

“Rahmenschau”: Scenes of Observation in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Des Vetters Eckfenster*¹

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I.

At the end of 1820, E.T.A. Hoffmann writes in a letter to the publisher Johann Daniel Symanski:

Sie fordern, verehrtester Herr! mich auf, an der Zeitschrift, die Sie unter dem Titel ‚*der Zuschauer*‘ herauszugeben gedenken, mitzuarbeiten. Mit Vergnügen werde ich Ihren Wunsch erfüllen, um so mehr, als der wohlgewählte Titel mich an meine Lieblingsneigung erinnert. Sie wissen es nämlich wohl schon wie gar zu gern ich zuschauen und anschauen, und dann schwarz auf weiß von mir gebe, was ich eben recht lebendig erschaut. (5: 569)

In this scene of recollection, the “well-chosen title,” evidently modeled on the English journal *Spectator* (published from 1711 on), mobilizes a dynamic that turns simple *spectatorship* into a multiply-graded perception. From *spectatorship* emerges both *spectatorship* [*Zuschauen*] and intuition [*Anschauen*]. If only “then” this newly differentiated viewing [*Schauen*] seeks to articulate itself in written form, *spectatorship* and intuition will have transformed into beholding [*Erschauen*], becoming the third term in a space of viewing that is syntactically staged differently in each case. *Spectatorship*, we might say, is refracted at the angle of signifying prefixes; it divides as if through a prism into the spectrum of its variants. In this way, the theatrical dimension of the term *spectator* becomes productive for a theory of representation: *spectatorship*, which is historically associated with the scenic space,² and which is capable of viewing together, both transitively and reflexively, the framed theatrical product and the act of framing³—*spectatorship* has taken a look at itself, and has, in minimal displacements, opened up the arena [*Schauplatz*] of different framings.

As the letter continues, Hoffmann tries to provide a more precise determination of the relationship between the three terms. Intuition is distinct

from spectatorship and object-oriented looking thanks to its “inner eyes.”⁴ These, according to Hoffmann, “are lodged in the head just as the understanding is.” Only “that which has been viewed inwardly this way” can “be brought to light in a lively and true manner.” Only the “marital alliance” of “understanding and imagination” can guarantee that “anything worthwhile comes out of” poetry in particular (5: 569). It is easy to hear in Hoffmann’s commentary echoes of the “serapiontic principle,” the theory of poetry he developed in his 1819 *Die Serapions-Brüder*. The goal of the theory: “das Bild, das ihm [dem wahren Künstler] im Innern aufgegangen recht zu erfassen mit allen seinen Gestalten, Farben, Lichtern und Schatten, und dann, wenn er sich recht entzündet fühlt, die Darstellung ins äußere Leben zu tragen” (4: 69). The initially open relation between the terms *spectatorship*, *intuition*, and *beholding* has thus been settled. More resolutely than in the *Serapions-Brüder*, Hoffmann in this letter inscribes spectatorship and thus the rationally cognizable external word into the process of perception.⁵ Spectatorship allies on at least equal terms with the productive forces of a visionarily excited “seer’s gift” (Japp 63), synthesizes into beholding, and flows black on white into the poet’s word. The serapiontic ideal thus combines with a clear emphasis on the external world and thereby remains in force. It is thus only coherent for Hoffmann to conclude the paragraph in question with the emphatic exclamation: “Ich bleibe bei diesem Prinzip!” (5: 569).

From here, it would be easy to construct a transition to Hoffmann’s late story *Des Veters Eckfenster* of 1822. There, spectatorship and intuition, the components of the “serapiontic principle,” are distributed among two cousins who, from the elevated position of a corner window, observe a turbulently vivid market scene. In a “marital” alliance—the final part shows both protagonists in an intimate embrace—two ways of seeing meet: one divides the intransparent mass scene into clear segments with the help of a “glass” and describes them true to detail, the other absorbs this material and synthesizes it in his productive imagination. Even if this transition seems to impose itself—research on Hoffmann yields several variations⁶—it is a rather curious phenomenon on the margins that interests me to begin with. It refers, first, to the fact that in his epistolary speech, Hoffmann *explicitly* names the reference to the *Serapions-Brüder* and thus places the letter in the context of a theory of poetry that seems so very evident in the letter; second, to the fact that Hoffmann’s letter is conceived as an open *Letter to the Editor* and does indeed appear in the first issue of the *Zuschauer* to be published. This is significant because the letter as a whole comes up with an excuse for why Symanski’s request for collaboration on the *Zuschauer*—although it absolutely should be granted—cannot be granted right now: Hoffmann is currently engaged in another “literary labor,” he is arranging “the papers of the tomcat Murr” (5: 570) for publication and translating Spontini’s newest opera, *Olimpia*, into

German. The dynamic of substitution and postponement thus evoked produces a highly convoluted system of references in which object formations coexist in such a way that not only gives rise to occasional paradoxes but also brings to light fundamental indeterminacies in the field of possible claims to validity. This set of problems becomes visible thanks to an observation dedicated to the question of framings, that is, to discursive strategies for the organization of perception.⁷

II.

