Once, Again, At All

> The reader has but to repeat, in his own mind… the scene in the woods… to have a true idea of my bitter experience there, during the first period of the breaking process through which Mr. Covey carried me. I have no heart to repeat each separate transaction, in which I was a victim of his violence and brutality.
>
> – Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (270)

> I have no learned theory of art to present, no rules of wise criticism to explain or enforce, no great pictures to admire, no distinguished artists, ancient or modern, to commend. I bring to the work before me only the eye and thought of a lay man.
>
> – Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" (351)

I

This essay considers how Douglass develops his narrative techniques of representing subjectivity across his autobiographies by studying his texts in relation to two late-nineteenth century photographic experiments organized around the challenge of picturing bodies in motion. I argue that, as differing iterations of relatively consistent subject matter, the phrases, scenes, and descriptions that recur throughout Douglass's autobiographies exemplify a representational logic characteristic of both narrative and photographic expression. This logic promises to present and secure a subject by rendering their presence objectively—i.e. as an object, either of scrutiny or concern—, even as it simultaneously imputes to that subject a dynamic vitality that necessarily exceeds finite representation. While repetition itself—by which I simply mean the recurrence of various but precise anecdotes across Douglass's different narratives—may be an unremarkable feature of successive retellings of a life story, here I propose that studying the narrative function of iteration offers perhaps the most illuminating perspective from which to appreciate Douglass's relationship to photography. By understanding the autobiographical enterprise as a creative effort to

commit the constituent events of a life into narrative form, we can recognize Douglass's progressively longer and increasingly comprehensive attempts to do so as examples of narrative representation peculiarly premised on repetition and iteration. At stake in my reorientation from reading any one of his autobiographies on their own, to considering what meaning they achieve when read together, is a renewed sense not only of Douglass's particular generic commitments, but of the more profound aesthetic and ontological principles photography and African American literature share as well.

Studying iteration in Douglass's autobiographies alongside the roughly contemporaneous photographic experiments that I discuss below is also about finding a new way of thinking about the common ground that narrative and photographic forms share. Iteration as an aesthetic phenomenon—rather than either a narrative technique or a technique of narrative analysis—becomes particularly evident through photography's abstraction of visual experience.[1] Whereas most scholarship on Douglass and photography attends to his lectures on the topic and to his photographic archive to historicize his prolific exploration of its possibilities, my own focus on how the iterative logic of photography refigures aesthetic problems of how parts relate to wholes sends my inquiry in a very different direction.[2] To date, scholarship in the field has been limited by its commitment to the daguerreotype as a heuristic for understanding how subjects are formed through the use of technologies of reproduction.[3] With Douglass in particular, scholars have been encouraged by the daguerreotypes' *unique* mode of representation to discuss expressions of subjectivity almost exclusively in terms of democracy and truth—values which, in turn, come to overdetermine our understanding of the medium.[4] My turn to the experiments of Muybridge and Marey responds to this overdetermination by considering how their use of iteration evinces the recursive way that photographs produce the very truths they are taken to reveal.

Despite the varying length and formal complexity of Douglass's autobiographies, their conformity to a largely consistent arrangement of pivotal moments in his life lends them a sense of coherence, if not contiguity. Even as he occasionally alludes to and cites his earlier texts in his later works, Douglass makes no attempt to explicitly conjoin his autobiographies one to another. The narratives' sense of continuity instead comes from how regularly they observe the familiar plot points that chart Douglass's development from an enslaved child into a free adult. From his fight with Covey, to his quest for literacy, to the other myriad brutalities of his youth, not only do the representative points of Douglass's story identify his narrative as his own—they also serve to articulate his subjectivity as one defined by the capacity to bear witness, and to do so as an iterative practice.[5] By examining those features that make Douglass's narratives both alike and different from one another, we see how the tensions born of repetition and difference produce meaningful discrepancies that, in turn, inform the ways we read and interpret his theorization of subject formation.

For Douglass, the sovereignty of the subject is fundamentally premised on the ability to not only perceive the world—as appearances can indeed be deceiving—but to employ the principles of its operation as well. This relation of appearance to perception, or of aesthetic representation more broadly, is an old one for African American literary studies, but a young one for Douglass scholarship.[6] Lena Hill's argument that black antebellum writers "found purchase [in a] visual veracity that insist[ed] on their role as moral arbiters having little in common with the ridiculous servants and entertainers so often portrayed in high and popular art," advances a claim similar to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s seminal thesis that Douglass was "the most representative colored man in the United States both because he represented black people most eloquently and elegantly, and because he was the race's great opportunity to re-present itself in the court of racist public opinion."[7] Photographic reproduction, political representation, and liberal subjectivity become more

tightly imbricated concepts in most studies of African American aesthetics and antebellum visual culture, through arguments like Gates's, which claims that "Black Americans sought to re-present their public selves in order to reconstruct their public, reproducible images."[8] Whatever this schematization offers in the way of theorizing the emancipatory potential Douglass and other nineteenth century writers saw in photographic technologies, it also obscures the important if implicit critique of the apparently natural correspondence between sight, sovereignty, and certitude running through much of their work. My interest in how the logic of iteration works throughout Douglass's visual and autobiographical oeuvres follows after Sarah Blackwood's incisive suggestion that Douglass and other African American writers "argued for a visual literacy that denied the indexical power of white visual practices while embracing the power of the image to make injustice visible."[9] Here I show how the study of repeated forms exposes ostensible truths for the synthetic products of attention, scrutiny, and discernment that they are, rather than the self-evident features of the world they seem to be.

Considering the subtle differences in the way Douglass narrates an instance of misapprehension in his second and third autobiographies respectively, the peculiarly narrative capacity of iteration becomes apparent. Early on in *My Bondage*, as he recollects the harrowing journey through the woods that would bring him from his grandmother's home to Lloyd's plantation, Douglass recalls a profound discovery about how sight relates to knowledge:

> Several old logs and stumps imposed upon me, and got themselves taken for wild beasts. I could see their legs, eyes, and ears, or I could see something like eyes, legs, and ears, till I got close enough to them to see that the eyes were knots, washed white with rain, and the legs were broken limbs, and the ears, only ears owing to the point from which they were seen. Thus early I learned that the point from which a thing is viewed is of some importance. (*MB* 148)

Despite the apparent banality of Douglass's observation that things viewed from one point often appear differently when viewed from another, his description of how our knowledge of the world is just as likely to be made sharper as it is to be usurped by visual experience, itself promises insight. In

this passage we see two types of iteration at work: the first in the way that Douglass looks over his environment several times, from distinct angles, like a series of double takes; and the second in the way that the successive, superseding clauses of the passage work to replicate Douglass's emergent sense of the world that lies before him. While the progression from "I could see," to "or I could see something like," to "till I got close enough to them to see that," certainly elaborates sight as a capacity of discernment and legibility, also of note is the way that the knowledge that sight produces actually yields to further scrutiny as the passage goes on.[10] If Douglass's pat conclusion to this anecdote belies the event's true significance, comparing this passage with his representation of the same moment in *Life and Times* proves illuminating. As Douglass writes in his third narrative:

> Several old logs and stumps imposed upon me, and got themselves taken for enormous animals. I could plainly see their legs, eyes, ears, and teeth, till I got close enough to see that the eyes were knots, washed white with rain, and the legs were broken limbs, and the ears and teeth only such because of the point from which they were seen. (*LT* 480)

We can recognize the latter passage's concision immediately. The iterative syntax of Douglass's apprehension in *My Bondage* is reduced to a more symmetrical form in *Life and Times* by way of Douglass's "plainly… till" construction.[11] This small change clarifies the aesthetic peculiarity of the iterative logic at work in the first passage by demonstrating the way in which, despite its rhetorical utility as a method of representing the process of apprehension—as it does in the first passage—, iteration is not necessarily about either economy or clarity. What the latter passage sacrifices in fact, by collapsing Douglass's longer expression of disorientation into a more succinct statement about event and causation, might be recognized as a keener sense of the incident's lasting impression. Indeed, the most evident difference between these passages is the way that Douglass's distillation of the lesson he learned from this incident in the first text is absorbed into the latter's last sentence. "Only such because" does substantive if subtle work in the latter passage, at once taking the place of the former's "owing to," and also incorporating Douglass's earlier insight about perspective and

conjecture into a broader, less edifying summary of events.[12] The distinctions that emerge through this brief comparison evince iteration's capacity to show progression from an original to a final form. It also makes legible the discrepancies between the forms that shape our experience of change over time.

