
”...But when they Ask us to Look at Pictures Cross-Eyed, we Rebel.” Social and Anthropological Implications of Stereoscopic Images

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Abstract

Stereoscopic images, which imitate natural spatial perception and make an immersive experience possible, have led to similar enthusiasm after their discovery in the 19th century as the current stereoscopic technique, virtual reality applications on head-mounted displays, recently triggers in parts of society. Despite its temporary success, stereoscopy is yet associated with a process of media convergence and divergence as it lost popularity in the 20th century on account of the rise of other techniques such as color photography and moving images. These accomplish a high degree of illustratability without the needs of a viewer between picture and observer, which structures the social situation in front of a stereoscopic image. Nonetheless stereoscopy never completely disappeared as it was and still is applicable in specific ways of use (Bourdieu 1965). The proposed paper aims at reconstructing ways of use of stereoscopic images in order to understand and describe the immersive mode of seeing as a symbolic form: By means of a visual analysis of Jacques Henri Lartigue's stereo photographs and Oskar Fischinger's stereo paintings following the comparative principles of the "Figurative Hermeneutics" (Müller 2012), the immersive mode of seeing is not analyzed as a psychological or physiological process, but as an act which is subject to medial framing, predications and interpretational orders (Plessner 1980). The paper can be seen as a contribution to visual sociology and image theory in general and to a sociological comprehension of the immersive mode of seeing in particular.

Keywords: anthropology, stereoscopy, photography, immersion, image theory

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