

Women's Views

*The Narrative Stereograph
in Nineteenth-Century America*

MELODY DAVIS



UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE PRESS
DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

University of New Hampshire Press

www.upne.com/unh.html

© 2015 University of New Hampshire

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

Designed by Eric M. Brooks

Typeset in Miller by Passumpsic Publishing

For permission to reproduce any of the material in this book,
contact Permissions, University Press of New England,
One Court Street, Suite 250, Lebanon NH 03766;
or visit www.upne.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davis, Melody D., 1959–

Women's views: the narrative stereograph in
nineteenth-century America / Melody Davis.

pages cm. — (Becoming modern:
new nineteenth-century studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-61168-838-2 (cloth : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-1-61168-839-9 (pbk. : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-1-61168-840-5 (ebook)

1. Photography, Stereoscopic — United States — History —
19th century. 2. Women — United States — Social conditions —
19th century. 3. Photography — Social aspects — United States —
History — 19th century. 4. Narrative art — United States — History
— 19th century. 5. Photographic criticism. I. Title.

TR780.D38 2015

778.9'24—dc23 2015015505

5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Aunt Ferndeina deposited a box in my lap and, in her typically laconic style, said *these belong to you*. In it were two stereoscopes and a small collection of stereographs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I had just announced my intention to continue graduate studies in art history with a concentration on the history of photography, so the gift was thoughtful. Ferndeina told me that the stereographs and stereoscopes had belonged to our family and that they spent many an hour looking at them. My reaction was a warm thanks and an internal *oh, how quaint*, for my academic training had informed me that such stuff was kitsch and of no lasting importance to the History of Photography. A few days later I gave them a look. I quickly achieved fusion—the replication of the third dimension—with the old Holmes-Bates stereoscopes, and once I saw one view in dimension, I had to see them all. It was as though a vacuum were attached to my eyes, and through vision alone I was sucked into each scene. I stood on the brink of a crater splitting a street in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. I could have fallen in. I stood in a garden of irises in Kyoto, the chromolithographed colors swimming in my brain with iridescent blue and sharp gold. I beheld in the haze a distant mountain range with craggy peaks properly arranged, with space between one another, and with every solid object from near to far inviting me, virtual cartographer, to enter. I stood witness to the battery of a “rat” with a boot heel; a beleaguered father marching a howling baby; a salon with blossoming skirts that I could barely move between, much less fit in, chairs; and a fishing “smack” (kiss) beside a lake that swelled big as American dreams. In that hour, I fell into stereo and out of art history.

Atavistic, my aptitude to construct space from two small, monocular photographs mounted side by side on a card was typical for a Victorian. I experienced a deep-sinking, transporting, full and resounding space and a very dimensional rounding of figures, each and every time. Atypical was my experience of this for my chosen profession, where the prevailing authority on stereography asserted that I should have seen only a deranged space, if any at all. This scholarship informed my generation that stereographs were as flat as the cardboard they were mounted upon, a sham of dimensionality, crudely serving a populace easily hypnotized by automatism. But I saw wonderfully volumetric scenes that induced a slowed time of self-guided scrutiny. Something was amiss. Perhaps I was not really cut out for grad school, I mused, as my visual experience was out of synch with the prevailing regime. I rejected that

one with a handy youthful arrogance. A powerful gut feeling was growing, and after witnessing a bunch of tableaux vivant scenes, I put the stereoscope down and said aloud, "These were for women."

In Carol Armstrong's seminar "Positivism and the Photo-Illustrated Book," I presented my idea with the support of some of the reader response theorists you will find in this book. My fellow graduate students were not convinced. They reminded me that picturing attractive women simply caters to the male gaze, a collusion with the reification of the female body under the hegemonics of patriarchy. I had failed to make my case, but Dr. Armstrong understood that this topic meant something to me, and my idea was interesting. Her encouragement helped me to make the longer argument that was needed. She, Geoffrey Batchen, and Rose-Carol Long formed the best dissertation committee one could hope for. As we parted, Dr. Batchen wagged a finger at me and extracted a promise that I would publish this work as a book. His belief, too, has sustained me.

It was good that I did not know the journey from that fateful box until now would take more than twenty years, for I would not have started had I known. The isolation of working against the grain of dominant discourse made me embattled at times. Had history been historical, I would not have to explain what a stereograph is, and I would grow angry thinking of the great lie that had been woven through the history of photography and all the other lies woven there. They erased people like me and my family and the use we made of photographic culture that came to us by rail, bicycle, and buggy. Living by and working on the Pennsylvania main line, my family was captivated, as millions of others were, by a commercial photography that reached determinedly into rural America. It was

marketed to families and spoke to them, which meant it appealed, foremost, to the wife. In Victorian-age America, the wife was the decision maker for products for the home, and stereographs were marketed to appeal to the female-centric, hearth-and-home sentiment that, perhaps more than any other idea, sustained people of the nineteenth century.

Stereography is uncanny to begin with—from two dimensions pop a three-dimensional visual environment—but stereo is uncanny in the truest sense of the word, *unheimlich*, or strangely homelike, to me, for it brought together two worlds that my professional training had taught me were forever sundered. There could be no congress between a poor, rural, and provincial people as we were and the erudite culture of art history, belonging to great wealth, white urban spaces, and those who could afford to spend more than a decade on higher education. The inviting spaces in that box could not be included in the evaluative system foundational to my discipline. But that box spoke for a larger history which included just about every American in the late nineteenth century. The tradition of gifting stereographs, which was particular to women through the Victorian age, was also represented in Ferndeina's present, though neither she nor I understood that at the time. Ferndeina gave me a gift of history, personal as it was experienced in her childhood home, and American. Strangest of all, this gift propelled me into theoretical discourse at a great remove from the humble beginning point of its inquiry, while turning me back into familial time, as I handled cards with the finger smudges of ancestors, while in a house in a rural region completely off the map of high culture, only ten miles from that Pennsylvania main line bringing stereovision into our lives.

This book is dedicated to Ferndeina Dillman.

Chapter Two

The View as Body Analogue

THE STEREOVIEW DOES NOT LET US EASILY FORGET THAT THE BODY, WITH NO prompting from consciousness, allows a perception of dimension. Stereo cultivates a self-reflexive awareness of interior spatial processing that stands in a paradoxical relation to its photographic veracity, as the awareness of a subjective construction jostles with an objectivity considered trustworthy enough for evidentiary status. The things of this world will still be photographically posited and brought to an arm's length possession, but unilateral visual consumption is disturbed. Rather, the viewer is possessed by a self-generated volume, aware of himself as a viewing being, instigating that modern loop of perception and self-referentiality. The square plane of the specimen is unbounded, transferred to neurological space uncomfortably suggestive of fantasy but with a clarity that seems to guarantee that this projected dream represents a world brought forth whole. The signatures of visual truth and the surety of empirical observation seem breached. Stereography is incomplete, requiring an interactive participation that triggers an involuntary internal response, which is then displayed as an environment to visually enter as a witness and narrator. Descartes meets Alice in the looking glass.

