

Title: When the Image Responds: The Aura of the Photograph in Aleksandr Ivanov's "The Stereoscope: A Twilight Story"

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Abstract:

The protagonist of Aleksandr Ivanov's novella "The Stereoscope (A Twilight Story)" ["Стереоскоп (Сумеречный рассказ)"; 1909] finds himself mysteriously transported into the photographic world – a three-dimensional, oneiric space frozen in time. This liminal realm (which prompts the narrator's evocative reflections on memory and loss) simultaneously inspires "dread," "sorrow" ("страх и... грусть"; 58), and delight ("упоени[е]"; 74). My paper suggests that the source of these emotions lies in what Walter Benjamin identifies as an aura of the photograph (*Selected Writings*, 3:108). Taking as a point of departure Benjamin's "definition of the aura as the aura of distance opened up with the look that awakens in an object perceived" (*The Arcades Project* 314), this presentation explores how, through confronting the viewer-narrator with tantalizingly vivid, yet painfully unreachable images of the past, the photograph enthralls, subjugates, and objectifies him, thereby acquiring agency and the ability to gaze back. Ultimately, the paper argues that Aleksandr Ivanov's novella not only yields a rich lode of insights into the reception of photography in the Silver Age, but also reveals itself to be an important literary precursor to Benjaminian theory of the aura.

Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland et al., edited by Howard Eiland and Michael William Jennings, vol. 3: 1935-1938, Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2006.

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Ivanov, Aleksandr. "Stereoskop (Sumerechnyi Rasskaz)." *Stereoskop. Antologiya Peterburgskoi Fantastiki*, compiled and with notes and an introduction by E. Belodubrovskii and D. Ravinskii, Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburgskoe legkoe chtenie / Sankt-peterburgskii fond kul'tury, 1992, pp. 52–82.