If Douglass is investigating the development of his own subjectivity, Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, working in the United States and France respectively, used photography in similar ways to investigate the movement of bodies through space and time. The experiments they designed radically repurposed the fundamental premises of photography. Muybridge and Marey found that the photograph's combination of abstraction and fidelity enabled them to arrest movement and in arresting it analyze it.[13] This analytic process was an interpretive one, and indeed, Muybridge and Marey came to their respective discoveries in independent and very different ways. Whereas Muybridge's work made it possible to reconstitute a body's movement through the sequencing of successive photographs, Marey's methods allowed the entirety of a body's motion to be captured in a single frame.[14]

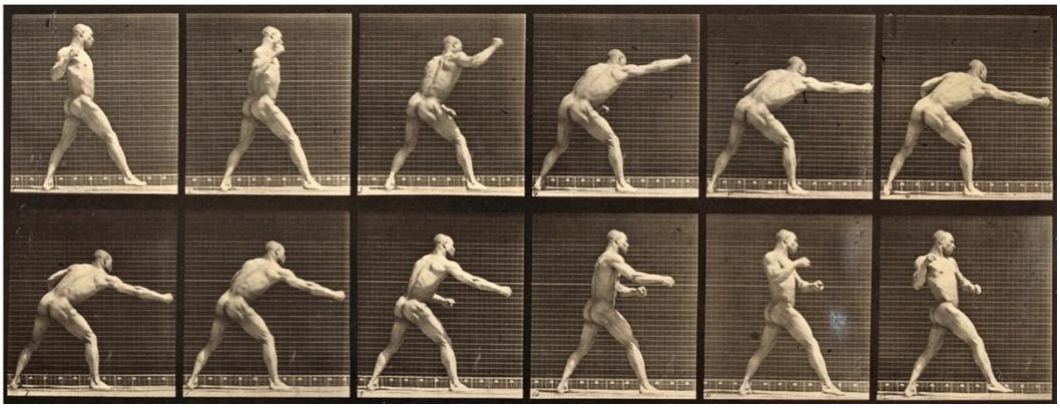
Étienne-Jules Marey

In their pursuit of the kind of insight that photographs produce only when considered together—and not at all when studied individually—Muybridge and Marey alight on the iterative nature of photographic truth. Premised as they are on disaggregating and reconstituting appearances into and from their constituent parts, Muybridge and Marey's work offers a new and productive way of considering the aesthetic questions that Douglass's narratives provoke about iteration, visuality, and

subjective experience. Insofar as Douglass's autobiographies offer a treatise on how black subjects come into being, Muybridge and Marey's investigations into how meaning coheres through discrepant processes of reading and mediation sharpens our inquiry into Douglass's narrative representations of the subject.

II

That photography had the power not just to represent the world with fidelity, but to show us things that we ourselves could not see, was central to the appeal of Muybridge's early experiments. Beyond this appeal however, the philosophical problems of perception revealed by Muybridge's work were also resolved in powerful if subtle ways through his restoration of our intuitive sense of motion. Alone, photographs of galloping horses were subject to the paradoxical notion that photographs capture movement without moving themselves—to image the horse at any point in its run said nothing about its movement; only its form at a given point in time. By assembling the discrete frames of the horse's gallop into an aesthetic whole however, Muybridge found that the impression of continuity across frames could insinuate motion quite powerfully. This insight into the medium's speculative potential carried through to Muybridge's subsequent photographic studies of movement, collected in his 1887 publication, *Animal Locomotion*.



Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*: Plate 344, striking a blow (right hand), 1887

The essential aesthetic gestures of analysis and assembly that characterized Muybridge's first major study of motion became more powerful and refined in *Animal Locomotion*. Over the course of this second project, Muybridge photographed humans as well as animals as they performed a panoply of actions ranging from athletic maneuvers to quotidian tasks. As with the horses, Muybridge used arrays of multiple cameras to capture successive moments throughout the duration of a given action. Building on the method used in *Horse in Motion* however, in *Animal Locomotion* Muybridge used multiple camera arrays during each action to photograph his subjects from alternative perspectives. The result, as shown below, was a more robust depiction of a subject's movement through space than the *Horse in Motion*'s solely perpendicular vantage could suggest.[15]

Muybridge found that the eidetic power of individual photographs—their incredible capacity to testify to the appearance and existence of people, places, and things—was curiously amplified by arranging them into groups.[16] What from one point of view seemed an inexhaustible capacity to record the world, from another vantage revealed an important limit to the medium's expressive potential. Alone, an image of a horse with each of its feet suspended in the air fell far short of the critique of perception Muybridge managed to articulate in the *Horse in Motion* study. Placing that individual image alongside others depicting the horse's legs in various and apparently sequential stages of motion however, gave Muybridge the power to manipulate an new economy of expression. Manifesting motion, Muybridge discovered, was about intentionally minding the gaps between photographs that would otherwise individuate them. The fact that the negative spaces delineating sequence also gave an impression of motion ultimately revealed the experience of continuity to be a function of perception: an artifact of the way we see the world. Even as the spaces distinguishing one photograph from the next facilitate our ability to read and comprehend the motions they depict, the gaps also belie Muybridge's interpretations of the events in question. Recognizing the interpretive steps, reminds us that Muybridge's project is as material as it is visual—that the very

elisions that validate and sustain its illusions rely on a syllogistic correspondence between these negative spaces and the time that supposedly elapses between takes. *Horse in Motion* and *Animal Locomotion* together reveal a horizon beyond a single photograph's ability to image a moment in time. If in Muybridge we see the subject realized through assemblage and iteration, in Marey's works we find a method of acknowledging the subject's being in time that is quite literally seamless.

Marey delved deeper than Muybridge did into the premises of indexicality and objectivity that characterized photography. Trained as a physiologist, Marey came to photography by way of his research into cardiology. Marey recognized, as Muybridge did with the galloping strides of his horses, that studying the flow of blood through the body presented problems of perception as well as observation, due to the phenomenal quality of his object of study—the pulse.[17] Though it could readily be felt, the pulse could not straightforwardly be seen; it could easily be determined, but only indirectly represented through abstract notation. Methods of measuring the pulse by feel lacked fidelity, frustrated as they were by the intermediate boundaries of skin and the contradictory beatings of hearts between bodies. Long before he considered visual methods of study, Marey designed devices meant to transcribe the pulse with as little input from the external world—and therefore as much fidelity to the original signal itself—as possible. He discovered that by attaching a writing instrument to a pressure plate sensitive enough to register the tremors of blood moving through veins, the heart could effectively be made to inscribe itself. What this strategy afforded in terms of exponentially increasing the amount and quality of the data collected, paled in comparison, as far as Marey was considered, to the analyst's newfound ability to step away from the data collection process entirely. As imperfect as even this device was, given its abiding material mediation of the body's natural functions, Marey saw promise in its reversal of the dynamic of observation: the phenomenon under consideration could now be studied without either interruption or input from the observer. Underlying the pursuit of precision that ultimately led Marey to consider photography

as an aide to study, were values of fidelity and immediacy that would eventually characterize his interest in the idiosyncratic forms of iterative movements.