Interiorizing structures require a certain degree of comfort and a modicum of leisure time, supported in the nineteenth century by a Romantic ethos of heightened individuality, which seemed to assure that the time so spent was devoted to a worthy end. The intensive gendering of the home sphere occurred contemporaneously with stereo's revealed and revealing interiority and its obsessive depiction of bourgeois subjecthood, while the material elevation of parlor culture served to reinforce that these were desirable middle-class values. The world entered as though through a crack in the curtain into a room/camera, metonymically aligned with the Victorian invention of photography, and, in that private realization of self associated with women and cultivation, the stereoview affirmed the germ of its own creation, home

life and the consciousness formed there. Through the glass of the stereoscope, transported worlds embodied the viewer, and *were* the viewer, who cooperatively fleshed out the picture, as though a social pact had been tacitly made between the enlargement of private consciousness and a public realm devoted to splitting and delimiting its populace. Women's access to the public sphere was circumscribed, but male access to the world through the stereoscope in the home, with its nested and overt interiorities, was certain. Through the stereoview, men came to look at themselves in a corporeally analogous manner to the way women had been conditioned to look at themselves, a double observation, self-reflexive and outwardly specular.

Contemporaneous thinkers reflected on this self-projection into stereoscopic experience and a wondrous reaction to its passive, instantaneous "being there." Oliver Wendell Holmes, an articulate and passionate spokesman for the medium, and one who, so the popular legend goes, coined its very name, *stereography*, understood that the view reflected a somatic process.¹ Holmes was a physician, so such a reading was natural to him. He also possessed a subtle and ductile mind informed by a classical education within Boston's intellectual circle. Such benefits provided an ability to pick and choose metaphorical models, and his three essays on stereography freely range through erudite allusions, but overall they remain rooted in the body and the physical development of stereoviewing. Ultimately, that embodiment is transcended into a freely roving consciousness that also belongs to stereo's nature, a virtual realization. Holmes implies we approach this first through our physical nature, then learn how to progress beyond atomization into a culture of viewing. Such passage is a theme through all three of his stereography essays, indicating that stereoviewing is an active, embodied, and intellectual journey, which helps to shed light on the strange and preternaturally contemporary ending of his first essay, wherein Holmes suggests the world dematerializes in the stereoscope.

Penned in 1859, the same year that Holmes invented a new stereoscope, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph" is likely the most canonical essay on stereography. Combined with two following essays that Dr. Holmes published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, which he helped to found and edited, the theme of the stereograph as a somatic process became an analogue to a new type of man who is born into stereovision, grows up within it, and through it enters into social consciousness.² A corporeal sourcing for stereopsis had occurred over a century prior in Bishop Berkeley's theory of depth perception developing through tactility. Both authors privilege the haptic, and both reference for support the famous Cheselden's patient, a blind man restored to vision, for an understanding of how the human evolves through depth perception as a person might work their hand into a glove and that glove into a visual grasp.

This chapter begins with Holmes's theme of stereo-embodiment as an analogue for the somatic-intellectual development of a new sort of man. After a close reading of key points in Holmes's three essays, the chapter will turn to Jacques Lacan's theory of the return volley of the gaze. Though he was not discussing stereography in particular, Lacan does liken his concept of the return gaze to *photo-graphy*, written as such, with italics and a hyphen. His rather paranoid vision of the gaze's ability to posit and fix the viewer is furthered by Luce Irigaray, whose incendiary speculum is a metaphor to burn through the patriarchal gaze. These theorists help us to understand the psychic effects of the spatial destabilization of stereography. When the visual possession of objects as presented in photography is complicated by the evocation of a virtual environment, with the end result being that the empirical appears to be simply an involuntary neurological gestation, the control of objectifying and unitary schemas become unstable, plural, hybrid, or feminized. What I call "stereo-phobia" can be a reaction, for almost as soon as one evokes embodiment, the female is supplied for said body, men having, Irigaray asserts, kept purely disengaged and

unilateral vision for themselves. *Camera* means room, *stereo* solid, *graphy* writing or picturing—a room solidly pictured. Narrative stereography not only pictures women in the domicile, it also evokes interiorization through its process of spatial depiction, so that gendered bodies and their placement coordinate with individual vision as cultivated in the private sphere. For the American middle class, this dynamic formed an analogue for modern, individualized interiority, or the self-reflective consciousness.

Oliver Wendell Holmes's essays on stereography are filled with colorful allusions and extended metaphors, since entertaining the leisured, educated reader was their primary purpose. The colloquial banter implies that we, the readers, belong to the same class as the author, and Holmes's breezy journalistic style, dappled with erudition, creates the chatty criticism for which the *Atlantic Monthly* was known. Theoretical messages embedded in the essays have been deciphered by more than a few critics, but few have touched on the writer's tone, style, or charm. Holmes's essays have been analyzed with Marxist critiques, critiques of bourgeois consumption, the erotic specularization of a female figure, and the author's use of stereo as a self-portrait.³ Each of these positions has its merit, but none straightforwardly addresses Holmes's primary theme—a corporealized vision, nor his poetic, peripatetic style, also thematic. Holmes writes the way we look at stereoviews—by entering and "walking" about, wondering and projecting inner thoughts upon the scene.

I wish to read by and through Holmes's figurative language, as the author meanders through a story of development, a life's progress of the viewer, a man such as Holmes with an active and imaginative mind.⁴ Nancy West first explored the sense of the haptic that runs through these essays, focusing on Holmes's use of depth as a visual metaphor for knowledge.⁵ I will expand upon this idea of haptic cognition, concentrating on the corporeality of the language and the theme of a life's course, as Holmes turns the stereoscope into a prosthesis of transportation, by which

we understand journeying as a haptic, subjective-objective dynamic, one realized first physically, interiorly, and ultimately in cultural consciousness.⁶

For many in the nineteenth century, stereography was the Rosetta stone of perception, allowing one to read a process of vision that hitherto had been opaque. Depth was no longer intractable; it could be summoned, and most remarkably by images that had no depth at all. Holmes's enthusiasm was barely contained: "If a strange planet should happen to come within hail, and one of its philosophers were to ask us, as it passed, to hand him the most remarkable material product of human skill, we should offer him, without a moment's hesitation, a stereoscope . . ." ("Sun Painting and Sun Sculpture," hereafter "SP").⁷ The idea of transport—a planet coming "within hail"—moves beyond individual particulars to an optical futurism. First, though, the expression of the properties of the senses and their secondary effect, perception, must precede through the body, and Holmes accomplishes this with the repeated use of skin as a metaphor for photography, a leitmotif that has not received enough comment in the literature.