It could thus be said that the renewed affirmation of the serapiontic principle in Hoffmann's letter foregrounds the framing function of *intertextuality*. "Ich bleibe bei diesem Prinzip!" would then mean: I frame the relationship of spectatorship, intuition, and beholding under discussion here according to the principles that organize a given poetics. The procedure of representation thus affirmed immediately comes up against counterframings that once more arise from an *intertextual* dynamics: For Hoffmann's concurrent projects, the *edition* of Murr's views on life and a libretto *translation*, precisely do not foreground Hoffmann's work as productively exteriorized introspection but as the reworking of material that is given. From this perspective, the serapiontic principle reveals its immanent contradiction: A vision anchored in the inward space of the unique subject cannot without further ado be elevated to the level of a *principle*, be repeated or cited.

The situation that arose from conflicting framings (an un-founded intertextual authorization) has become intransparent but seems to be cleared up in the concluding part of Hoffmann's letter. There, he announces the postponed contribution. What "at the moment" is "impossible," namely to satisfy the wishes of the publisher and to provide a contribution, is to happen in the future, for there is already "going around in my mind" something that "in the near future [. . .] will enter the light of day" (5: 571). Once again, the serapiontic principle of a vision going around in the mind combining with its exiting into the world asserts itself. That the text thus announced is indeed *Des Vettters Eckfenster*, which is completed in the spring of 1822 and does in fact appear in the *Zuschauer*, is uncontroversial in the literature. Yet the unsettling fact remains that the belated granting of the wish so to speak rides upon another, for the letter that declares the requested contribution to be an impossibility is itself a contribution to the first issue of the newly founded journal. Within the frame of the journal, the open letter becomes the contribution whose possibility this very letter denies. It is thus different from the contribution requested and at the same time, it *is* a contribution. This paradoxical naming of the different as the same not only causes the question of granting the wish to slide into the realm of the undecidable; the question of

spectatorship, too, and its so easily established connection with the serapiontic ideal, undergo a noticeable shift. For what the text seems programmatically to proclaim—its emphatic “I follow this principle!”—becomes questionable in that it is a valid performative that appears in an *impossibly possible* contribution. In the paradoxes of distinction, spectatorship is exposed to fluctuating framings, it transforms into an unstable configuration. From here, there is another transition to *Des Veters Eckfenster* to be found, a transition that focuses its attention on the discontinuous productivity of framings; of framings which appear in various ways in the *Eckfenster* and stage object formations at the moment of their specifically conditioned creation.

III.

The situation at the opening of the *Eckfenster* is a significant lack in the system of serapiontic poetics. The cousin named in the title, a writer afflicted by a paralyzing illness, is driven by the “turning of the wheels of fantasy.” Yet what “continued to labor on within, continually producing something new and something new again” (6: 468) does not make it into the external world in black on white but can merely be narrated orally. Whenever a “thought” seeks to “follow” the “path” onto the “paper,” the illness blocks this path and the thought dissipates irretrievably. The illness, in other words, is a paralysis of writing. We might also say that it blocks the serapiontic ideal at the point at which this ideal seeks to distinguish just two levels, inner idea and written representation, without separately appraising the medium’s formative powers; the illness, in other words, interrupts a theory of representation that is not even about writing but seems to assume that from the inner to the outer, a thought comes to light without reservation.

Writing does however become an issue in the *Eckfenster*, and this issue takes the form of a framing scene. The drama is narrated from cousin to cousin, the ill cousin tells it to his healthy relative as follows:

“Vetter, mit mir ist es aus! Ich komme mir vor, wie jener alte, vom Wahnsinn zerrüttete Maler, der Tage lang vor einer in den Rahmen gespannten grundierten Leinwand saß, und allen, die zu ihm kamen, die mannigfachen Schönheiten des reichen, herrlichen Gemäldes anpries, das er so eben vollendet; – ich geb’s auf, das wirkende schaffende Leben, welches zur äußeren Form gestaltet aus mir selbst hinaus tritt, sich mit der Welt befreundend! – Mein Geist zieht sich in seine Klause zurück!” (6: 469)

The painter’s speech is a speech without visible object; it talks about beauties that do not exist in the world of painting. The passage not only exposes a semiotic fallacy that brilliantly stages Lessing’s media theory in his *Laokoon*;⁸ more fundamentally, it problematizes the possibility of the

creation of “form,” more precisely of a creation of form that would be tied to the formative powers of the creative subject. The mention of insanity is notable in this regard. It does not localize insanity in the *language* of the painter, which evinces no signs of disruption. Insanity rather resides in the referential correlation *between* language and the linguistically described object: It articulates itself in the mode of the description of the image. The *Ausdrucksproblem* of the sick cousin gains additional meaning against this backdrop. This problem does not simply have to do with the loss of writing but more precisely with the paradoxical form of a description that strikingly builds up an objective reference [*Leinwand*] and at the same time goes into emptiness. The question of the subject [*mit mir ist es aus!*] is thus joined in this passage—a highly ironic passage, as emphasized by comparison and framing—with the problem of medial differences. The subject, one could say, becomes in this connection the productive holding chamber for paradoxical forms of representation.