By rigging a camera's shutter to fire at regular intervals, Marey was able to simultaneously remove his own discretion from the imaging process and also expose a single piece of film to successive exposures. This method allowed Marey to record his subjects as they moved, unencumbered, for the entire duration of a given movement. The resulting photograph could thereby present a subject at several, successive moments in time, and several progressive points in space. By turning the photograph's promise of indexicality—its unique and irreproachable recognition of the subject—back on itself, Marey threw the once imperceptible complexities of movement into sharp relief. Motions like walking and flight that might ordinarily seem fluid or continuous were revealed through the abstraction of photographic form to consist already of iterative and discrete movements—before and apart from Marey's interpretive intervention. A constant gait could be rendered as the sequences by which our muscles push off of and pull on one another as we move. A bird's wings could be clearly seen and closely studied, mid-flight, to appreciate the counter-intuitive interplay of extension and contraction that eluded natural observation. As the circulation of blood generated a pulse that could be made to speak for the heart, Marey discovered that the intermediate forms assumed by bodies in motion could describe the movements of those bodies themselves. At stake in this revelation, was the possibility of eliding the body from its own representation completely, so totally abstracting the subject's self-expression as to keep only its nodal points of articulation.

III

Like Muybridge and Marey, Douglass recognized in the dialectical nature of photographic representation an opportunity to make and remake oneself that came, not from the photograph's revelation of the truth, but rather from its ability to posit truth anew:

> It is the picture of life contrasted with the fact of life, the ideal contrasted with the real, which makes criticism possible. Where there is no criticism there is no progress, for the want of progress is not felt where such want is not made visible by criticism. It is by looking upon this picture and upon that which enables us to point out the defects of the one and the perfections of the other. ("Pictures and Progress," 356-357)[18]

If the indexicality of photographs put their claims beyond reproach, their iterative nature—i.e., the way that the photograph's material acknowledgement of the wider world beyond its frame—placed an important check on the truths they could propose.

Douglass's iterations on witnessing Aunt Hester's sexual assault serves as an example of how discrepancies between his texts signify in meaningful ways. In the *Narrative*, the depravity of the incident impresses itself upon Douglass: "I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition," he writes, insisting, "I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing."[19] The repetition Douglass uses to emphasize the gravity of this scene also introduces what follows as a seminal experience in his life. "It was the blood-stained gate," Douglass infamously recalls; "the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass."[20] By figuring Aunt Hester's rape as the threshold beyond which his ignorance of slavery gives way to a deeper understanding of his own precarity, Douglass underscores the integral role that witnessing plays in the structural predation slavery provokes. Douglass strives to convey the existential nature of this crisis, bounded as it is on one side by imminent threats of violence, and on the other by the limited options to either withstand or merely bear witness to that violence. But as his lamentation at the opening of this scene—"I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it"— suggests, Douglass finds that the situation before him is also, crucially, an epistemological and aesthetic crisis.[21] "It was the first in a long series of such outrages, of which I

was doomed to be a witness and a participant," he explains: "I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in the closet… I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen any thing like it before."[22] Douglass concludes the *Narrative*'s first chapter by linking sight to knowledge in an expression of his profound failure as a child to continue to bear witness, and as an adult, to find the words capable of faithfully rendering this seminal moment in his life. This inaugural violence is an acute inflection point in the *Narrative*: Douglass is led to understand his own lack of agency by observing the same in another.

The same scene appears quite differently in *My Bondage* however, in ways that point to a more complex aesthetic imperative than mere revision would suggest. Whereas in the *Narrative*, Douglass claims to have "often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine," in the 1855 narrative he is more careful to situate Aunt Hester's punishment within the wider apparatus of power and domination proper to the system of slavery.[23] "The reader will have noticed that, in enumerating the names of the slaves who lived with my old master, *Esther*, is mentioned," Douglass remarks, circumspectly identifying Esther as one among many held in bondage.[24] The spectacular violence that erupts into Douglass's life in his first narrative, is reduced by narrative schematization to a banal fact of life in his second. In *My Bondage*, Douglass prefaces his description of Aunt Hester's torture by soberly explaining that "the circumstances which I am about to narrate… are not singular nor isolated in slave life, but are common in every slaveholding community in which I have lived. They are incidental to the relation of master and slave, and exist in all sections of slaveholding countries."[25] The loss of words Douglass feels in the face of this abuse in the *Narrative* is replaced in *My Bondage* by an effusion of feeling: "From my heart I pitied her, and—child though I was—the outrage kindled in me a feeling far from peaceful; but I was hushed, terrified, stunned, and could do nothing, and the fate of Esther might be mine next."[26] Though Douglass still manages to convey the traumatic impression left

behind by this act of witnessing, the distance he registers between himself and the events at hand is striking for its narrative detachment. "The whole scene, with all its attendants, was revolting and shocking to the last degree," Douglass writes—largely in keeping with the sense of shock expressed in the 1845 text—before adding, "and when the motives of this brutal castigation are considered, language has no power to convey a just sense of its awful criminality."[27] Just what this discrepancy between texts brings into view is an important matter of interpretation, rather than a clear cut case of Douglass's maturation as a writer, abolitionist, or theorist of the experience of slavery. In Douglass's narratives, insofar as either of his accounts of Aunt Hester's abuse refers to and represents the same event, we can understand them each to be iterations of that event. Iterations manifest both difference and continuity through repetition by alluding to a contiguous world in which the events they represent transpire. As an act or object of representation that we recognize as part of some larger whole by way of its similarities to *and* its differences from other iterations of that same, larger whole, the iteration offers us insight into the aesthetic significance of repetition that studies of revision in Douglass have not fully appreciated.[28]

Considering how scholars have attended to Douglass's successive accounts of his mother's visits to see him on Colonel Lloyd's plantation brings the unique value of iteration, over revision, into clearer view. In the *Narrative*, Douglass's portrayal of his mother is sparse; less about her, or their relationship, and more about how the conditions endemic to slavery preclude such a bond from ever flourishing. Due to the twelve miles between them, Douglass explains, his mother visited so rarely that he "never saw [her] more than four or five times in [his] life; and each of these times was very short in duration, and at night."[29] If the first narrative presents the mother's absence, it is important to note that Douglass's description is not devoid of meaning or expression, but rather insistent on the particular form of intimacy borne of such strain. Though he "do[es] not recollect of ever seeing [his] mother by the light of day," Douglass is careful to note that "she was with me in

the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone."[30] The memory of Douglass's mother in the *Narrative* would seem to be defined by absence and negation. Indeed, as Douglass himself opines: "never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger."[31] The palpable sense of foreclosure running through this scene in the *Narrative* makes Douglass's descriptions of his mother in *My Bondage* all the more striking for how vividly they render her brief presence in his life.

Douglass presents memory as the site of a peculiar aesthetic tension in *My Bondage*, by prefacing his memories of his mother with a confession of ignorance that also lays claim to a privileged kind of insight. "My knowledge of my mother is very scanty, but very distinct," Douglass explains, emphasizing at once both the paucity of his knowledge and its sufficiency.[32] The conviction implicit in this apparently paradoxical claim—that singular memories often leave lasting impressions—is reiterated consistently throughout Douglass's descriptions of his mother, and in terms that explicitly evoke photographic representation. "Her personal appearance and bearing are ineffaceably stamped upon my memory," Douglass insists at one point; and at another, that "the side view of her face is imaged on my memory, and I take few steps in life without feeling her presence; but the image is mute, and I have no striking words of her's treasured up."[33] By returning to and lamenting her absence in *My Bondage* and *Life and Times*, Douglass effectively re-presents his mother's presence in his life, restoring her forgotten legacy, and reinvesting her memory with new meaning.[34] We can recognize Douglass's effort to recover his mother from the opacity of language and the transience of memory as a problem common to both narrative and photographic representation. Douglass returns to his mother's memory through narrative in order to produce objective views of his subjective experience of her presence. With each iteration we see Douglass working, through the similarities and the differences between texts, to theorize black subjectivity as

the product of incremental progress and contingent relationality. The idea that we are formed by the ways that others and our experiences impress themselves on us is articulated most cogently in the following extended account Douglass relates of his mother's protection. In *My Bondage*, Douglass's recollection of his early days at Colonel Lloyd's plantation includes and centers on his mother's intercession between himself and Aunt Katy, an enslaved woman whose authority over the kitchen he has recently transgressed. Douglass's mother comes to his rescue just as he submits to Aunt Katy's punishment:

> Just as I began to help myself to my very dry meal, in came my dear mother. And now, dear reader, a scene occurred which was altogether worth beholding, and to me it was instructive as well as interesting. The friendless and hungry boy, in his extremest need—and when he did not dare to look for succor—found himself in the strong, protecting arms of a mother; a mother who was at the moment (being endowed with high powers of manner as well as matter) more than a match for all his enemies. I shall never forget the indescribable expression of her countenance, when I told her that I had had no food since morning; and that Aunt Katy said she 'meant to starve the life out of me.' There was pity in her glance at me, and a fiery indignation at Aunt Katy at the same time; and while she took the corn from me, and gave me a large ginger cake, in its stead, she read Aunt Katy a lecture which she never forgot. My mother threatened her with complaining to old master in my behalf; for the latter, though harsh and cruel himself, at times, did not sanction the meanness, injustice, partiality, and oppressions enacted by Aunt Katy in the kitchen. That night I learned the fact, that I was not only a child, but *somebody's* child. The 'sweet cake' my mother gave me was in the shape of a heart, with a rich, dark ring glazed upon the edge of it. I was victorious, and well off for the moment; prouder, on my mother's knee, than a king upon his throne. (*MB*, author's emphasis, 154-155)

This account elaborates on what scant mention Douglass's mother receives in the *Narrative* by figuring her as returned, empowered, and triumphant in her rebuke of the dehumanizing effects that would diminish her son. Though this change certainly constitutes revision in one sense, there is another sense in which what Douglass effects here counts as re-envisioning a signal moment in his life. As a second take, a rethinking, a re-presentation, Douglass exploits the generic limits of the slave narrative—to present the truth of the past—to make memory malleable enough for the retrieval of new insights from past experiences. In his third narrative, Douglass writes:

> "The scene which followed is beyond my power to describe. The friendless and hungry boy, in his extremest need, found himself in the strong, protecting arms of his mother. I have before spoken of my mother's dignified and impressive manner. I shall never forget the indescribable expression of her countenance when I told her that Aunt Katy had said she would starve the life out of me. There was deep and tender pity in her glance at me, and, at the same moment, a fiery indignation at Aunt Katy, and while she took the corn from me, and gave in its stead a large ginger-cake, she read Aunt Katy a lecture which was never forgotten. That night I learned as I had never learned before, that I was not only a child, but somebody's child. I was grander upon my mothers' knee than a kind upon his throne" (*LT*, 484)

As in the woods, Douglass's third iteration of this point of his narrative differs in striking, subtle, and idiosyncratic ways. As well, those likenesses that the passages from either of the latter texts do share signify in ways that are too provocative to ignore. Douglass acknowledges this dynamic himself in the latter narrative by calling attention to his reiteration of his mother's dignity and presence. The interplay of difference and likeness that arises between these texts does its own significatory work as readers are left to deliberate and parse the space between experience and representation: which is, at root, an aesthetic question. Juxtaposed, we can easily recognize the syntactic economy of the latter passage—its incorporation of Douglass's mother's gift into the recollection of her excoriation of Aunt Katy, for instance.[35] The details of the gift are pared away and the resulting adulation Douglass remembers takes pride of place, concluding the scene. In this sense, what we might take to be the point of this memory—a portentous trial and an early triumph—is made subordinate to a larger, more cohesive arc of Douglass's development.

What we can also think of as falling out of the later text however, and just after Douglass remarks on its lasting memory no less, is the content of his mother's censure. In *My Bondage*, Douglass's recapitulation of the lecture his mother gives Aunt Katy sketches, in brief, the very dynamic of relationality and devolution of power that informs the entire structure of authority in which he finds himself. That the weight of this lesson leads directly to Douglass's realization of his own provenance cannot be understated—in either text, the knowledge that he is *somebody's* grounds Douglass's identity, impressing on him a sense of who he is by clarifying who he is in relation to.

Though the ethic of this relational orientation suffuses each of Douglass's narratives, its point and manner of articulation in the second and third narratives, in these acts of reflection, rebuke, and revisionary rectitude critically resituates his origin in fundamental ways. Absence and negation are no longer the only characteristics defining Douglass's early life in his second and third narratives. Indeed, as his poetic attention to the ginger-cake—and to its *appearance,* in particular—suggests, Douglass's scanty but distinct memory of his mother persuades him from a young age that the impressions of others are to be found wherever we look in the world.

IV

The worldliness of these technologies—the way in which their efficacy corresponded directly to the physical conditions of the very world they rendered intelligible, traversable, and navigable—was what captivated Douglass and carried over to inform his thinking about photographic representation. "Morse has brought the ends of the earth together and Daguerre has made it a picture gallery," Douglass proclaims, signaling at once the two senses in which photography is essentially of the world.[36] If photographic representation can be said to augment the ways we negotiate and perceive the world around us, Douglass is eager to remind his audience that the photographs that effect such representation are themselves, nevertheless, also of the world. Douglass's nod to the abundance of photographs— "[w]e have pictures, true pictures, of every object which can interest us," he remarks—highlights the second aspect of their worldliness: the way in which their colloquial mode of representation has so rapidly become synonymous with quotidian experience.[37] Though "[s]team has shortened the distance across the ocean," Douglass argues, "a voyage is unnecessary to look at Europe…. You have but to cross the parlor to see… all the wonders of European architecture, which by the way is about all that the traveler sees abroad that he could not see at home."[38] Running parallel here, are the twinned implications that photographic

reproduction threatens the value of unique or original experience on the one hand, while introducing fundamentally new ways of experiencing the world on the other. Douglass perceived both promise and peril in this dynamic, but no more than any other technological innovation. "This picture-making faculty is flung out into the world like all others," he reasons, "capable of being harnessed to the car of truth and error: It is a vast power to whatever it is coupled."[39]

More than either promise or peril, Douglass saw sheer possibility in photography's worldliness—"sheer," because of the medium's radical objectivity, and "possibility" for the way it seemed to Douglass to transcend the foreclosure of any given political will. And while scholars have generally read this sense of transcendence in Douglass's photography lectures as a refusal of contemporary ethnographic efforts to corroborate theories of African-descended peoples' racial inferiority with the supposed objectivity of photography, such constructions tend to fall short of the more robust aesthetic theory Douglass avers in his lectures. [40]The racist antebellum visual culture against which scholars typically leverage Douglass's photographic thought finds its most explicit expression in Louis Agassiz's [year] portraits of enslaved men and women in [place]. Designed to corroborate slavery's supremacist ideologies by way of photography's indexicality, Agassiz's portraits serve as poignant foils to the emancipatory aspirations of Douglass's lectures. These images' portrayals of black men and women consigned to the exploitative gaze of Agassiz and his benefactors and impressed into the consolidation of their own dehumanization would seem to implicate Agassiz's photographs and photographic representation more broadly within a larger framework of racist visuality, and indeed this is the very fissure that critics have worked to bridge by returning to Douglass's abiding faith in the emancipatory capacity of photography.[41] The apparent devastation of human spirit in these photographs, contrasted with Douglass's own extensive corpus of daguerreotype portraits, has led some scholars to recognize in his photographic vision a conviction that "if his audiences look[ed] at his or any other African American's image and

reflect[ed] on its likeness to their own, the daguerreotype [would] show them the reality of blacks' humanity and awaken them to their own."[42] The advantage of this conception of photographic representation comes from the way it manages to route the medium's democratic and emancipatory potential not through the essential truth of photographic materials, but rather through the hermeneutic process brought about by engaging with photographs themselves. However slight, distinctions, and the differences they make are at the heart of Douglass's theory of pictures. "It is the picture of life contrasted with the fact of life, the ideal contrasted with the real, which makes criticism possible," Douglass insists. "Where there is no criticism there is no progress," he argues, "for the want of progress is not felt where such want is not made *visible* by criticism."[43] As a medium of dynamic representation, Douglass maintains, photography gives both rise and form to the very means by which the authority of its own fidelity can most effectively be challenged. This recursive character of the knowledge photography produces is both what Douglass strives to articulate in his lectures and also marks where he and others alert to photographs' near-self-perpetuating logic diverge from conventional understandings of the medium.