He begins the first essay ("The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," hereafter ss) with an allusion to a classical idea of Democritus that objects throw off images or films (*eidola*), which strike our sense perceptions, like skins, allowing us to perceive them through touch (ss 738). Holmes is being fanciful, of course, but this allusion offers a convenient transition to Lucretius's use of the term "cortex" for *eidola*. The by-now cliché phrase "mirror with a memory" occurs here as a metaphor for a stereoscopic daguerreotype—not all photography. We enter its silvery skin of cognition, after which we take an "Arabian carpet ride" on the locomotive, which transports like stereo. We have moved quite a bit from being hit with skins, to having a cortexlike skin and remembering via a smooth skin of surface, then being zipped about on a carpet smooth-to-the-touch: the theme of embodied progress is encapsulated. We next find ourselves at John Whipple's studio, where we will witness the processes

of photographic techniques, including the albumen print stereograph. The photo-skin returns at the end of the essay, when the stereograph and its objects are likened to the skins of cattle, and their hides are all we need: "We have got the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core" (ss 748).

He begins his second essay, "Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture," with an elaborate conceit that the live flaying of Marsyas by Apollo was really the god of light's special sort of revenge, the taking of a *photographic* portrait of that presumptuous flutist (sp 13). What a relief that to be skinned alive will not result in destruction! "We are now flaying our friends and submitted to be flayed ourselves, every few years or months or days" (sp 13). To be photographed, then, is to be visually flayed. To view a photograph is to be hit with skins of light, *en-skinned*, or to skin a subject in turn. Holmes's figurative language posits photography and stereoviewing as active, even aggressive: "We slip off from the dome. . . . We skim off a thin, dry cuticle . . . We steal a landscape. . . . We skin the flints by the wayside" (sp 13). Encompassing larva and chrysalis stages prefigure the photographic *imago* in "The Doings of the Sunbeam" (hereafter "ds"), and unattractive cartes-de-visite are "like skins at a tanner's"—the just dessert for preferring a common portrait of one's epidermis over a stereoview journey (ds 9). He even assumes that by stereoscopically "brushing against" the door frame of Ann Hathaway's cottage he will be in the Bard's skin, as Will Shakespeare's epidermal cells may still linger there (ss 7).

Holmes is consistent in frequently referring to photographs as forms of living consciousness. He cannot seem to resist an opportunity to pun on chemical sensitivity and sensate awareness: "latent soul," "sensitive conscience," "mind sensitized" (ds 5, 14); "the negative is now to give birth to a positive"; "the perverse and totally depraved negative"; "the paper is now sensitive; it has a conscience, and is afraid of daylight"; "the sensitive paper beneath confesses its weakness and betrays it by growing dark" (ss 741). Anthropomorphizing adds the color that the readers of the

Atlantic would have expected, establishing a jocular tone. In concert with the photo-skin analogy and with the development (another pun) of the human through the stereographic image, we are swept into a chemical joy—silver compounds or skin, both are *photosensitive* and *photo-dependent*. Holmes cannot but help plying two trades at once—poetic and medical license.

In this lighthearted manner, the author will develop mankind—stereoscopically, though his tone disguises earnestness. He starts on a developmental journey of man through stereoscopic vision by first mentioning the case of Cheselden's patient, a man with cataracts who never saw in any degree stereoptically (ss 742). When his diseased eyes were restored to normal vision, this man felt all objects touched his eyes as they did his skin. This reference has come down in scientific literature from a case in 1728 as a *tabula rasa* from which theory can infer backward to a state of no stereopsis. Such a zero-degree acuity was thought to represent a state of no subject-object separation, creating an engulfing sense of space-tactility with all vision seeming to be "on-the-skin" (ss 742). Cheselden's patient appeared, along with a privileging of the role of the haptic, in the optical theories of George Berkeley, writing 150 years prior to Holmes and whose works the essayist and stereoscope inventor would have certainly known as part of his education in philosophy.⁸ For Berkeley, distance, extension, figure, and solidity were properties known by touch, not sight.⁹ He asserted that objects of sense are ideas known by reason, while sight, properly speaking, is comprised only of the sensations of light and color, properties belonging to Nature, or God (the same to him).¹⁰

I neither see distance itself, nor anything that I take to be at a distance. . . . neither distance nor things placed at a distance are themselves, or their ideas, truly perceived by sight. . . . what he sees [the observer] only suggests to his understanding that, after having passed a certain distance, to be mea-

sured by the motion of his body, which is perceivable by touch, he shall come to perceive such and such tangible ideas, which have been usually connected with such and such visible ideas.¹¹

Berkeley is not suggesting that we do not perceive distance but that we do not perceive it directly, or primarily. We know dimension by our experience with it, and it is not a property of our immediate senses but of our reasoning faculty. The interpretation of and dissent from this position began the nativist versus empirical debate that raged in the next century.¹² For Berkeley, sight and touch are distinct qualities, but interwoven in our daily experience so that we do not necessarily distinguish between them when it comes to those secondary properties, depth and dimension.¹³ Sight is seen by the eye, but touch is suggested by the eye: "not so truly perceived as *suggested* by the eye, in like manner as thoughts by the ear."¹⁴ Recent studies on the development of stereopsis in infants have offered some confirmation of this. Babies are not born with depth perception but develop it on the average at 3.8 months,¹⁵ and they do so in conjunction with kinesthetic development, which is prior to binocularity and a necessity for the development of stereopsis.¹⁶ The ability to grasp is thus foundational to the perception of depth, and the two develop in a conjoined manner. Berkeley, neglected for twentieth-century neurological models, may have another word yet.

Also intriguing is the author's assertion that the perception of dimension hinges on the arbitrary, as language does, since it is learned and predicated on experience: "The very same ideas on the perception whereof we judge an object to be small might as well have served to make us conclude it great . . . just as the words of any language are in their own nature indifferent to signify this or that thing, or nothing at all."¹⁷ Observation and experience are the matters by which the tangible eye [the eye itself] is separated from the visible eye [perception], and it is on this point that Berkeley repeatedly stresses that vision and touch are separate, and "exist only in the mind."¹⁸ Mental pro-

cessing is how we know, but it cannot be easily sorted out between senses other than to assert—and here Berkeley differs from his predecessors as well as from theorists who postdate him such as David Brewster—that the eye is really just a receptor for light, color, and motion; all the rest is processing of the visible eye/perception guided by foreknowledge of touch. "I observe that visible figures represent tangible figures much after the same manner that written words do sounds. Now, in this respect, words are not arbitrary; it not being indifferent what written word stands for any sound."¹⁹ Berkeley may be asserting an arbitrary nature for dimension, which is where Wheatstone will be headed, but not wishing to unground touch and dimension completely, he locates the perception in the individual's relational processing of body and object. Touch foregrounds our knowledge and determines our relation to things perceived, and sight belongs to a mental construction somewhat as language is based on customary usages.

Our discussion of Berkeley highlights Holmes's developmental stereo-man, for not only did both writers employ that *tabula rasa*, Cheselden's patient, but both were moving through an analysis of tactility to a higher type of organizational order articulate in synthesizing tactile information into systems. From the Cheselden's patient reference, Holmes segues into a discussion of natural stereopsis, sounding like Berkeley: "By means of these two different views of an object, the mind, as it were, feels round it [the object] and gets an idea of its solidity. We clasp an object with our eyes, as with our arms, or with our hands, or with our thumb and finger, and then we know it to be something more than a surface" (ss 742–43).