In the course of the text, the question of the creative subject is linked to that of public representation, and once again framings play a decisive role. Thus the healthy cousin who serves as first-person narrator considers it “necessary” to reconcile his ill cousin’s productive fantasy with the “low-ceilinged” room, whose narrow square is stretched by heavenly poetic powers, or he localizes the cousin’s abode “on the great market,” which is not only “enclosed,” frame-like, by “magnificent buildings” but presents in the center the “colossally and ingeniously conceived theater building.” Right in the middle of the capital Berlin, framings, it seems, aim at a magnificent and glorious representation tied to the productivity of the genius, to a representation that representatively stages the creation of both subject and form. The cousin’s home congenially fits into this subject-centered frame. The cousin lives in a building on a corner, and “aus dem Fenster eines kleinen Kabinets übersieht er mit einem Blick das ganze Panorama des grandiosen Platzes” (6: 469).

In citing the panorama, Hoffmann brings in a highly popular media technique and a form of art wide-spread since the end of the eighteenth century.⁹ It derives its mass-media popularity from a new technique in the field of landscape painting. Parts of a painting glued together and, arranged in a curve or a circle, add up to the visual impression of a spatial image coherent in itself. This image is perspectively oriented toward the viewer who, standing in the middle of a room on an elevated platform, experiences the realistic and detailed image of a city or a landscape as deceptively real. The radical visual break Jonathan Crary discerns at the beginning of the nineteenth century is visible in the panorama as well. No longer does the central perspective imposed by the image organize the fixed gaze of viewers and turn them into passive recipients; rather these viewers become actively seeing parts of a technologically organized apparatus of perception: The totality announced by

the panorama is only experienced by those who in full circumspection synthesize visual impressions, individual images as it were, into a complete view. Yet these active viewers in the panorama, who experience themselves as I-origos within the domain of their seeing, are formed under specific conditions. The panoramic technique, guided by scientific objectivity, produces a seeing that is experienced physically and thus suggestively rehearses the bourgeois viewer in the aesthetic ideal of a flawless realism. In other words: There where the seeing subject emancipates itself in a freely wandering gaze, this gaze at the same time submits to a specific aesthetic order (cf. Eicher 372–3). What’s more: If the pleasure taken in the value of viewing a precise imitation invites the viewer to a distanced contemplation, this also happens in the kind of representatively staged scenes of power that become increasingly popular in the nationally-minded nineteenth century, which orients its citizens’ wandering gaze in the direction of power.

Entirely in accordance with the idea of this new historic medium, Hoffmann’s reference to the “entire panorama” of the “grandiose square” emphasizes the moments of overview and totality. For there where the madness of the empty canvas at first indicated problems of representation, the view from the corner window promises relief: “Aber dies Fenster ist mein Trost, hier ist mir das bunte Leben auf’s Neue aufgegangen, und ich fühle mich befreundet mit seinem niemals rastenden Treiben. Komm Vetter, schau hinaus!” (Hoffmann 6: 471). The “active creative life” (469) given up on at the height of the crisis of the paralysis of writing seems to have been regained in the panoramic perspective. However, in this supposed apotheosis of expression, what is lacking is precisely that “outer form” (469) that brings to the outside that which is within. Its place is taken by the window as a framing or, differently, by a reflection on media¹⁰ that attempts to investigate what creation of form could mean in a time of panoramic seeing. In this context, the fact is important that the two cousins sit *across from* each other and in such a way that the cousin who has newly entered into this perspective “just barely fits into the window space” (471). Not only do they both look through the same window, but both their views are framed by the same section. Their seeing is observed *as* seeing.

The healthy cousin provides *one* possible object formation in a circumspective overview when, encouraged by his cousin to “take a look outside,” he describes the following impression:

Der Anblick war in der Tat seltsam und überraschend. Der ganze Markt schien eine einzige, dicht zusammen gedrängte Volksmasse, so daß man glauben mußte, ein dazwischen geworfener Apfel könnte niemals zur Erde gelangen. Die verschiedensten Farben glänzten im Sonnenschein und zwar in ganz kleinen Flecken; auf mich machte dies den Eindruck eines großen, vom Winde bewegten, hin und her wogenden Tulpenbeetes, und ich mußte mir gestehen, daß der Anblick zwar sehr artig, aber auf die Länge ermüdend sei, ja wohl gar aufge-

reizten Personen einen kleinen Schwindel verursachen könne, der dem nicht unangenehmen Delirieren des nahenden Traums gliche; darin suchte ich das Vergnügen, das das Eckfenster dem Vetter gewähre, und äußerte ihm dieses ganz unverhohlen. (471)

Here, the one “view” onto the “entire panorama of the grandiose square” becomes concrete in a pervasive movement not of (natural) phenomena limited in themselves but of aesthetic materials that appear as in spots: “the most varied colors gleam in the sunshine,” the entirety of the panoramic totality (“the entire market”) as if pointillistically disperses into “very small spots.” Figuralness does not arise or, if it does, merely in such a way that its result, unstable and undefined, strangely affects the viewer. The rhetoric of “dizziness” can be situated historically. According to Oettermann (12), dizziness is one of the bodily sensations that were quite common among viewers as yet not used to panoramic seeing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It took hold of them when they were first exposed to the expanse of the panorama and, in this way, to the “limitations of human vision” (12) conditioned by the history of media: “According to contemporary accounts, a great many ‘ladies with delicate nerves’ and ‘young dandies’ became seasick at the first exhibitions” (13). From this perspective, the “prospect” afforded by the corner window is “indeed [. . .] surprising,” for it situates the panoramic view not on the site of the objective viewer in control but rather at the boundary of the visible and of control—there where certain viewing patterns have not yet been formed, where encodings are yet to be developed, and where the conditions and preconditions of seeing free of dizziness become discernible. In putting “dizziness” up for discussion, in other words, the *Eckfenster* observes the principles that constitute panoramic viewing at the threshold of their genesis in a particular medium.

