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Randall Mc Leod, "The Fog of ar⊤", in *Exercises Furieux: A partir de l'édition de l'* Orlando furioso *De Franceschi (Venise, 1584)*, Ilaria Andreoli, ed., Lang, Zurich, 2013, 162–247 (86 pp).

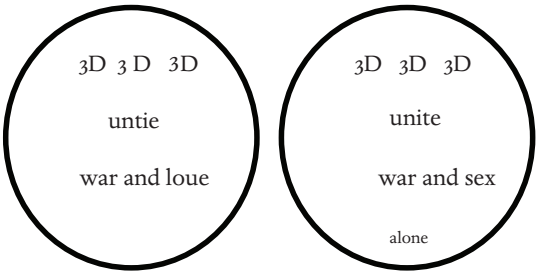


Without buying an expensive apparatus (like a Mc Leod Portable Collator), you can see what I mean by comparing the two images opposite in a way open to those of Mother Nature's children with simultaneous binocular vision. (Some individuals see out of both eyes, but not at the same time. What I am about to describe won't work for them. They can approximate the experience, however, by photocopying one image onto a transparency and the other onto an opaque, and laying the former over the latter. Even microscopic differences in size will then create a distracting *moiré* ; but gross variations, especially those that shift type, should be instantly recognizable nevertheless.)

Sit down now. Prop the book on the table in front of you. Relax. This won't hurt. Our two gracious assistants in the white coats, Gwendolyn and Lakshimi are here to help you, one for each eye. This won't hurt your left eye. It won't hurt the other one, either, yes, that one over there, on the other side of your nose. Yes, that one. No, it's OK, those *are* electrodes, but we are not using electrodes today. On you. What? Yes, you can leave your glasses on. All comfy? Good. Place the tip of your finger between the base of these two circles and draw it slowly toward your nose, with your *eyes* tracking the ap-approaching tip, but with your *attention* always on the two distant circles – which will have become *four* in number soon after your finger has left the page! Do you see that? Good. Two of the four images will remain in position, but the other two will draw toward each other as your finger approaches your nose. When your hand will have come somewhat more than half the distance, these two floating circles should merge. Stop there! The central image of the *three* is the one to watch, for it is a fusion of the two peripheral ones. OK so far?

Now, without altering the *convergence* of your eyebeams, withdraw your finger and – and *presto* – your *focus* should shift automatically to the plane of the page. Now you are ready to collate. You should begin to experience the odd visual effects mentioned above, for both circles are perceived in the same place at the same time, and the two chambers of your brain (each hard-wired by an optic nerve to a different eye, left to right and right to left) will try to make sense of the two slightly different inputs in the centre of the fused circles, as if they were from a single object. *Long live strabismus*. What the brain is attempting here is what it always does when we look

at a single object from the two eyes' slightly different positions : the brain uses these angular differences between the two inputs to triangulate, to gauge the distance between subject and object, say, or object and background, or different distances within the object. But now we've fooled the grey matter and offered each eye the input from a different example of two look-alike objects (as if the two inputs were from a single object), in which case any 3D sensation reveals nothing objective about depth at all, but rather about relative horizontal differences between aspects of these two 2D images.[14] Neat, eh?



14 In nature, binocular vision offers two views of an object, though we usually perceive only one (unless we wilfully cross our eyes). At birth, we may see double, but soon babies learn to focus both eyes at the point of convergence of the eye-beams, and convince themselves that there is only one mother. (Most of us are not aware, however, that outside the narrow cone (2º) of foveal vision, some areas in the periphery of the visual field continue to present a double image – as does your nose, for example.) The two ocular functions of tracking and focus are controlled by different muscles – focus within the eye (by the ciliary muscle, acting on the lens) and tracking outside the eyes (by the *lateral rectus*, etc., acting on the eyeball). Working naturally in tandem, but only arbitrarily so, these two functions are not only physiologically, but also mentally distinct, as this experiement shows, for when the finger is brought toward the nose, focus and tracking normally shift in tandem; but when the finger is removed, focus alone tends to shift, reverting to the plane where it began.

Alternatively, you may forget your finger, and bring the *book* to your nose, positioning a circle in front of each eye, while you stare straight ahead, as if gazing to infinity.[15] Without allowing your eyes to converge, slowly move the book away from your face to a distance where you can focus on the circles comfortably. In this mode, *three* circles will be visible as soon as the book leaves your nose : the central circle is the fusion you are looking for : that is where the 3D and other effects will be found.

If you feel nauseous in either experiment, do stop before you vomit or faint. To answer all your needs, however, we have a bucket and towels, a bed, and a defibulator. (And grief counsellors are on stand by, *just* as a precaution, for we have never much needed them.) If you want to persevere in the midst of queasiness, however, you may be able to stabilize yourself by concentrating on the circumference of the middle circle – a *primum stabile* in a turning world – before moving on to explore its content, for the circumference is invariant. But each line of words *has* some variant. Not relaxed yet? Then try it with a glass of wine. Whatever happens, my dear, (or doesn't), you will at least enjoy the Beaujolais.

In this cross-eyed mode, merely *detecting* the variants is easier than *understanding* them. To analyze the differences, use your fingers, once both hands are free (put down your glass) as windshield wipers : with elbows on the table, hold an index finger in front of each eye, and, moving them back and forth – No, I mean the windshield wipers – in parallel in front of your pupils, alternately block the gaze of one eye, then of the other. Against a stable background formed by the identical parts of the two images, the variants will assert themselves often by jumping back and forth against that background, just as in the astronomers' « blink comparator », which you and your friends may have used as kids to analyze time-lapse photographs of the sky in search of asteroids, comets, or Pluto.

15 For comfort in this second method, the distance between your pupils needs to be the same as or greater than the distance between the centres of the circles. If it is not, try the experiement with a photocopy of the two circles reduced in size.