We can perceive the stakes of this discussion in the fact that Douglass's acknowledgement of photographic representation's paradoxically unreliable objectivity (or intrinsic transience) does not dissuade him from making photographs central to his aesthetic theory. On the contrary, by reasoning that "it is by looking upon this picture and upon that which enables us to point out the defects of the one and the perfections of the other," Douglass doubles down to recognize photographic truth, fugitive and infinite though it may be, as fundamentally akin to truth as such.[44] And, given that "[n]o one truth stands alone," and that, "[a]ny one truth leads to the boundless realms of all truth," Douglass finds that it is "by means of pictures [themselves, that] we may be led to the contemplation of great truths."[45] For Douglass, the complexity of photographic expression lay in the undeniable purchase photographs have on the world, in the fact that however false their

claims, photographs' indexicality inevitably affirms something irrefutable about existence and the human condition. Sarah Blackwood's insight, that a keen "sensitiv[ity] to the dynamic between the truthful and deceptive qualities of the photograph" prompted Douglass and other antebellum African American writers to seek out "a visual literacy that denied the indexical power of white visual practices while embracing the power of the image to make injustice visible," points toward how we might more productively incorporate the complexity of Douglass's aesthetic theory into an analysis of his narrative oeuvre.[46] That Douglass's theory of photography takes photographs to be sites of and occasions for the activity of interpretation, rather than closed texts always already inscribed with their own self-evident meaning however, complicates questions of how the medium represents subjectivity in general.

The distinction Douglass sees, between what photographs are and what we make them out to be, informs his understanding of what purchase a medium as paradoxically mimetic and indexical, veridical and interpretive, as photography might have on processes of subject formation. "Man… is a many-sided being," Douglass opines—and the discrepant logics of photographic representation would seem to speak to that side "wherein illusions take the form of solid reality and shadows get themselves recognized as substance: the side which is better pleased with feeling than reason… with things as they seem, than things as they are, with contemplation rather than action."[47] The binaristic and evocative nature of this assertion notwithstanding, Douglass's confirmation of photography's affective, virtual, and contingent registers resonates deeply with the ways that many scholars read black subjectivity in his work. As Bernier, Stauffer, and Trodd have it, Douglass "rejected fixed social stations and rigid hierarchies [and] repudiate[d] the idea of a fixed self. He imagined the self as continually evolving, in a state of constant flux, which exploded the very foundations of both slavery and racism."[48] Gates has similarly suggested that Douglass, "through image of himself after image of himself," sought to illustrate, "that the Negro, the slave, was as variable as any human being could

be, not just in comparison to white people, but even more importantly among and *within* themselves."[49] The interest that Douglass and these critics share in the connection between photographic reproduction and repetition is instructive for the way it posits a subject constituted by variability, development, and irresolution. "Even 'the representative colored man in the United States' *presented* a range of selves over time," Gates points out, insisting on the centrality of such difference to Douglass's strategy of self-presentation.[50] "As any biographer of Douglass knows," Gates notes, "there was not *a* Frederick Douglass; there were many Douglasses… Not only did the black object actually, all along, embody subjectivity, but this subjectivity evolved and mutated over time."[51] Given the subject's perpetual flux, many-sidedness, and dynamism, the value of photography would seem to lie not in its capacity to capture, preserve, or define the subject, but rather in the aesthetic possibilities opened up by iteration itself.

The iterative nature of photographic expression fascinated Douglass even as it remained just beyond the limits of his lecture's scope. Running through the prospects of either proliferating the means of photographic representation, or of countering the falsehoods of white supremacist ideology with images of positive exempla, the possibility of utterance, of saying anything at all, finds an unprecedented expression in photography. The paradox born of photographic indexicality—the truth of a photograph—and photographic discourse—the truths that a photograph cannot help but corroborate—all but escaped Douglass; indeed, his aesthetic theory revolves around this very problem, of how photographs can at once be of the world and also exceed it. Blackwood offers one of the few compelling explanations of how this problem informed Douglass's own narrative techniques and those of other antebellum African American writers: "The mimetic function of the slave narrative was, like the photograph, both foreclosing and liberating," Blackwood maintains, arguing that these writers appreciated the fact that "it was liberating to speak the truth, to show slavery as it was, even while this truth could never really be accurately captured within the frame of

any narrative or photograph."[52] For Douglass, the worldliness of photographs laid bare the conceptual artificiality of frames as such, exposing them to be little more than a means of countenancing the limits of human perception and aesthetic expression.

The faculty of distinction—a corollary of the difference brought about by iteration—, facilitated by the frame, anchors Douglass's theorization of how individuals come to understand their place in the world through images. "For man, and for man alone," Douglass writes, "all nature is richly studded with the material of art. Not only the outside world, but the inside soul may be described as a picture gallery, a magnificent panorama in which things of time and things of eternity are silently portrayed."[53] Here, the twinned capacity to see the world in pictures and to recognize pictures in the world is used to define the category of the human. The ability to discern, to distinguish, to analyze the world around oneself, in turn, Douglass suggests, sets humans apart from nature by propagating a sense of interiority in contrast to an external world. Ironically, in framing this phenomenon of individuation as both a picture gallery and a panorama, Douglass betrays his own superseding interest in stressing the harmonious aspects of his theory, over and above considerations of medium specificity. Douglass's metaphor for the interior subject (at once a picture gallery, a panorama, and the world itself) seems to turn in on itself in the end, to become all-encompassing in its effort to realize a fuller, more complete self-apprehension. Even time is flattened out in this configuration of the self, as the recursion of representation that Douglass takes to be characteristic of subjectivity incorporates both the finitude and the infinity of the material world.

Douglass recognized in iteration, and in the repetition it implies, the potential to reflect on and revise that which might otherwise remain singularly as is. For Douglass, the inexhaustible fidelity of photographic representation meant that the value of iteration went well beyond the prospects either of collecting pictures of others or of reasserting one's own subjectivity through successive

self-portraits. If Douglass's own visual archive indeed belies a conception of photographic self-representation organized around "possession and recognition as systems of accumulation," as Ginger Hill has persuasively argued, his interest in "Pictures and Progress" remains fixed on the critical discernment he thought photography cultivated in daily life.[54] While individuals could certainly find in photography an unprecedented way to document and declare as 'representative' whichever of their attributes they could capture visually, The novel kind of scrutiny that photography encouraged convinced Douglass that photographs bore more profound implications than their mere physical circulation let on. Douglass suggested that the ostensible social economy of photographs—in which individuals evidently gained knowledge of themselves, others, and the world around them through the production, exchange, and suppression of photographs—was itself but an expression of a deeper, ineluctable sense of the world and how it presents itself to us. "We can criticize the characters and actions of men about us because we can see them outside of ourselves, and compare them one with another," Douglass writes, averring the basic social principles characteristic of social interaction.[55] "But self-criticism," he continues, alluding here to the type of self-knowledge that photography allegedly produces, "arises out of the power we possess of making ourselves objective to ourselves—[we] can see our interior selves as distinct personalities, as though looking in a glass."[56] The function of repetition plays a vital role here, as Douglass draws a distinction between a general regard of others and a regard peculiarly of oneself. In his effort to articulate the inextricable link between criticism and comparison on the one hand, and difference and identity on the other, Douglass lauds photographic reproduction not for its capacity to ensure the subject before others' scrutiny, but rather for its power to provide the subject with an image of themselves of such fidelity as to provoke self-reflection. Faced with this kind of self-representation, Douglass argues, the photographic subject would find their gaze-upon-the-world turned back upon themselves, and thereby come to see themselves as they are seen in the world.

