Mystical abyss

How 'enlightenment is achieved through darkness'

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"Cinematic analysis of running", 1883, by Etienne-Jules Marey.

camera as a two-dimensional "black screen".

In front of this optical illusion, Marey photographed penguins, soldiers and horses that flew, marched and galloped across its infinite expanse. Under the harsh light of the midday sun, Marey captured multiple exposures on a single plate to create his blurry science of motion. Sometimes he would dress his subjects in black boots so that they could isolate limbs, or articulate them with white lines so that he could analyze the physiology of movement.

One of Marey's ghostly chronophotographs, taken in 1885 and showing a human skeleton striding across the frame, is titled "Cinematic analysis of running". Marey was the founder of cinematography, influencing both the Lumière brothers and Thomas Edison. In 1889, Edison visited Marey's station, with its tower and "zoetrope camera" from which his subjects could be captured from above against a background of a path painted with flowers.

He was struck by Marey's "figures geometrical"

and by the new method he was pioneering, capturing movement on a long strip of sensitized paper, rather than a single glass plate.

He had shown one of these films at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1883, at the opening of the museum of the World's Fair, and he included it in his book "Cinematic analysis of running".

Marey's book gestures and suggests where it should clarify. It reveals a surprisingly personal and international character, who weaved his beliefs about open borders, corruption, pan-Americanism and fascism into a vision of the world of the future's dark, sometimes utopic, modern city. It leaves unspoken — or unasked, even — certain questions about how this fusion worked. Yet it offers enjoyable revelations for anyone familiar with Marey's work.