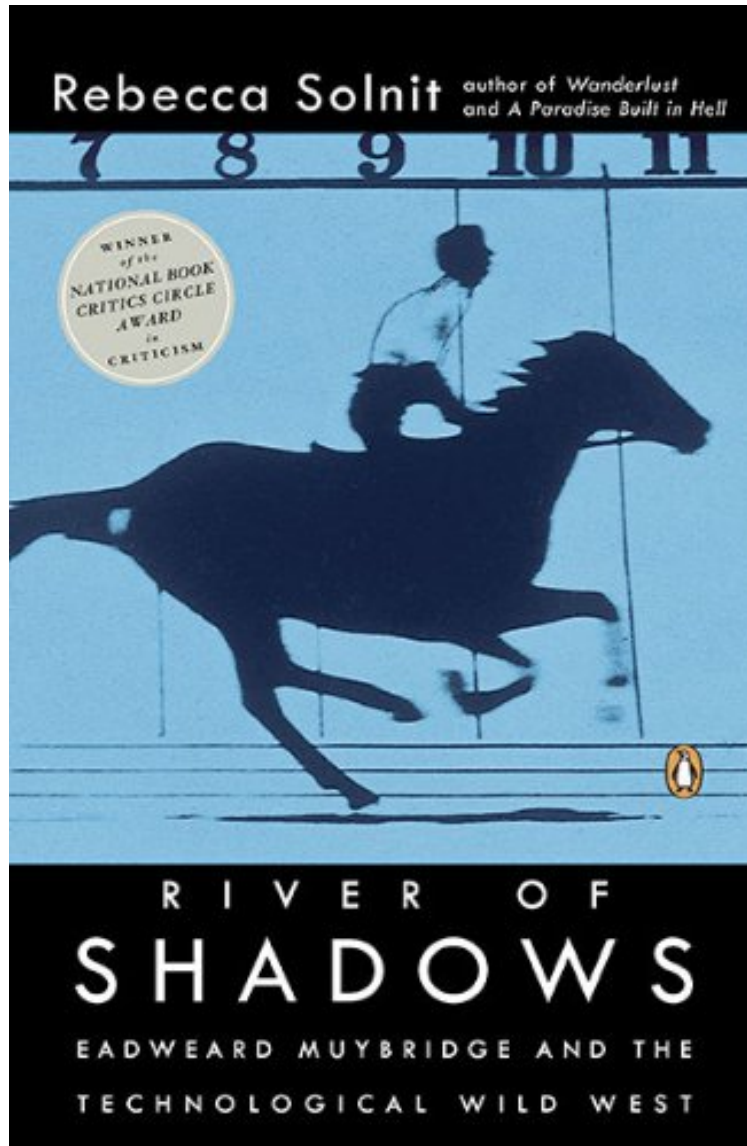


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River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West

Rebecca Solnit

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Rebecca Solnit : River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Changing Time...Changing Us By James D. Long I read Ms.Solnit's

book after learning that it had inspired actor/director Gary Oldman to write a screenplay called *Flying Horse*, with an eye toward directing the film about photo pioneer Eadweard Muybridge. *RIVER OF SHADOWS* is a meandering but thoughtfully entertaining journey through the energetic, sometimes tragic life of Eadweard Muybridge whose motion-study images were midwife to modern cinema. Solnit grandly sets the stage of Muybridge's era and how the lure of the early photographic process gave the Englishman a new career and a fresh start. His whole-hearted embrace of the burgeoning technology continues to impact us and our perception of time via motion pictures and all forms of emerging visual media. The book title's reference to the "technological wild west" is so appropriate by guiding us through the historical cloud of dust kicked up by an America of the late 1800s with its growing railroads, vanishing cowboys and struggling native tribes, to reveal how science was a significant part of the rough and tumble mix. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Memorable and should not be missed By Jayne An unusual penetrating study of the beginning of photography, of Muybridge's life and his 'movement studies.' Mr. Stanford, of Stanford university, figures in this history, too. Solnit makes insightful connections between traveling by rail and the moving pictures (river of shadows) and captures interesting verbal snapshots of an era. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. fascinating story and history By Katya Cohen Not the most scintillating writing I've ever read, but an eye-opening story of an artist (Muybridge) whose work helped shape our world. In fact, before reading this book, I took him entirely for granted and did not even consider him an "artist", just a photographer who took pictures of things in motion. He is a heck of a lot more than that, and his photographs are beautiful! The book also gave me (a foreigner who did not study the history of the formation of the west) a glimpse at the fascinating and almost incredible history of the formation of San Francisco, and at how truly rapidly this country developed the roots of what it is today (for better and for worse). This should be required reading in history classes.

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

From Publishers Weekly In the 1870s, at a racetrack built by railroad baron Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge invented high-speed photography. With his camera, he cut time into fractions of a second and laid it out in slices. Never before had human eyes seen a trotting horse distinctly, and the photographs astounded horsemen and artists, especially when Muybridge set the film in motion and the horse reeled fluidly across the screen. Today it is difficult to understand the pictures' impact, but 2001 NBCC finalist Solnit (*As Eve Said to the Serpent*) vividly recreates the wonder that greeted those primitive movies. Although she points her lens at Muybridge, her true subject is the perceptual revolution of the 19th century when the railroad, the telegraph and the camera transformed the experience of space and time. English-born Muybridge launched his career in 1867 with scenes of Yosemite and San Francisco. He soon began the experiments with "instantaneous" photography that led to the famous motion studies. Except for its most dramatic moments—the murder of his wife's lover, a suit against Stanford—the photographer's life remains obscure. Insistent on writing a biography nonetheless, Solnit pads the book with an account of workers' strikes, an aside on Victorian geology and other irrelevant details. Left to speculate about Muybridge's inspirations, she attributes much to a head injury resulting from a stagecoach accident. Her claims about Stanford and Muybridge as the progenitors of Silicon Valley and Hollywood are equally unsubstantiated. If the book fails as biography, however, it succeeds as a critical essay on Muybridge's art and a reflection on the meaning of space and time. Bw photos. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist *Starred* Cultural historian Solnit, an original and penetrating thinker with a gift for inventive metaphors and syntactical grace whose previous books include *Wanderlust* (2000), brings her fascination with the American West, photography, and technology's impact on the environment and culture to the story of the man who made motion pictures possible, photographer Eadweard Muybridge. An Englishman turned California bookseller, superb landscape photographer, inventor, murderer (he killed his wife's lover), and pioneer in stop-action photography and the study of animals, including humans, in motion, Muybridge is fascinating and significant, as is his turbulent milieu. Solnit recounts Muybridge's strange life and immensely influential work within the context of the tragic war against Native Americans, and ties his achievements to the world-changing repercussions of photography and the railroads in particular, and industrialization in general. Her exhilarating argument leads her to declare that California, home of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, is the true capital of modernism, and to claim that we haven't even begun to come to terms with its legacy: our estrangement from nature and utter immersion in the mesmerizing "river of shadows," the endless stream of images generated via film, video, and computer. Masterly and creative, Solnit's far-roaming synthesis is as unsettling as it is compelling. Donna Seaman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved One finds it hard to remember what things looked like before this book appeared in the world. The New

York Times Book The imagery of a poet, the ideas of a theoretician, the rhythm of a thoroughbred and the force of a Southern Pacific locomotive.San Francisco Chronicle