The ill cousin immediately reacts to this “dizziness.” He initiates a school of perception that is to train his younger relative in “really viewing.” Such a trained eye, we read, does not succumb to the “sense-confusing sight of the motley throng of the people moved in meaningless activity” but is capable of transforming the “market” into the “most various scene of civil life” (Hoffmann 6: 471). It replaces a diffuse aesthetics of spots of colors with the differentiated and meaningful forms of social order. The emphasis here is plainly on a certain “art of viewing” (471); what is *real* about the market—its reality as a social-historical phenomenon instead of a colored “bed of tulips”—only becomes visible where viewing has been trained to become *real* viewing. The tension thus established between a delirious aesthetics of the sea of flowers and the economic realities of bourgeois existence in the big city has led some interpreters to assume that the *Eckfenster* marks Hoffmann’s late farewell to the Romantic conception of art and his turn to an early form of realist writing. The argument can be made more

subtly by referring to names and concepts that further specify the eye that *really views*.

First, we read that this eye acts against the colorful formlessness of the “mass” thanks to a “distinct viewing” [*deutliches Schauen*] (472); citing the epistemological topos of “distinctness,” it evidently approximates the analytic cognitive powers of reason and produces differentiating determinations where the lower cognitive powers—in the case of the human senses, one of the archetypes is the perception of color—predominate. In Leibniz’s terms, the viewer caught up in perceptions of color at best attains clear cognition, is able to identify different colors and recognize them to be certain colors. At the same time, this cognition remains confused and does not attain distinct cognition because it is able to determine difference at best “through the simple testimony of the senses, not by way of explicit marks” (Leibniz 24). Second, Jacques Callot, Daniel Chodowiecki, and William Hogarth are crown witnesses for the attempt to distinguish “outlines” [*Umrisse*] and thereby to inscribe one bourgeois “sketch after another” (Hoffmann 6: 471) into the turbulent market scene. In combination with the ill cousin’s praise of his “trained physiognomics” (474), the three engravers’ names acquire symptomatic significance: As important *providers of images* for Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775–78), which developed its basic pathognomonic forms not least on the basis of the grotesque, satirical, or generic caricatures of these artists (cf. Pabst 240), the *really viewing* eye evidently is to be understood within the horizon of rationally making distinct the sensual experience (of color) as well as eighteenth-century Enlightenment physiognomic techniques of observation and analysis. The claim of these techniques, namely scientifically-objectively to infer an inner disposition, a particular character or its future developments, from the outer appearance of a human being,¹¹ is founded on a systematic “art of spying” [*Ausspähungskunst*] (Kant 297) that aims for the incidental, small details, insignificant gestures, looks, and hints. And it thereby fulfills a historically-indexed desire for order, the wish to compensate for the decay of social framings with procedures of interpretation that are able to classify the “individual,” which is becoming more and more opaque: “The bourgeois insecurity in judging one’s counterparts that resulted from the decline of the estates, urbanization, and increased travel leads to a boom for eighteenth century’s physiognomic doctrines” (Oesterle 86). Accordingly, finding out what is uniquely *individual* in a physiognomic phenomenon is essential to Lavater’s interpretational strategy. What is essential is that which remains practically inaccessible to the healthy cousin in his confrontation with the amorphous “mass of the people” (Hoffmann 6: 471)—the incomprehensible phenomenon of his time (cf. Lüdemann 119–20). The “outlines” of recognizable objects remain unattainable, he sees—and that is why he must be trained to *really view*—a field of unarticulated colors, not individual protagonists of bourgeois life.

There have been interpretations of Hoffmann's peculiar 1822 anachronism, of his "Romantic recourse to Enlightenment viewing patterns" (Oesterle), that place it within a social history.¹² It can also be discussed in terms of a theory of representation, once again guided by the notion of framings.

IV.

The first element of the "art of viewing" (or the art of observing the strategies of panoramic viewing) is a technical instrument. With the help of a "glass" (Hoffmann 6: 472) that serves the purpose of magnification, the cousin-turned-student manages to detach individual sections from the mass of colors and to observe them one after the other. The procedure evokes memories of the physicotheological "art" of "seeing" (Brockes 663) that Barthold Heinrich Brockes develops almost a hundred years earlier thanks to a perspective he creates by joining his hands to form a tube. This tube becomes a "means" (661) for focusing the complex multitude of impressions, which in their "all too great number cannot properly be distinguished," within a frame and "thereby" to see them "more distinctly" [*deutlicher*] (662). Thanks to "reason"—which brings order by means of instruments and is to be understood in the context of science, indexed here by the name of Newton (662)—it becomes possible to "draft" a series of "unit[s]" and to "observe them one after the other" (660). Perceptions that are scattered and distributed far and wide are thus channeled "by the small opening" (662) and reduced to a manageable section. In Brockes, too, the opponent of reason lurks in the realm of colors. For if this perspective is taken, one may "inskünftige nicht ferner klagen: / Ich weiß nicht, was ich sehen soll; das Feld ist gelb, die Luft ist blau, / Der Wald ist licht = und dunkel = grün, und diß ist alles was ich schau" (661).