Somatic knowledge indicates a primary or infant state, and we have just progressed from the no subject-object separation of Cheselden's patient to that of an infant processing haptic dimensionality. In neither writer is dimension limited to the possessory impulse, however, but functions metaphysically as the agent by which we become aware of mental depth and can move thereby into an understanding that is

ultimately immaterial. Language, that delineator of arbitrary perception as well as semiotic richness, will provide the vision.

Holmes progresses next to a stereoscopic portrait, as though to transition from a baby's first picture to something institutionalized, such as the town photographic studio. We return to the stealing skins idea: The stereographer has "stolen our double image" and "we were just now stereographed . . . as if we were fugitives from justice" (ss 743). *We* will be reconstructed in the stereoscope, set aright in our dignity, "as though we were 'a *solid* man of Boston'" (ss 743). Stereo fills out those flat skins, and we become punningly respectable. Further, we are properly introduced: "Such are the stereoscope and photograph by the aid of which *form* is henceforth to make itself seen through the world of intelligence . . . the card of introduction to make all mankind acquaintances" (ss 744). Quite a transition — nadir to zenith — no space, infant, criminal, pillar of society, then "social media." Our mind will be educated stereoscopically, and we will not only enter into intelligent thought but also take our place in culture's discourse.

We next find ourselves looking at the stereograph, getting "schooled." Rather like a toddler, we see space too loominglly:

The scraggy branches of a tree in the foreground run out at us as if they would scratch our eyes out. The elbow of a figure stands forth as to make us almost uncomfortable. Then there is such a frightful amount of detail, that we have the same sense of infinite complexity which Nature gives us. A painter shows us masses, the stereoscopic figure spares us nothing . . . The sun is no respecter of persons or of things. (ss 744)

The stereograph is reaching out to grab and scratch, as though we were toddlers pushed about in a scary world. Passive, sucked into the stereoscope's overwhelming space, no master of the objects but, rather, pulled into their environment with aggressive force, we are learning through moving about in it. A new

knowledge of physicality is called for, as we learn to negotiate distances optical-kinesthetically.

Following this passage, we are given a discursive on the one-to-one correspondence of points in an actual viewing position through Holmes's parlor window and a stereoview taken from it. Note it's a *parlor* window (ss 744–45). We are being tutored by the author — stereo-nature is just like our own, only better. We are now ready to leave home, stereoscopically. First, we visit Alloway Kirk and note the monument to the three dead children of Seedsman Ayr. Sentimentality charges up, and our child state is now mournfully "dead," left behind, though gladly we're still safe in the parlor, where sentiment reigns supreme. We continue our stereo lessons.

There is before us a view of the Pool of David at Hebron, in which a shadowy figure appears at the water's edge, in the right-hand farther corner of the right-hand picture only. This muffled shape stealing silently into the solemn scene has already written a hundred biographies in our imagination. In the lovely glass stereograph of the Lake of Brienz, on the left-hand side, a vaguely hinted female figure stands by the margin of the fair water; on the other side of the picture she is not seen. This is life; we seem to see her come and go. All the longings, passions, experiences, possibilities of womanhood animate that gliding shadow which has flitted through our consciousness. (ss 745)

The subject is growing up. Rather than be pulled by scratchy fingers or suffer through edifying parlor lessons, the author encourages us to narrativize with him in these scenes. The shadowy female figures exist in only one print from each of the photograph pairs. This means that viewed stereoscopically they will be seen, if at all, because of the information in one eye completing for a moment the lack in the other. In retinal covering, information incompatible between the images will be resolved by the brain, never averaged, and data will be either seen or unseen, and may fleetingly pass from one state to the other as retinal fa-

tigue sets in and eyes alternate dominance in vision.²⁰ The collective body of scratching and pulling space gives way to the singular object, especially as she is available to only one eye, as though sexual desire privileged one image over another, an emotional "retinal covering." In a poetic reverie, the author speaks for "our consciousness," the gaze formed by longing and loss, as women come and go, sparking a "hundred biographies" — through photographic accident.

Now, "we" are motivated, grown up, on the chase of active desire. The essay suddenly switches tenses:

I creep over the vast features of Ramses . . . I scale the huge mountain-crystal . . . I pace the length of the three Titanic stones . . . I dive into some mass of foliage . . . I look into the eyes of the caged tiger . . . I walk the streets of once buried cities . . . and leave my outward frame in the arm-chair at my table, while in spirit I am looking down upon Jerusalem. (ss 745)

The first person shift is a jolt. *I* am on life's course, a Victorian stereo-man actively engaged with his environment, and in fact, the environment is him. Witnessing and physical activity equate, and the viewer lives within the space of the depiction, his spirit sailing away from his chair to a God's-eye view of Jerusalem. From infant to infinite, Holmes has used stereography to chart the progress of a male individual of a leisured class, from the indeterminate to a transformation within the mechanism of space, one that awakens fear and desire, embarks him upon a conceptualization of the active life and leads, finally, to a vision of the believer, *cogito* raised to spirit, consciousness unimpeded by gravity.

This new pilgrim's progress through the stereoscope ends at the holy city with a view that emphasizes somatically grounded education that graduates to cognition. This journey puts one on a developmental course, environments pulling the viewer along, demanding response, touching and threatening, teasing and withholding. While the active surveying of types is easy to note in studying stereography, it is equally

important to note that for Holmes, as for many of his contemporaries, stereoscopic space also represented a passive release into perception.²¹ The author oscillates between descriptions of types (Ramses, tiger, Jerusalem) and his sense of environmentalization, which induces mediating desire.

The development of stereo-man is notable for its biographism but also for transporting the subjective response to a sociocultural level, where the author creates a heterotopia that is only in part measure ironic:²²

Form is henceforth divorced from matter. In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please . . . Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us. Men will hunt all curious, beautiful, grand objects, as they hunt the cattle of South America, for the *skins*, [emphasis mine] and leave the carcasses as of little worth. (ss 747-48)

This passage *has* occasioned a hundred biographies. Imagine that Holmes was in earnest, and one plunges down a rabbit hole, for this is feature writing of the popular press, where hyperbole was a standard unit of measure and looking-glass vision a method. Yet this passage sounds uncannily intuitive of our digital age. The skin metaphor reappears, and all of creation is a hide, even the Coliseum, which he invokes.