As "unalloyed creations of imagination, conscious of no contradiction, no deception," photographs remain "solid and flinty realities of the soul" in Douglass's imagination: "Granite and iron are not more real supports to things material than are those to the subtle architecture of the mind."[57] Insisting on the complex and nuanced ways that photographs signify would seem to do little to preclude conceptions of photographic meaning like Douglass's from making recourse to metaphors of built environments, physical structures, and material constraints. Douglass's allusion to the architecture of the soul here however, is importantly *not* about reaffirming conventional notions of extant psychic spaces within the individual. Instead, by yoking the inscrutable configuration of the mind together with the photograph's apparently indiscriminate mode of representation, Douglass lights upon a novel way of understanding how photographs simultaneously produce and withhold meaning. The refusal to prioritize our subjective engagement with photographs over the empirical indexicality of their material form leads Douglass to identify photography's revelatory power less with the ability to disclose some final, superlative truth, and more with the possibilities afforded by iteration, of trying, now and again, to say something true at all.

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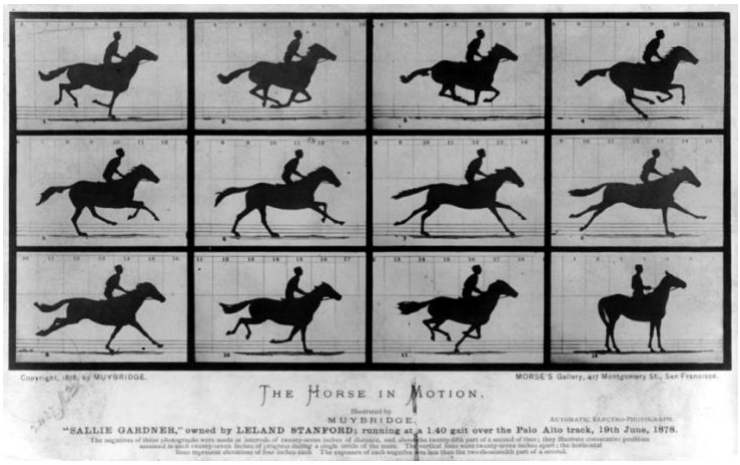

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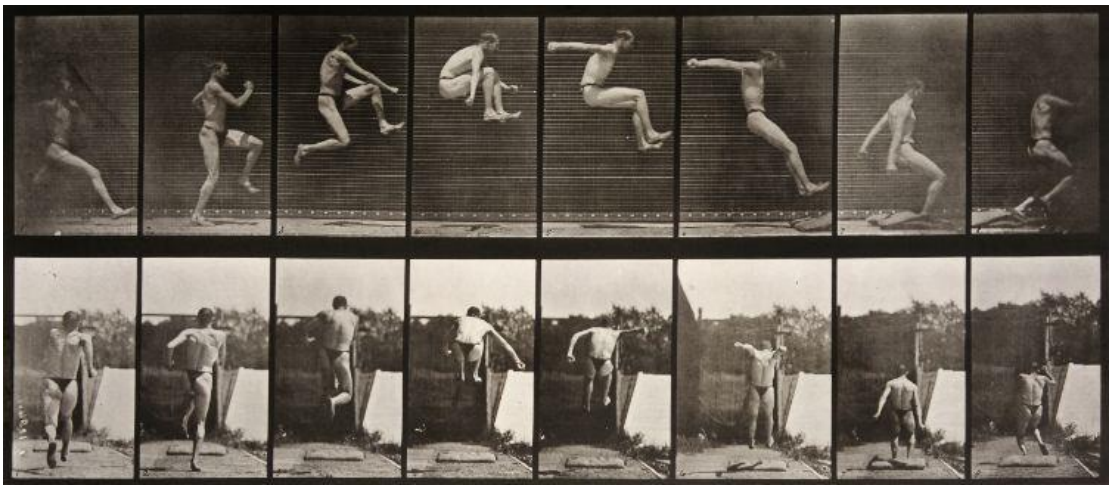
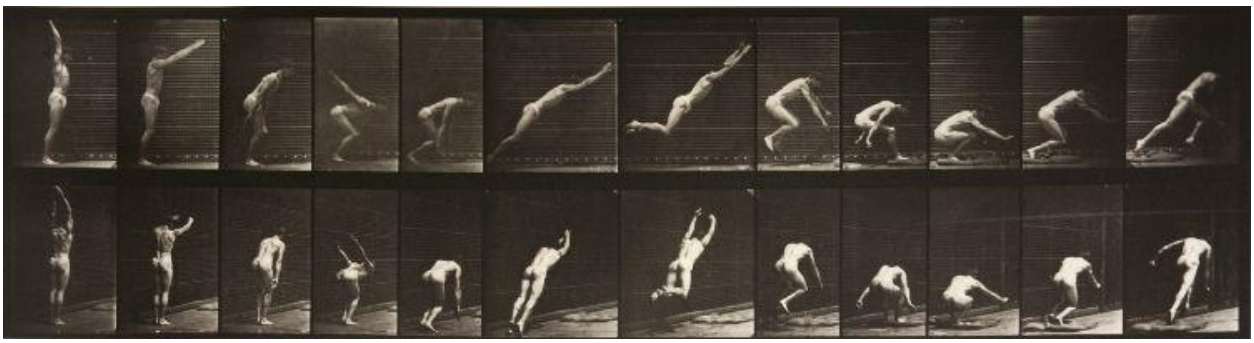


Figure 2.2 Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*: Plate 160, Man Performing Long Jump, 1887



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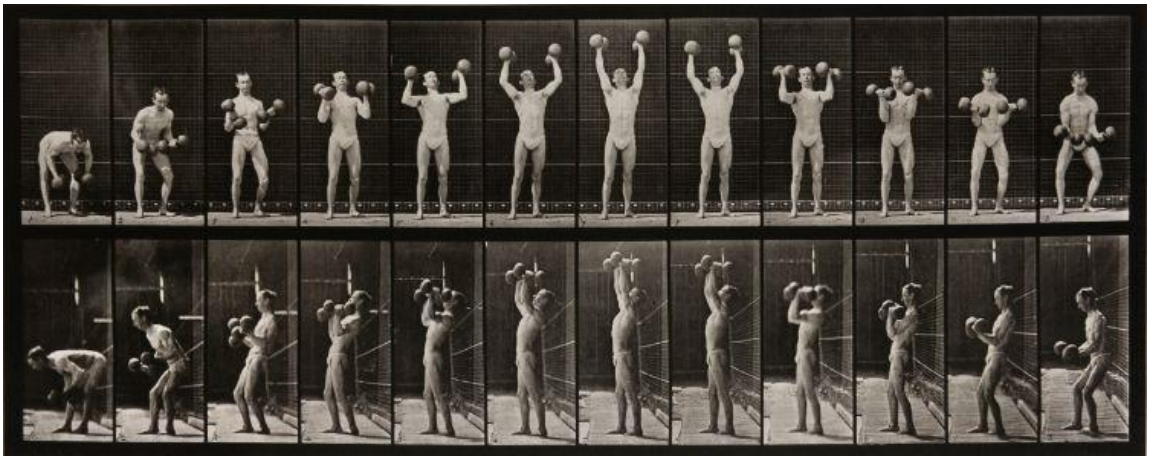

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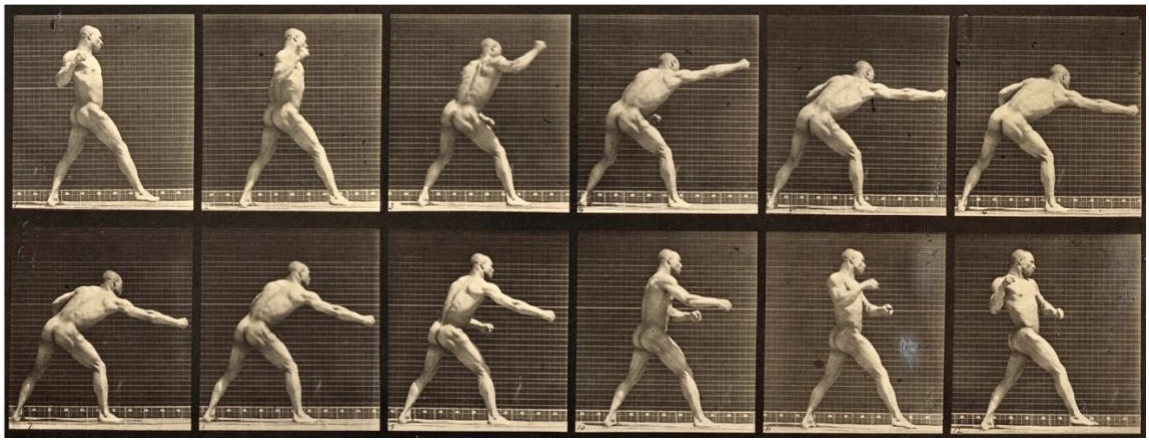