The framed viewing [*Rahmenschau*] instituted by Brockes, a procedure of observation that becomes increasingly established in the eighteenth century, enters into tension with the sensual perception of color. It is evidently capable of clarifying, of making this color perception distinct. In this context, framed viewing is the name of a "sectional seeing" (Langen 20) that artificially delimits the visual field with the help of optical devices (telescope, camera obscura, peep box, window) and thereby makes individual objects distinctly recognizable in the first place. According to Langen, this isolating framed viewing corresponds to "rationalism's tendency to delimit the object to a 'comprehensible' [*übersehbar*] field of apperception" (32) that is reinserted into a larger context only after this selective individualization. The "rationalist peep box man" (22) opens up the world by way of continuously enchained framing: "Every one of rationalism's larger constructs is thus basically a mosaic, a sum of individual parts that are closed in on themselves

and independent and that are essentially merely added up, not connected organically” (26).

Hoffmann’s *Eckfenster*, too, stages such a framed viewing: Enclosed in the corner window and its panoramic perspective, we observe as their basic element a framed viewing that seems to do just what traditionally characterizes it: The learning cousin’s glass enframes the object of cognition, takes it out of “the fullness of the things falling into purview” and thus produces “distinctness of reception” (Langen 8–9). The colorful sea of tulips thereby transforms into a recognizable singularity. Only now does the cousin notice a “somewhat strangely clothed person”; now, the text tells us, he has “captured” it [*gefaßt*] (Hoffmann 6: 472); and now the physiognomically-inspired interpretation can begin.

Two particularities of the composition are worth noting in this context. A continuous dialog unfolds between the two cousins, a dialog whose staged, alternating speech approximates a dramatic situation. In the course of the dialog, “distinct viewing” is articulated in the mode of *evidentia* (cf. Campe 218–9) when the learning cousin describes down to the most minute detail the person framed in each instance and his or her actions, and his teaching counterpart complements the graphic explanation with a kind of individualized social history. Two aspects are of particular interest: While it was colors’ aesthetic powers of diffusion that dizzied the unschooled cousin in an undulating sea of tulips, now it is distinctly appearing colors, a “nuanced differentiation of colors” (Gunia and Kremer 77) that structure the framed image. In this image, what is predominant is no longer the non-specified back and forth of a mass movement but individual people, for example the “strangely clothed person” already mentioned, who make their way through the crowded market: “Jetzt stürzt sie sich ins Gewühl. Versuche, Vetter, ob du ihren Lauf in den verschiedensten Krümmungen verfolgen kannst, ohne sie aus dem Auge zu verlieren, das gelbe Tuch leuchtet dir vor.” The apprentice immediately follows the advice:

Ei, wie der brennende gelbe Punkt die Masse durchschneidet. Jetzt ist sie schon der Kirche nah – jetzt feilscht sie um etwas bei den Buden – jetzt ist sie fort – o weh! Ich habe sie verloren – nein, dort am Ende duckt sie wieder auf – dort bei dem Geflügel – sie ergreift eine gerupfte Gans – sie betastet sie mit kennerischen Fingern. – (Hoffmann 6: 472)

The teaching cousin enjoys the itinerary of his student’s gaze with pedagogical satisfaction: “Gut Vetter, das Fixieren des Blicks erzeugt das deutliche Schauen” (472). But what does *distinct* mean here? and what to *fixate*? In a certain sense, the gaze is fixed by the enframing glass. Yet what is captured by the glass is dynamic through and through, the market’s circulating exchange that includes all participants. This, however, cannot but endanger a framed viewing that seeks to “capture the object in a state of rest” since

“the object’s immobility” is “the precondition of clear, unambiguous capturing” (Langen 9). What is more: It is surprising that it should of all things be color that guides the gaze and contributes to making distinctions. Yet this color is made acute as “burning yellow point.” It can name an “itinerary in all of its various turns,” in other words, it is no longer a formless spot but an outlining breach that stages a syntagmatically curved course of events. The “glass,” we might say, undergoes a significant change of function. It does not, as an instrument of scientific-objective framed viewing, provide a view onto the object before our eyes, or, put differently: It provides this view in the course of a distinct movement of *writing*, in the form of that medium in which the object that is *seen* comes before our eyes at the same time as an object that is *narrated* and *described*. The glass, in other words, observes the formation of objects in its paradoxical mediality; it observes the *narrated* formation of objects in panoramic seeing and at the same time the *narrating* text, in which this formation comes up.

We also notice that the alignment of seeing and writing comes with a rearrangement of temporality. In the healthy cousin’s speech, time is articulated in the epic second-style, a ‘time-covering’ description technique that seeks to transpose without remainder what is optically seen into the medium of writing. The event-like “now” and “there”—cut up by syntagmatic dashes or temporal leaps—scans this movement in fragments of observations arranged as fragments of writing. A kind of experimental simultaneous writing produces the effect of spatiotemporal co-presence, in which graphic proximity and distanced observation peculiarly intertwine—intertwine to form a kind of panoramic experiment in which it is debatable what access to the world the panoramic view really produces.