"The cream of visible creation has been skimmed off," Holmes asserts in the second essay (sp 16). Skimming and skinning are close in sound, both extractive, one violent. An aggression is happening to consciousness, for the lesson that the stereoscope reinforces is truly not that of objects, though they may appear with all the seductions of voyeurism; it is that dimensionality is only experience and perception, arbitrary as language, phantomlike and virtual. We slip

on the costume of visibility and embody it at will, cross-dressing through the world, for "the divorce of form from substance" (ss 748) is realized. The essay ends in a dizzy heterotopia as Holmes gives free reign to a science fiction of stereoscopic money, measurements, banks, and libraries of pictorial forms called up at will, like an image search. We have no idea how profoundly Holmes could have sensed this would be the future while he was writing fantasy, or how much he was just tongue in cheek.

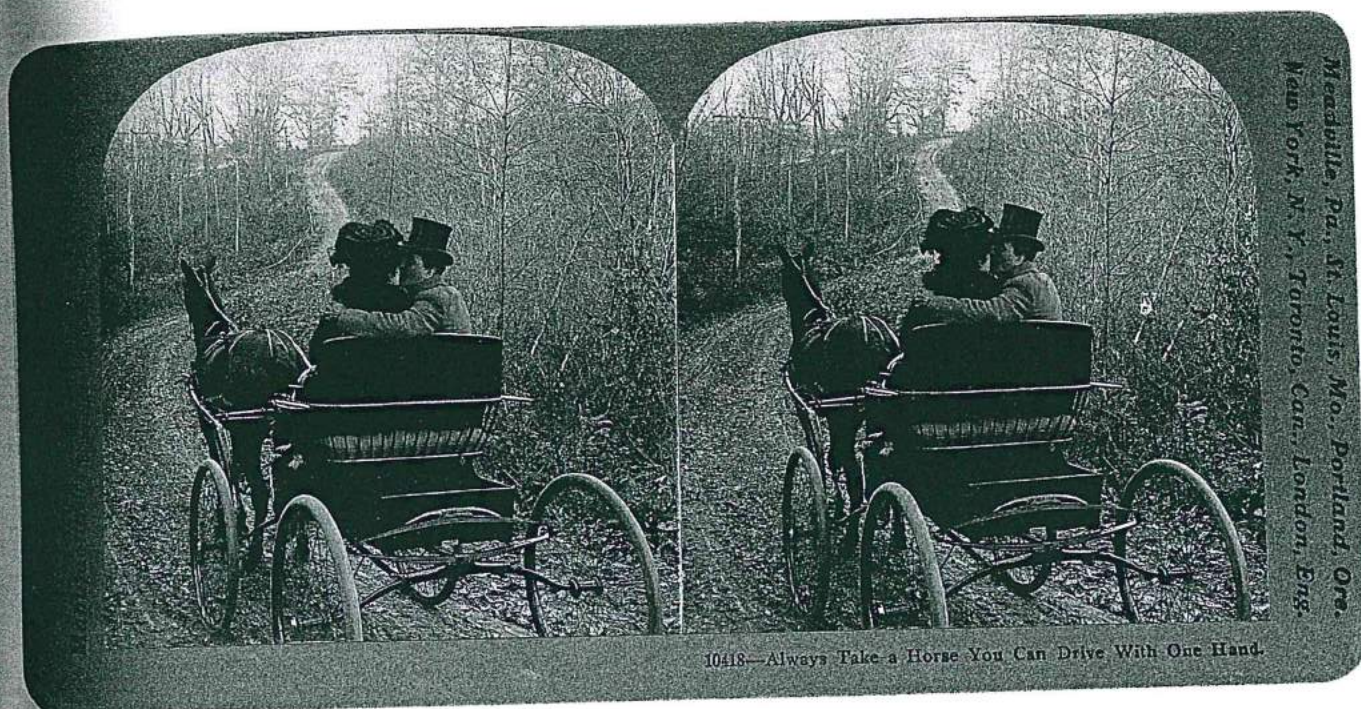
Holmes preferred travel and monument views and was little interested in what was called "groups"—the narrative subject (ss 747). The somatic performance of space and its response through fantasy is demonstrated in his narrations, a typically Victorian response. Stereoviews of the Antietam battlefield permitted him to relive the search for his son, wounded there, and though he does not divulge this to the reader, the emotion is palpable: "It was so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewn with rags and wrecks, came back to us, and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented" (Ds 12).

In the last two essays, "Sun Pictures" (1861) and "Doings of the Sunbeam" (1863), the imagery of skinning, corpses, and death—for example, women suiciding off the London Bridge (sp 24)—appear with more intensity, echoing the ravages of the Civil War. As we enter life stereoscopically, so too, we live there in death and dissolution, dematerialization of every sort, skins, corpses, falling women. The device has grafted onto the body, and we live in a virtual space, films projecting around us, striking the eye, the consciousness optically propelled into an observed objecthood, also a skin. We progress through a grounding in the body, and stereovision, to a metaphysical-visual consciousness.

From a self-interested motivation in seeing the persons or objects depicted, one can stereoscopically

travel and end up embedded in a landscape or environmentalization. In *Always Take a Horse You Can Drive with One Hand*, by Keystone View Company in 1901 (figure 6), the title reads as a bit of spoken advice from one young man to a male friend. This was the sort of comic view that sold very well to married women and couples, as chapter 4 will show. We can read this view socially, as reflecting the change in norms for dating that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century, when young American women were more frequently left unchaperoned in social situations and courting was more liberal. Such liberties gained acceptance by families and were, as might be expected, enthusiastically embraced by more than a few women.²³ Finding "alone time"—by any means necessary—was a stock theme of the day, which women appreciated and purchased in stereoview form (figures 26, 49–50).

In *Always Take a Horse*, though, the bodies are a small portion of the overall scene and rather concealed, as the point of view is behind the couple. The semiosis shifts to the landscape, and a projection of the female form is evidenced in the experience of the space. One becomes deeply aware of the fallen foliage, the American woodland environment, and the road, the impacted dirt that curves down and away, a serpentine shape in the very same outline of a woman's torso, as the couple moves over the hip curve of the road and onward. Thus, the viewer is pulled along the space bending in, a waistlike narrowing in the distance beyond the woman's hat, to the journey this couple is on. The spatial sense of the slow and sensual road echoes the lovemaking, which the viewer is induced to imagine and continue, and the path describes the couple's physical ease alone together. The environment itself becomes as sinuous as she is. This is a pretty typical courtship view, and the title acknowledges the convention of a young man's assertiveness. It can be read *flatly* as one man's erotic designs in action, but complicating this is its realization as a spatial depiction. When activated, the space takes a feminine form, and as a volumetricizing pro-



[FIGURE 6]