Figure 2.5 Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*: Plate 344, striking a blow (right hand), 1887

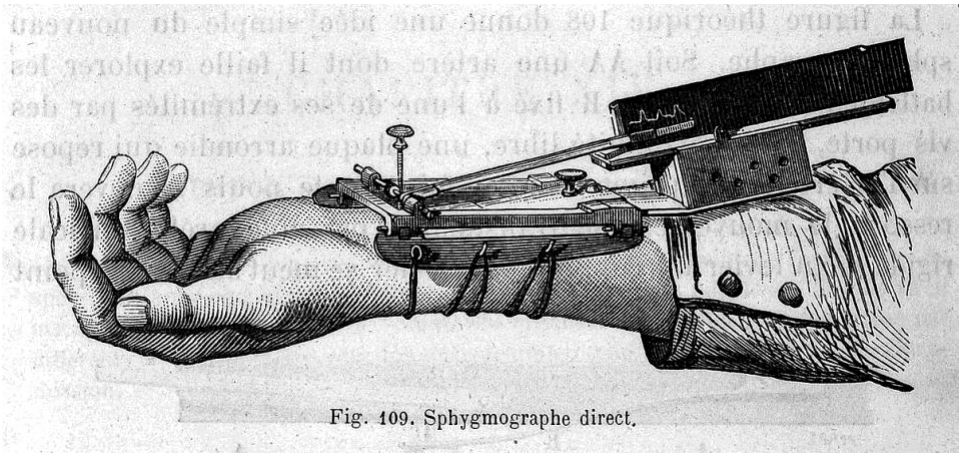


Figure 2.6 Étienne-Jules Marey's sphygmographe

Figure 2.7 Étienne-Jules Marey

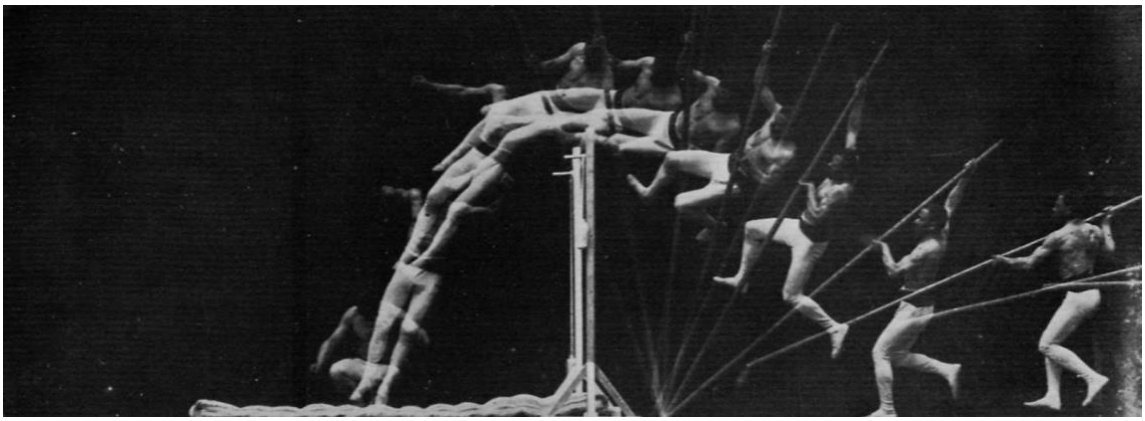
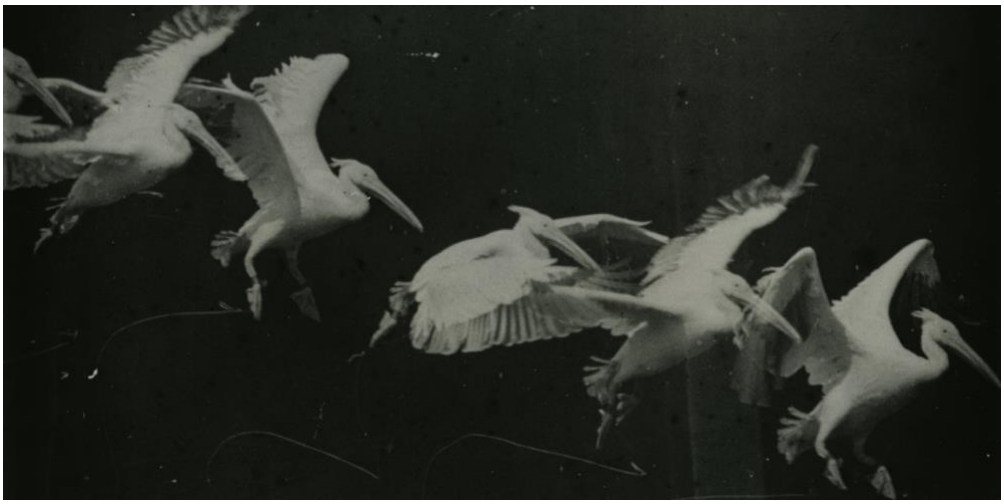


Figure 2.8 Étienne-Jules Marey



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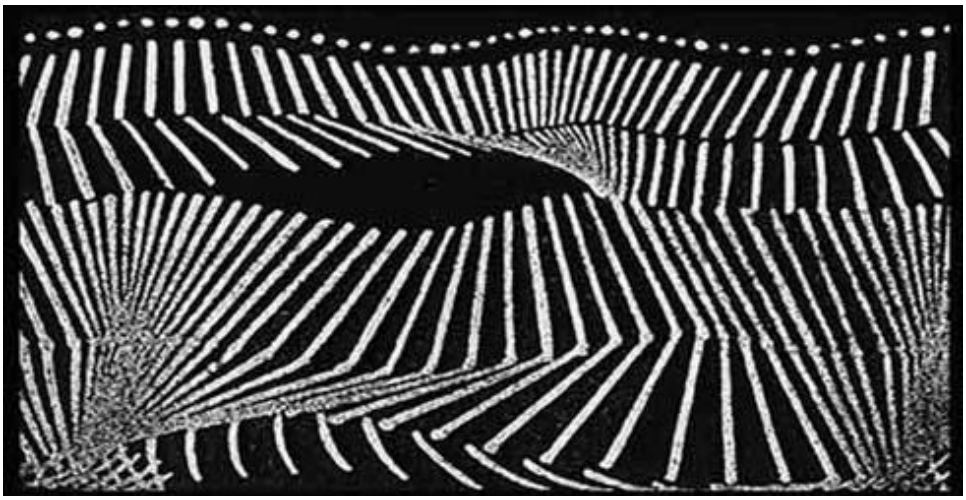

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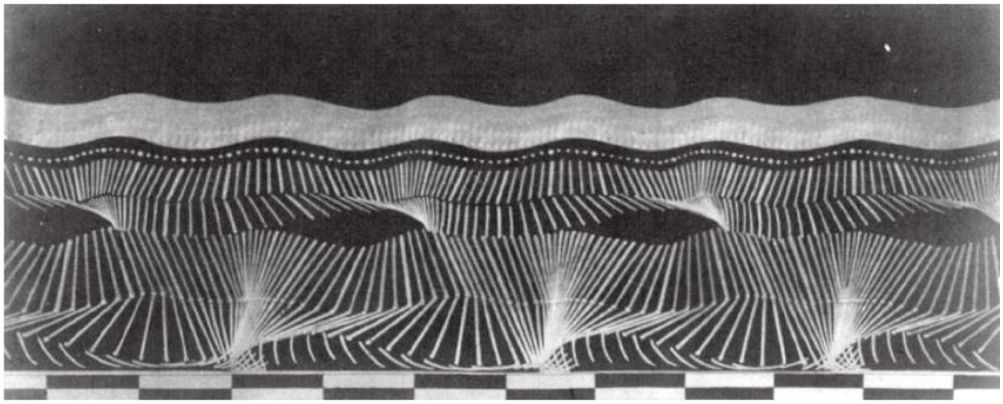

