
Genealogies of VR in the archives

Elizabeth Parke

elizabeth.parke@mail.utoronto.ca.
University of Toronto, Canada

Liz Ridolfo

liz.ridolfo@utoronto.ca
University of Toronto, Canada

Using stereoscope cards and a stereoscope viewer from 1900, held in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library and the University of Toronto Mississauga Library, this poster presents the history of early immersive viewing experiences by tracing the history of 3D ways of seeing from the stereoscope cards to Oculus Rift and Google cardboard. Secondly, we offer tools for teaching with archival photographic materials, examining the histories of seeing, and integrating digital tools in the curriculum to enrich students' access to these cards' histories while also introducing recent VR development tools such as Unity, and Cardboard. Lastly, by using 3D scanning and printing we replicate the viewer, further expanding possible student engagement with DH tools, methods, and theories. The resulting student projects can be archived in a virtual exhibit (using Omeka), and the meta-data and data from the cards and viewer added to the objects' records.

The goal of this pilot project is to develop an 'out of the box' teaching resource for use in the classroom that offers analogue and digital engagement with rare materials, questions the histories of seeing stereoscopically, and contextualizes contemporary devices for seeing this way in a longer history of photography and immersive media that is often overlooked. Our project pushes students and researchers to consider the longer genealogy of virtual reality viewers and draws on previous work such as that of the Stereogramimator at the New York Public Library lab. In so doing, we seek to recover early histories of immersive media, photography, printing, and popular entertainment in the early 20th century.