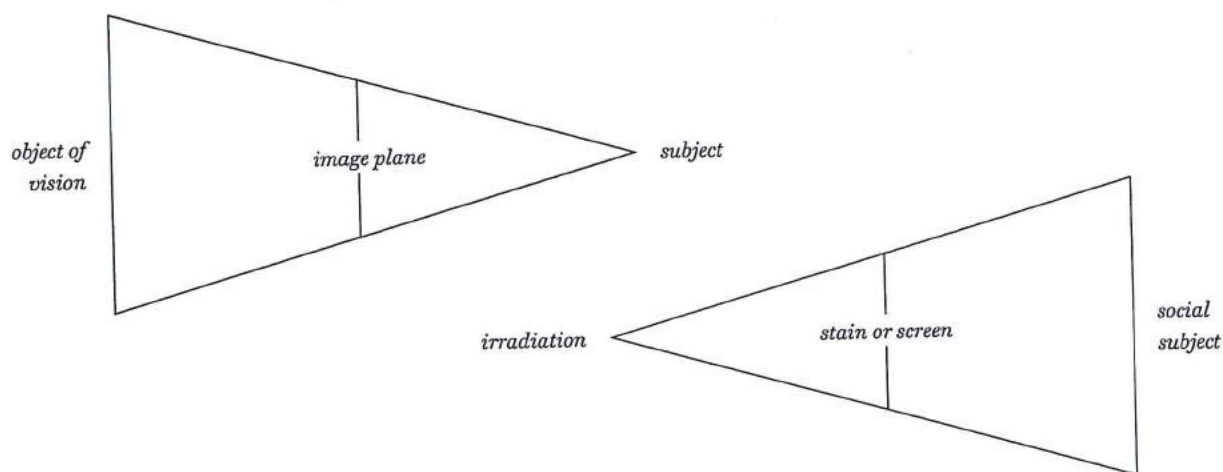
Keystone View Company, *Always Take a Horse You Can Drive with One Hand*, 1901, gelatin-silver print stereograph

cess, movement, and story, it does not objectify the figures as much as includes them, while including us. The entire field suggests a groundless embodiment, space formed solely by our somatic process and experience, an echo of the relation of this amorous pair.

A reading of visual possession or voyeurism is often expanded upon stereoscopic viewing through the realization that space, beginning as images cozily held in the hand, can mentally incarnate and become altogether different from the flat pictures, and a bidirectional dynamic is at play. In the terms of Jacques Lacan, the gaze directs itself through the look and can be noticed as a look-back only in moments of intensity. In the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan presents a structure for the gaze that he associates with "*photo-graphy*," in its etymologically pure sense of "light writing."²⁴ As with Holmes, Lacan's *photo-graph* is skin or screenlike. However, unlike the physician, the psychoanalyst's reading is

not somatic; the photo-skin functions as a projection and doubling, and the gaze, ungrounded, refers more to the invisible past than to the objects of present viewing.

When Lacan speaks of the gaze, he does not mean the look. The latter is the act of seeing, while the gaze is centered within that, invisible to the person generating the look, and it represents lack on the part of the subject, in psychoanalytic terms, that which creates drive and desire (for example, that woman by the pool). Defined by Lacan, "The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes anxiety."²⁵ Because of this loss and anxiety that is preconscious, the relinquished past of preobjectival unity, the gaze is driven to assertively seek in a self-sustaining desire. The object of the look is only a deflection or substitute for the gaze, which remains hidden, but we see the



[FIGURE 7]

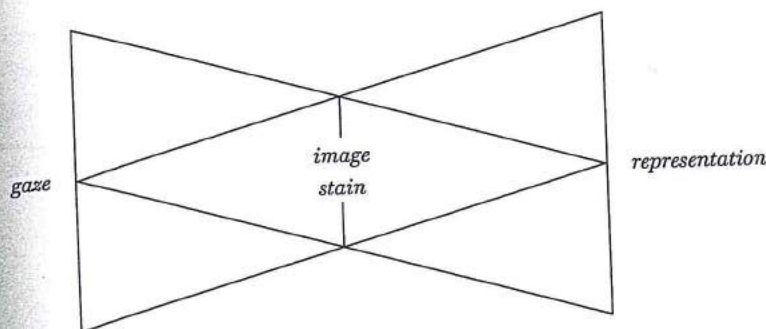
After Jacques Lacan, "The Line and Light," diagrams. From *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* by Jacques Lacan, translated by Alan Sheridan. Copyright © 1973 by Editions du Seuil. English translation copyright © 1977 by Alan Sheridan. Used by permission of W. W. Norton

gaze in moments of intensity, and it remains rather a tagalong with the look. Psychoanalytically speaking, the objects of desire seldom represent true desire. What can be delineated, however, is a dynamic, and Lacan's seminars demonstrate a graph that in its final form resembles a double axe illustrating his concept of the bidirectionality of the subject's gaze and the look-back that posits us as social and *pictured* beings. This graph is also uncannily similar to that of the stereoscope's dynamic, with its interiorization of vision, so that Lacan's psychoanalytic structure can help to shed light on the situation of the stereoview's reflexivity.

The apex of the triangle represents the subject's look, while the base is the object of vision, and the center line the image plane (fig. 7). (I have slightly modified Lacan's terms for clarity.) The second triangle in figure 7 presents an apex which is a point of light that is part of the object represented, originally, at the first triangle's base. This point of light looks back at the subject through sharp irradiation, a reflection or another source of intensity, and it is uncomfortable for

the person looking. (Lacan uses the example of a sardine can brightly lit by sun in the open sea.)²⁶ This point within the object represents the gaze, which, rather than being passively apperceived, is aggressive and powerful in letting the subject feel that it looks back or sees him.

The point of light intensity moves through a screen, which Lacan in other places calls the stain, and it generates a picture. The screen/stain is the social subject, and the picture is that which is generated from the point of the gaze through him. Lacan calls this "the given-to-be-seen that preexists the seen."²⁷ The picture is simply representation, and the subject exists attached to the stain but also filling the space behind it toward the base of the triangle, as a crustacean fills his shell.²⁸ Lacan asserts, "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us conscious institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*"; and "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."²⁹ The subject is implied between the stain and within the pictured, like an ink of the already-seen seeping in.



[FIGURE 8]

After Jacques Lacan, "What Is a Picture?" diagram. From *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* by Jacques Lacan, translated by Alan Sheridan. Copyright © 1973 by Editions du Seuil. English translation copyright © 1977 by Alan Sheridan. Used by permission of W. W. Norton

This rather paranoiac vision Lacan likens to a "photo-graph": "the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form, I am *photo-graphed*."³⁰ As Kaja Silverman explains, this light writing "would seem to look back at us from precisely the site of others whom we attempt to subordinate to our visual scrutiny."³¹ Social subjects, we are written upon and captured by light.