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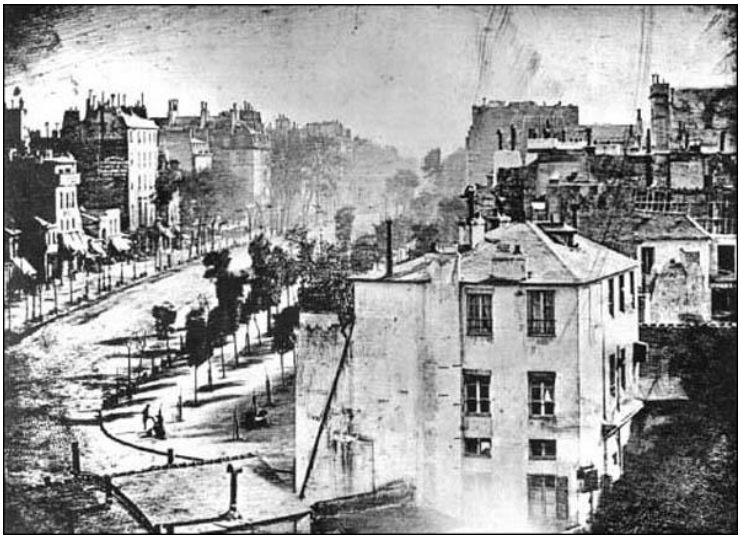

Figure 2.12 Louis Daguerre, *Paris Boulevard* 1838

[1] See Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1937), or Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (The MIT Press, 1997)..
[2] Scholars who have focused extensively on the history of these photographs include Celeste-Marie Bernier, John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.
[3] See Alan Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs: Images as History* (Hill and Wang, 1989), or Shawn Michelle Smith's *Photography and the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Duke University Press, 2004).
[4] For more on the peculiar materiality of daguerreotypes, see Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs*; Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory and the Black Body* (University of Michigan Press, 2010)
[5] The capacity to extrapolate a greater, more generic form from Douglass's descriptions of his own experience of bondage—against which other slave narratives might be compared, and in which a more complete picture of the conditions of slavery might be achieved—has proven to be an elemental force of African American literary criticism for the last fifty years. See Ashraf Rushdy's *Neo-Slave Narratives* (Oxford University Press, 1999) for more on the paradigmatic influence slave narratives have had on literary scholarship since the mid-twentieth century. See Saidiya Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" (in *Small Axe*, vol. 26, no. 12, 2008) for a sense of the field's enduring faith in complete pictures and hermeneutics of recovery, in spite of its inherent suspicion of the archive's purported objectivity and disinterestedness.
[6] See Taylor, Paul C. *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, 6.
[7] Hill, Lena. *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 53-54. Gates Jr., Henry Louis. "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black." *Representations* vol. 24, 1988, pp. 129-155, 129.
[8] Ibid., 129. My project's examination of how the subject is produced by the aesthetic principles underlying photography and narrative representation follows after important critiques from Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of* Subjection (Oxford University Press, 1997), and Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), of the constitution of the liberal subject.
[9] Blackwood, Sarah. "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology." *American Literature*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2009, 94.
[10] Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Library of America, 1994, 148.
[11] Douglass, Frederick. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Library of America, 1994, 480.
[12] Ibid.; *My Bondage*. 148.
[13] Histories of Muybridge's work are numerous. I draw on several to elucidate this brief overview of his work, including: Sarah Gordon, *Indecent Exposures: Eadweard Muybridge's* Animal Locomotion *Nudes* (Yale University Press, 2015); Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Duke University Press, 2013); Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (Penguin Books, 2004); Phillip Prodger, *Time Stands Still: Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Phil Hill, *Eadweard Muybridge (55 Series)* (Phaidon Press, 2001).
[14] See Marta Braun on Marey, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). Shawn Michelle Smith on Muybridge, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Duke University Press, 2013).
[15] See figs. 2.2-2.5
[16] Note that this is not merely a matter of juxtaposition—the pairing or even grouping of photographs had long been recognized as effective ways to augment their representational capacities. The stereoscope for instance set two nearly identical photographs side by side to exploit the limits of human depth perception and thereby enhance the phenomenal quality of the images. Alternatively, collections of photographic material—portraits, landscapes, still-life pictures—could collectively chart or convey various subjects. See Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (NYU Press, 2015).
[17] The following are sources I rely on for historical accounts and explications of Marey's work: Francois Dagognet's *Étienne-Jules Marey: A Passion for the Trace* (Zone Books, 1992); Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Étienne-Jules Marey* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Josh Ellenbogen, *Reasoned and Unreasoned Images: The Photography of Bertillon, Galton, and Marey* (Penn State University Press, 2012); Sam Rohdie, *Montage* (Manchester University Press, 2006).
[18] Douglass, Frederick. "Pictures and Progress." *The Portable Frederick Douglass*, Penguin Classics, 355.
[19] Douglass, *Narrative,* 18.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 19
[22] Ibid., 18, 19.
[23] Ibid., 18.
[24] Douglass, *My Bondage*, 175.
[25] Ibid., 174.

[26] Ibid., 177.
[27] Ibid., 177.
[28] Robert Levine submits that "revision, rather than completion was among Douglass's highest values as an autobiographer" (3). Regarding the successive texts as "one large autobiographical project," in order to "recover what actually happened in Douglass's life," Levine betrays a common investment in the notion of an intact, unified historical referent lying beneath Douglass's separate narratives, waiting to be recovered (3-4). The inclination to smooth over the features that distinguish one narrative from the next, and thereby achieve a more whole, more true picture is appreciable, if only for how central it reveals coherence and clarity to be to so many modes of empirical study. The pursuit of clarity can easily give way to teleological imperatives however, which often attenuates theoretical inquiry, as when Levine's speculation as to the impetus behind Douglass's commitment to autobiography approaches hagiography: "More than any other of his other autobiographies," Levine finds, "*Life and Times* is haunted by Douglass's vision of impending death and driven by his desire to create the figure of 'Douglass' that he wants to bequeath to posterity." (302) Levine, Robert S. *The Lives of Frederick Douglass*. Harvard University Press, 2016.
[29] Douglass, *Narrative*, 16.
[30] Ibid., 16.
[31] Ibid., 16.
[32] Douglass, *My Bondage*, 151.
[33] Ibid., 152, 155.
[34] Note the repetition of these passages in *Life and Times*.
[35] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 484.
[36] Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" pp. 349. Here, in addition to his fascination with the technology of photography, Douglass belies a partiality to the singular male figure back of such innovations. What seems most important to me here is not the fact that Morse, Daguerre, and Douglass are all male, but that taken together their example reinforces a principle of technological historiography organized around paternal lineage.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 349-350.
[39] Ibid., 357.
[40] Dinius, Marcy. *The Camera and the Press*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, pp. 205-206.
[41] See Gates's "Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black" for more on visual discourse and stereotypes. See also Gates's chapters on binary opposition and the language of the self in *Figures in Black* (Oxford University Press, 1987).
[42] Dinius, *The Camera and the Press*. pp. 205-206. Bernier, Stauffer, and Trodd, "Introduction" pp. xvi.
[43] My emphasis. Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" pp. 356-357.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 347.
[46] Blackwood, Sarah. "Fugitive Obscura." *American Literature*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2009, pp. 95, 94.
[47] Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" pp. 351.
[48] Bernier, Stauffer, and Trodd, "Introduction" pp. xvi.
[49] Gates, "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura," pp. 37.
[50] Ibid., 38.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Blackwood, Sarah. "Fugitive Obscura," pp. 96.
[53] Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" pp. 352.
[54] Hill, Ginger, "'Rightly Viewed': Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass's Lectures on Pictures." *Pictures and Progress*, edited by Shawn Michelle Smith and Maurice O. Wallace, Duke University Press, 2012, pp. 49.
[55] Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," pp. 357.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid. 354.