Throughout, the contributions of the ill cousin, who unlike his healthy counterpart does not or in any case not “now” seem to look through the glass, serve as a contextualizing complement to the staccato of the montage. Engaging with the fragmentary yield of what is ‘optically narrated,’ his comments provide the frame for a narration that institutes meaning. Starting from the outer appearance and attitude of people—he is thus completely in line with physiognomic interpretation—the ill cousin discusses the origin, lifestyle and individual character of the people described in so vivid and compelling a manner that other interpretations, other ways of seeing hardly seem possible any more: “Von allem, was du da herauskombinierst, lieber Vetter, mag kein Wörtchen wahr sein, aber indem ich die Weiber anschau ist mir, Dank sei es deiner lebendigen Darstellung, alles so plausibel, daß ich daran glauben muß, ich mag wollen oder nicht” (Hoffmann 6: 475). The ill cousin’s interpreting *combinatorics* and the healthy cousin’s *perception* can hardly be distinguished any longer. The conjunction “indem” acts as a mediator. When it opens a modal subordinate clause, it provides the accompanying circumstance: in that. When it opens a temporal subordinate clause, however, it

indicates simultaneity: while. The difference is significant. In the first case, the object-oriented observation might still precede the “vivid representation,” but in the second case, *seeing* and *combining* take place at the same moment. In the latter case, seeing would be seeing the “vivid representation” and could not be separated from its written syntagma. It is only coherent then for the *truth* [Wahrheit] of optical *perception* [Wahrnehmung] to reveal itself as the plausibility of what is trustworthy or *probable* [wahrscheinlich], of that which, according to a long tradition, could be the case in poetry.

It remains to point out that the text by no means seeks to hide the hypothetical character of such combinatoric *constructions* of reality. Instead, on the occasion of a man who appears particularly strange, who has remained “an unsolvable riddle” (482) to the ill cousin, the contingency of physiognomic hermeneutics comes to the fore. Two competing, radically different profiles of character and lifestyle are offered as possible “varieties” for approaching the difficult riddle: We hear the story of a “cynical German master-draughtsman” who is “immediately refashioned into a homely French pastry chef” (486) in such a way that “his outward appearance, his entire nature fits this rather well.” The “riddle” here is not the phenomenon to be deciphered. The riddle is the possibility of differential connections in language which the “outward appearance” conveniently “fits”; riddle, in other words, is the name of narratives that are at the basis of this outward appearance as a kind of *genotext* and equi-originarily structure the visual phenomenon.

Once again, the construction of temporality is remarkable in this context. While the “now”-style of the student switches from scene to scene and seeks to stage the lively unfolding movement of seeing and signs, a kind of absolute present, the experienced teacher and *writer* speaks from the point of view of that which is always already prepared. The ill cousin expects things, people, and movements—“now” seen by the healthy cousin through the glass for the first time—as something that has already happened in just this way. Even where a “happy coincidence” (477) governs events, these turn out to be a repetition. Thus, for example, we see the entrance of a girl, whose “white silk shoes on the market must give away that the little miss belongs to the ballet or the theater more generally” (478). In the glass’s searching course, the learning student’s eye finds every outward detail while the teacher already guesses what is about to follow: The enframing glass promptly reveals a pretty young man who is preparing for a “charming rendezvous” (479). It is no coincidence in this context for Hoffmann to take up metaphors from the world of theater and to refer to ballet and comedy. Not only do all events on the market take place in the shadow of the theater building placed squarely in the middle, they also have the effect of episodes of a drama that is produced anew every market day and is masterfully anticipated by the ill cousin. Thus, for example, a group of old women “that is just now forming” appears in the

“third door of the theater” (473). What “just now” appears before our eyes as the formation takes place—the glass stages the “striking physiognomies” of two of the women—is nonetheless for the ill cousin, a regular guest in his box, a pairing that does not come together for the first time but “perennially” (474). The presentifying function in the syntactically synchronized seeing/narrating of the healthy cousin thus merges with a kind of recollecting function on the part of his ill counterpart. Even more so: The allegedly immediate seeing/narrating of this scene is theatrically framed as a post-facto effect of variegating repetition. Seeing/narrating thus distances itself—in repetition—from the model of the creative subject but also from the regime of the immediately visible and the “now”-time of a description that repeats presence. Seeing what is before our eyes, the ‘optical-objective’ perception in the glass’s perspective, instead turns out to be a reproduction of ideal images that derive from the ill cousin’s memory, his archive of images that have been interiorized and are mobilized in narration. Seeing would then not function as mimetically-figuring but as reproductively-citing. It would function, we could say once again, like writing, which is the medium of memory *par excellence* and the originary supplement of a language that the glass perspective compels to be representative.