When the two triangles are grafted onto each other (figure 8), the image labeled on the first shares the same line as the screen/stain labeled on the second; and the image created by the look overlaps with the social gaze representing us, so that the subject is now the subject of representation, and the gaze directs us. The shared areas form a diamond in the middle, and it is unclear who or what is seeing whom. So the gaze looks down and shows, as in dreams, and what it reveals is a split subject who tries to realize himself in double consciousness—"seeing oneself see oneself."³² This self-interiorizing is only an attempt to close the gap, however, which is created by what Lacan calls *objet a*, a place more than a thing, that represents primal separation and loss, the drive of the gaze. *Objet a* is always a symbol of lack, why we go about investing ourselves so intently on looking/gazing, the never-to-be-satisfied need arising from primal loss. The fractured or split subject is essential to Lacanian theory, for it is here that the subject "gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a *thrown-off skin*, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield" [emphasis

mine].³³ Such a splitting and covering, a casting off of skins, can be seen most apparently, for the psychoanalyst, in moments of passion and intensity, such as sex and combat. We may include, perhaps, stereoscopic transport and rapture. The reoccurrence of the skin motif is nothing short of uncanny for our subject, but as Freud explains, the uncanny is really the repressed home, our first home, the completely en-skinned site of the maternal body.³⁴

What is also uncanny, *unheimliche*, or truly home-like (as the "un" only marks denial in psychoanalysis), is how Lacan's graph of the doubled gaze becomes an analogue for the stereoscopic dynamic. When we look at figure 7, we see vision beginning at the subject and reading through the image an object in space. The object of vision "out there" gazes back in the next graph through the stereoscope (the screen) to penetrate the subject and create the 3D picture. The subject is unmoored between the representation he sees and that which sees him seeing himself, a double consciousness. This apperception of the gaze explains the word *stain* for the look-back, since the subject herself is seeping and spreading between a projection "out there" and a re-presentation "in here." The mind creating space reveals that there is no there there, only gazes. The stereoview thus creates a look-back that splits the subject between a person who reads a social scene and its codes and a person who reads himself reading. As Lacan reminds us, "seeing oneself see oneself" is merely a *skin* for a split that disguises desire, never to be filled. It introduces an interiority and self-reflection that diverges from the objects depicted

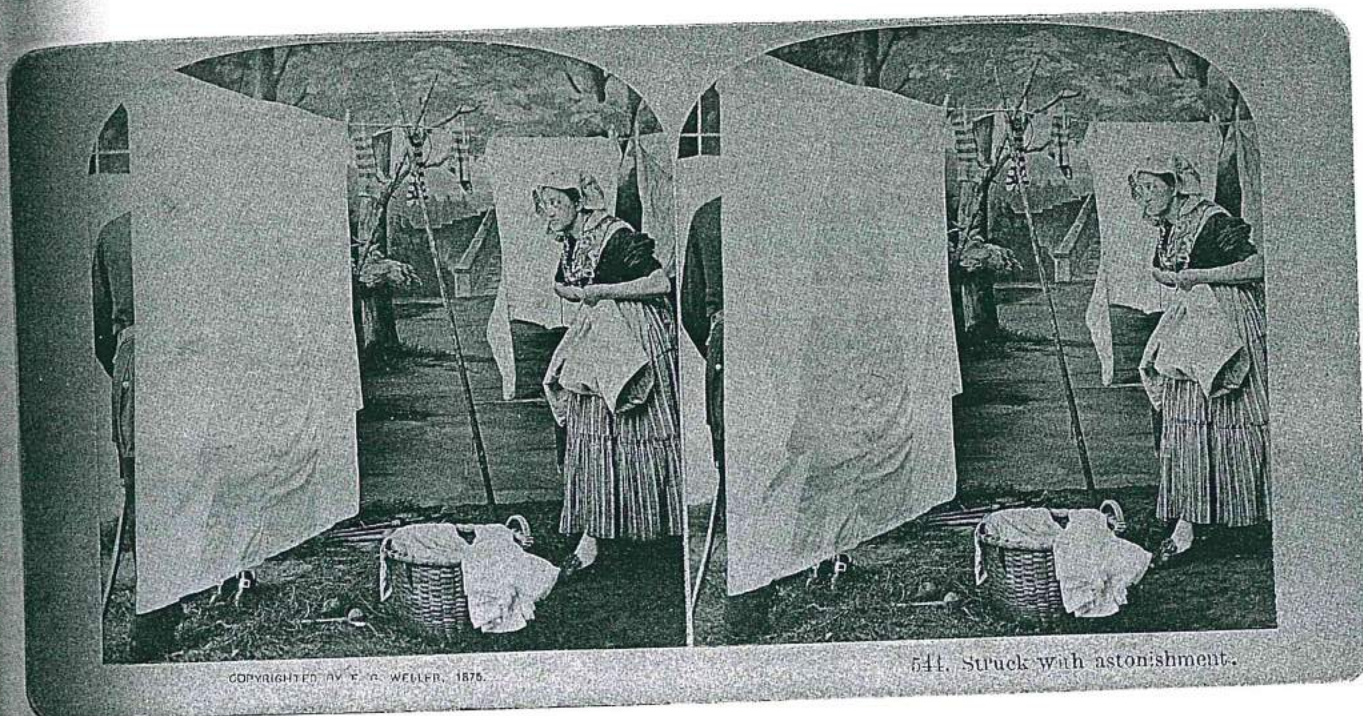
to introduce a new subject, where the bounds between the subjectivity and objectivity overlap and cannot be distinguished. I suspect that this ambiguous space was what has prompted one critic to use the word "obscene" in reaction to stereoscopy.³⁵

The word is interesting, though, not for its accuracy, but rather for its intense split, the backpedaling away from its vision and the will to negate its presence. Kaja Silverman has called the stereoscope a "referential crisis"—"human vision no longer serenely surveys and masters a domain of form which it images itself to be discrete."³⁶ Lindsey Smith claims that "binocular instruments facilitate a shift away from the self," while Beth Rayfield calls stereoscopic space destabilized.³⁷ Nonsubjective, obscene, destabilized, a crisis—we're talking about a simple, parlor device for family entertainment here. I propose the trouble lay in the stereoscope's body analogue, which was situated comfortably enough in its feminine sphere at the time, but today reads as a look-back into the visual subject himself.

