed". These images deny the common understanding of the horse's motion.

STANFORD(cont'd)

Paintings of the equestrian trot will show the forelegs always preceding the aft--I think of Messonier-- in symmetrical perfection.

MUYBRIDGE

But, as you can see here, nature's design is not so ideal. There are unlimited unexplained instants between these perfect moments-- unimagined by any painter. Time holds more mysteries than the imagination.

STANFORD

But gentlemen, we have another innovation for you.

MUYBRIDGE

To capture creatures of a single instant... That is what we have done. But to decompose and recompose motion. I give you the Zoopraxiscope.

Muybridge unveils the crude zoopraxiscope in a dark corner of the laboratory. He lights the lantern, and begins spinning the image of Occidental in motion. The reporters stand around amazed. Muybridge moves to stand beside Stanford.

STANFORD

I can recognize that horse's gait even in this phantasm.

MUYBRIDGE

It's the paradox in reverse: half the paths of a falling arrow, over and over and over... And animate the dead.

FADE UP PANEL OF MURDER FLASHBACK: The Decisive moment of shooting. With the image there is the sound of a giant Zoopraxiscope turning, slower.

EXT. UPENN PHOTOGRAPHY AREA, EARLY MORNING.

We see a line of 24 cameras like soldiers. They are more polished than the earlier cameras. Behind is stretched a large black grid with white lines. Tracking through the cameras, we follow a line, running from each to a control clock, this is wound by a familiar hand.

Muybridge is standing beside the clock, clearly excited, his visible top half is bare. He sets off the clock.

CUT TO: MLS of the photography area. Muybridge is walking in front of his own cameras. This view is replaced by the multiple panels of "Matured Athlete in Motion".

MONTAGE OF ENCYCLOPEDIA WORKS:

With the click of the shutters, panels appear, stretched across the screen of serial pictures. With the first shutter burst come 24 frames of the fencer in motion. Then again, with the boxer in motion. Then again with the athlete. Then Muybridge in stride. The pace quickens. There is again a series of athletes, this time three sets to a screen: Long Jumper, Javelin, Sprinter, then weightlifter, high jumper, boxing pair. The clock/shutter pace quickens. The next series is layered on the screen, 24 X 18 panels: Woman with fan, woman with baby, woman on stairs, woman with water, two women together, women with drapery, woman with child, woman dancing. The next set of images replaces those of before, again the pace quickens: young girl at play, young boy at play, young girls in hopscotch, young boys running, children in water, child crawling, child climbing stairs, child with doll, child climbing stairs 2, small child, child with mother, young woman. Again they are replaced faster; the abnormal: Single amputee, double amputee, infantile paralysis, bow-legged boy, sclerosis patient walking 1, sclerosis patient walking 2, epileptic 1, epileptic 2, locomotor ataxia walker 1, Locomotor ataxia walker 2, Local chorea sufferer 1, Local chorea sufferer 2. The clock shutters reach a frenetic pace. Panels on the screen are replaced with frames of the moment of murder.

CUT TO:

EXT. ZOO

FAST MOTION: Muybridge and two Helpers carry equipment into the zoo.

INT. ELEPHANT HOUSE

Muybridge and Helpers set up portable cameras. A crowd watches.

ANIMAL MONTAGE: Again the clock/shutter spins. The images are now interspersed with frames from the murder. The shutter speeds by like a machine gun.

Panels shown: Elephant walking, elephant pair walking, Lion walking, Lion turning, Lioness lying down, Tigress turning, Jaguar walking, Camel raking, camel galloping, baboon walking, baboon climbing, sloth walking, kangaroo jumping, cockatoo flying 1, cockatoo flying 2, cockatoo flying 3, hawk flying 1, hawk flying 2, hawk flying 3.

The photos shown are intercut with details of the cameras being loaded; plates exchanged. We see Muybridge standing behind the view camera, his hand on the clock. His look is intense... Electric. His hand pulls the trigger with each burst of shots.

FADE UP SMALL PANEL OF MURDER FLASHBACK.

We see a detail of Muybridge's eyes looking and then pulling the clock-trigger.

CUT TO:

POV MUYBRIDGE

The previous images are shown as zoetropes/zoopraxiscopes: ghostly looping images. Each image is successively layered on top of the other creating a pulsating, ghostly mass.

CUT TO:

DETAIL OF MUYBRIDGE

He cries in elation.

ZOOM OUT TO:

INT. ZOOPRAXIOLOGICAL HALL, CHICAGO COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION 1892.

Inside the giant darkened hall, Muybridge stands on a podium, pointing a cane at the giant projected image of the horse, Occidental. A crowd stands in front of him. Around the giant zoopraxiscopes are smaller ones projecting a museo of images: elephants, women, children, athletes, cripples, etc. We see a closeup of Muybridges happy face, gazing around the room.

CUT TO:

POV MUYBRIDGE

The darkened room is filled with ghostly zoopraxiscopic images: loops of the animations, we pan and see the audience, too as zoopraxiscopic images. The faces, lit by the faint ghostly light, gazing in wonder, slow to a frame by frame and then stop.

(EPILOGUE)

EXT. COTTAGE, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES, ENGLAND, 1910

A wizened MUYBRIDGE sits in a garden. Before him are the half finished ponds in the shape of the great lakes. A spade rests nearby. Above Muybridge is an apple tree. Around him is lush orchards. Muybridge is unwrapping a package marked with postage from America.

FADE UP INTERTITLE: (MORE)
 "The steps a man takes, from the day of his birth of the day of his death, trace an inconceivable figure in time. The Divine Intelligence perceives that figure at once, as man's intelligence perceives a triangle. He figure, perhaps, has its determined function in the economy of the universe." -Jorge Luis Borges"

He removes an early movie camera. Inspecting it, he removes the lens cap and safety, puts it to his eye and cranks. He laughs. Continuing to crank, he turns the camera towards the audience. We see the flicker of the lens shutter being opened and closed, and through it, his eye.