This shift is reflected within the frame of another scene of observation that integrates seeing and language/writing in a remarkable way. Once again staged spectacularly in front of “the wall of the theater” (487), the concern this time is with a blind man and with the possibility of “recognizing” (488) his blindness even if no visible “flaw” betrays the “lack of sight.” What is at stake, in other words, is the “confrontation of the act of seeing [. . .] with not-seeing” (Neumann 232) and the question of the extent to which not-seeing can be captured in seeing. The characteristic to be sought out is the “upward-pointing position of the head,” a characteristic interpreted as the blind man’s striving “to see the eternal light that lights his way in a beyond full of consolation, hope, and beatitude” (Hoffmann 6: 488–9). This interpretation offered by the ill cousin is of particular significance against the background of the “trained physiognomics” (474) that allegedly informs his seeing. For what the ill cousin sees when he interprets the not-seeing, what he sees in the place where seeing is lacking is the iconography of the “elevating gaze” [*him-melnder Blick*] (Pabst 242), well-known in the history of art as the characteristic of the martyr whose salvation is the subject of heavenly anticipation. Where *blindness* threatens the physiognomic paradigm constituted by the observation and interpretation of the human gaze, the ill cousin salvages the paradigm by replacing the alleged objective reference to the blind face with a mobilization/recollection of coded schemata. Accordingly, we might say: This attempt at seeing not-seeing, of *cognizingly* usurping blindness in the act of seeing reveals this attempt’s imaginary structure of misrecognition. But

it also stages the fact that this misrecognition is constitutive of every observation and indispensable for the genesis of language. For this attempt at seeing-not-seeing triggers the fullness of narration or, as the ill cousin puts it: “Der blinde Landwehrmann bietet mir jeden Markttag einen Schatz von Bemerkungen dar” (Hoffmann 6: 489). Yet in the double meaning of *Bemerkung*—it designates *notatio* and *observatio* (Grimm I: 1460)—*observation* and *written form* overlap. What is offered, scenically presented or *performed* by the blind actor in the drama of the market is thus not only the gestures that are framed and thus become *noticeable*; in the visible, it is, moreover and at the same time, the *notice*: the written *notation* as the significant correlate of blindness.

V.

This connection of (blind) seeing and writing is radicalized in another scene, which, by way of conclusion, will lead me back to the question of the serapiontic principle but also to the question of the panorama. Once again, as he did when he saw the bed of tulips, the healthy cousin describes his panoramic seeing: “Indem ich den ganzen Markt überschauete, bemerkte ich, daß die Mühlwagen dort, über die Tücher wie Zelte aufgespannt sind, deshalb einen malerischen Anblick gewähren, weil sie dem Auge ein Stützpunkt sind, um den sich die bunte Masse zu deutlichen Gruppen bildet” (Hoffmann 6: 490–1). Noticing [*Bemerken*] again plays a role: The view forms into a picturesque image of an overview and totality once individual objects detach from the colorful mass, once they are *noticed*. Again, seeing and speaking seem to synchronize completely; again, noticing constitutes itself in the course of visual noticing as distinct *speaking* and fixating. If this perception puts into practice the “real viewing” demanded by the ill cousin, then only insofar as seeing functions the way language does—more precisely, insofar as seeing functions like writing, which exhibits the *missing* of the moment and a fundamental withdrawal in the representation of the visible. For the ill cousin’s answer to the healthy one’s structured “now”-experience is the following: “Von den weißen Mehlwagen [. . .] kenne ich gerade auch etwas Entgegengesetztes. Mit Schmerz vermissen nämlich eine Köhlerfamilie, die sonst ihre Ware gerade über meinem Fenster am Theater feil bot, und jetzt hinübergewiesen sein soll auf die andere Seite” (491). The white flour carts turn out to be blanks in the act of seeing. According to the rule of association that is opposition, they mobilize a reproductive imagination that once more does not see that which is before the eyes but recollects the not-visible. Simultaneously, what is at stake is not the seer’s vision, an inward image that, within the serapiontic principle’s viewing space, affirms the internal realm of the individual. At stake, rather, is a productivity of the image that implements the contrast of black and white and, with it, the differential order of the

grapheme in subjectively induced viewing. The *absent* charburner's family, such as the ill cousin *describes* it from recollection, is therefore not different from a charburner's family the healthy cousin could *see* through his glass. In the best physiognomic manner, the family consists of a "big strong man with an impressive face" and "rugged features," a man who is "vigorous, almost violent in his movements." Yet the family's written character is immediately revealed when we read that it provides a "very faithful picture" of charburners "as they tend to show up in novels" (491).

Once this graphematic viewing and its compositional principles have got going, they do not come to an end and blur the panoramic view. The ill cousin continues his narrative:

Diesem Mann steht als zweites Glied der Familie im schneidendsten Kontrast, ein kaum vier Fuß hoher, seltsam verwachsener Kerl entgegen, der die Possierlichkeit selbst ist. Du weißt, lieber Vetter, dass es Leute gibt von gar seltsamem Bau; auf den ersten Blick muß man sie für bucklig erkennen, und doch vermag man bei näherer Betrachtung durchaus nicht anzugeben, wo ihnen denn eigentlich der Buckel sitzt. (491)