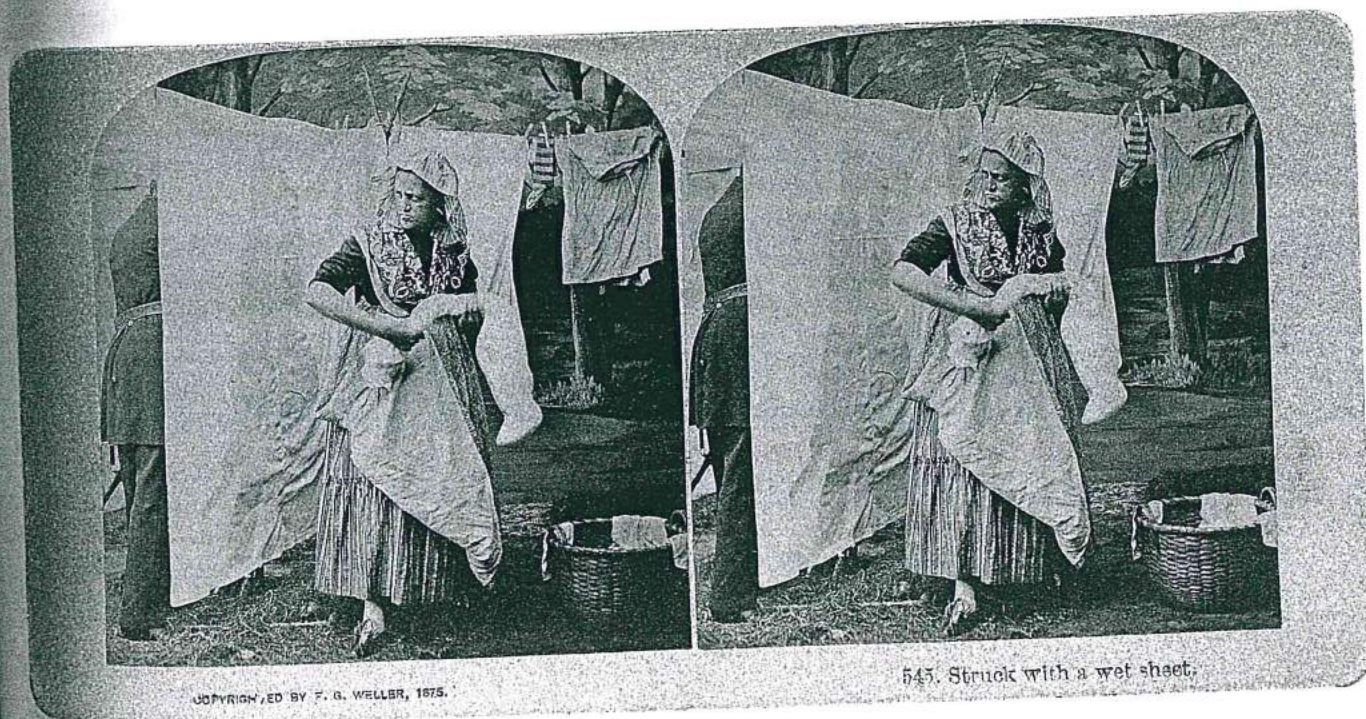
Consider F. G. Weller's *Struck with Astonishment* and *Struck with a Wet Sheet*, 1875 (figures 9 and 10), where we have a view with a literal screen image. Where other stereographers toyed with double exposure, Weller, ever inventive, used a plain old sheet hanging on the laundry line in his comic split-screen version of alone "by any means necessary." The sheet functions as a *mise en abyme*, or a bit of the structure of the medium itself echoed in the picture—the doubling of the stereoview and the stereoscope's lenses and the doubling that occurs between the two eyes' messages, which the visual cortex unifies. The image-screen of the Lacanian graph is here materialized in a quite palpable fashion as the play of desire. The silhouette of the lovers is an arbitrary object for desire, as desire is not fully aimed at the object but moves through it. They represent every young couple, and they are represented as flat shadows, *objet a* floated up from preconscious desire and projected onto a plane. The couple, originating as such, will evolve in the sequential as the circus chase of desire.

Comedy punctures these liminal forms, because comically is how our originary objects will appear, once we become conscious of them, and the sheet, a boundary of consciousness, returns to its simple laundry significance. Superego has its form, Mother, who with a sharp retaliatory thwack, will send the spectral pair back to the world of dreaming rather than appearing, touching and staining the subject. Lacan reminds us that we are not just stained by the stain/screen, we are mediators with it, and Weller's mother figure certainly "mediates."³⁸ *Dompte-regard* is Lacan's term for the laying down of the gaze when we are charmed by the vision of the image into a relaxation of our desire, and these two inventive stereoviews by Weller do just that, evoking the presence of the gaze through the screen image, then puncturing desire comically and turning the screen back to an old sheet.³⁹

Following this comic interlude, which is, after all, what much of stereoviewing was, let us return to stereo-phobia. The separation of high Culture from mass culture represents a protective guardianship, but such a defense is not the final matter in rejections of stereoviewing. Beth Rayfield has looked at the theory of Luce Irigaray's mirrored speculum as a model for the stereoscope's disquieting spatiality, one that "mimics the body," yet has a dislocation from it, and tends to disrupt rational and linear perspective.⁴⁰ I am indebted to her introduction of Irigaray's notorious metaphor to stereography, for it seems to physically match the stereoscope's shape and spatial dynamic. The ideology of Irigaray's metaphor, however, does not offer a close correspondence to stereoviews for her speculum, a concave mirror modeled on the female shape, burns through and destroys patriarchy by volleying back the phallogocentric penetrating gaze and incinerating it in the mirror's concentration. Historical narrative stereographs do not destroy patriarchy; they are fairly complicit with it. The Irigarayan term, the "hysterical-transcendent" and its incineration of rational, logocentric, phallogocentric culture is decidedly not the "hysterical" of narrative stereography.⁴¹



[FIGURE 9]
 F. G. Weller, *Struck with Astonishment*, 1875,
 albumen print stereograph (Plate 2)



[FIGURE 10]
 F. G. Weller, *Struck with a Wet Sheet*, 1875, albumen print stereograph

The Irigarayan model is, however, useful in a certain basic physicality, if not in strict ideological principle. The Holmes-Bates stereoscope does resemble a speculum for peering inside (figure 3), with its sliding rail and two lenses directing the viewer to focus on an angle of vision. The look-back into the corporeal realization of dimension allows one to turn upon the closed chamber of the mind, vision's gaze *photo-graphed*. The metaphor of the speculum can be thought of as a female corporeal version of the Lacanian double-axe shape. Irigaray was Lacan's heretical pupil at the Lycée, and she extends in extremis the aggression of his theory of the gaze. The stereoscopic image, meanwhile, relates to both thinkers in that it makes unavoidable a return volley of the specular and places the subject on a sliding rail of perceptual uncertainty, while the object is both an escapist transport and a skin thrown off from our unconscious. We lay down the gaze (*dompte-regard*) in the pleasure of looking and seeing ourselves looking at space formed gestationally. This involuntary aspect nags at some and can create a *stereo-hysteria*, or a rejection of the spatializing potential of stereography and its feminine body analogue, which constantly reminds us that we are less in control of the objects we see than

we may imagine, as the process of the stereoptical is observed only causationally, cast off from within.

As Lacan reminds us, the eternal chase of the gaze and its objects, shadowlike upon a screen, can be terribly amusing. With a *dompte-regard*, we can enter stereo-space, where, if so inclined, we can swim in a sea of sensation, and no matter that subjectivity and objectivity are suspended in some region of queer unattachment, there is enough presentness to pull us along with the tide of replicatory volume. For some, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, this is an unparalleled pleasure to experience and witness — a new form of man, synched with the stereoscope. The vision-in-the-body, what for Berkeley was a learned repertoire of the tactile, reverberates in the stereograph's space, a device that brings us to an awareness of the arbitrary values we assign these negotiations. Lacan and Irigaray show that such free-floating signification turns back on subjecthood, disallowing a pure objectivity and unfettered possessory gaze. In stereo, we are always split. The nineteenth century stereoscope was analogous with the body, and with unseen processes, automatic and interior, and it correspondingly found a place in the parlor in women's hands, with endless playacts of gendered semiotics.