Contrast still constitutes the narrative's formative law, its "second member" in the syntagmatic development. It is a contrast that develops by devolving into the fundamental question of the creation and cognition of form. What this passage gives us to see is the unfolding of a form's becoming, of a creation of form that proceeds syntagmatically, marks and inscribes its formative law, contrast, in this process. It is certainly conceivable that another recollection asserts itself here, perhaps the "hunchbacked little man" from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. While there, he figures as an uncanny disruption in the functioning of the everyday; in the *Eckfenster*, he provides the deforming grapheme of distinct seeing: As the effect of a contrast described black on white, he presents a "strange structure," which "on first sight" appears as "hunchbacked" but which on "closer observation" can no longer be determined (491). The distinction between hunchback and non-hunchback would however be essential for a determination of form. If the *where* of the hunchback cannot be fixed, the figure oscillates between "form and non-form" (Neumann 235) without non-form being recognizable by seeing. In this way, the object remains inaccessible to the physiognomic gaze that seeks to decipher the strange structure. It also remains inaccessible to the panoramic view when it takes up the glass to frame the undulating confusion and to observe it *more closely*. Finally, it adds further precision to the serapiontic principle when, as in the letter to the publisher Symanski, it is described as "favorite inclination," in which "ich zuschae und anschae, und dann schwarz auf weiß von mir gebe, was ich eben recht lebendig erschaut." The sequence of steps, in which object-directed spectatorship and inward intuition seem to precede representation, shifts, favoring an order in which seeing would be

structured like language and writing would bring into language the non-seeing in seeing. Against this background, we obtain a slightly different interpretation of the madness [*Wahn-Sinn*] that the ill cousin at the beginning of the *Eckfenster* enframes in the critical image of invisible painting to reveal the truth of writing:

“Vetter, mit mir ist es aus! Ich komme mir vor, wie jener alte, vom Wahnsinn zerrüttete Maler, der Tage lang vor einer in den Rahmen gespannten grundierten Leinwand saß, und allen, die zu ihm kamen, die mannigfachen Schönheiten des reichen, herrlichen Gemäldes anpries, das er so eben vollendet; – ich geb’s auf, das wirkende schaffende Leben, welches zur äußeren Form gestaltet aus mir selbst hinaus tritt, sich mit der Welt befreundend! – Mein Geist zieht sich in seine Klause zurück.” (Hoffmann 6: 469)

It is over for the creative subject if its articulation is remembered writing. It is over for the really *visual* image if it is praised by *language*. There would be nothing to see in the medium of speech, at least not “active creative life” in an optically available form. The *Eckfenster*’s multiply-graded frame structure observes the alignment of seeing and narrating as the experimental integration of two media: The local standing-before-our-eyes of the visual phenomenon confronts illustration [*Bildgebung*] in the course of narrative putting-before-our-eyes in language. The text’s experimental setup becomes obvious not only in that it stages evident narration as “possibility of a medial transposition from language to the optical” (Campe 220) in the healthy cousin while at the same time exhibiting in the ill cousin the constructions that form its basis; the text becomes obvious, moreover, because it discerns, as if in an inversion, *graphematic* procedures in the *seeing* that is represented. Writing, we could say, becomes the (re)mark of *mediated* seeing, of a seeing that precisely fails at transparency.

In this context, Hoffmann’s epistemic reference points, *making distinct* sensual perception (of color) and Enlightenment physiognomics on the one hand, the modern panorama on the other, do not enter into a constellation accidentally. What may appear to be anachronistic around 1820, namely taking recourse to a rationalistically-inspired aesthetics and to Lavater’s physiognomics, which science had long overcome, may perhaps point to something of contemporary relevance: The panorama, insofar as it offers the bourgeois of the nineteenth century, the century of the objective sciences, full access to the entire world in one self-satisfied, wandering gaze—the panorama may itself be subject to *aesthetic* formats (*writings*) that, similarly to the reality effects in Lavater that were borrowed (from Hogarth, Callot, and Chodowiecki), mediated and formatted, do not produce any transparency or explanation for a reality increasingly experienced as strange (the reality of the modern “masses of the people”). In that case, the *Eckfenster* would be ‘early realist’ insofar as, in terms of the panorama and its ideology of a flawless realism, it does

not picture reality but represents the construction of reality in media. “Really viewing” then names an epistemology or “grammatology” of seeing that stages this seeing as writing in the mode of multiply-graded framings and thereby takes aim at the principles that underlie the construction both of seeing and of its blind spots.

¹Translated by Nils F. Schott.

²On this point, compare the entry in the Grimm brother’s dictionary: “*zuschauer*, m. 1) einer der auf etwas hinsieht: und damit sie ja zuschauer (die landsknechte für ihre pluderhosen) genug hetten [. . .] 2) der einem vorgang oder thätigkeit zusieht, auch in der allgemeinen anwendung mit mehr oder weniger anlehnung an das zuschauen bei einem schauspiel. seit dem 16. jh. in aufnahme. a) allgemein: und hatten von dem volck mehr z. denn die andern, denn es war thor und feldt voller leut [. . .] b) bei einem schauspiel, im theater, anscheinend die älteste verwendung [. . .]” (16: 789).

³In *spectatorship* we thus find the reflection of an ambivalence that is an essential characteristic of the complementary procedure of “representation.” According to Louis Marin, the verb *to represent* harbors “a fruitful tension that permeates the meaning of the term. ‘To represent’ signifies first of all to substitute something present for something absent (which is of course the most general structure of signs) [. . .]. But in other respects, to represent means to show, to exhibit something present. In this case, the very act of presenting constructs the identity of what is presented, identifies the thing represented as such [. . .]. In other words, to represent means to present oneself representing something. Every representation [. . .] thus includes two dimensions, which I am in the habit of calling [. . .] reflexive—to present oneself—and transitive—to present something” (352). Framings, such as the framing of the theater stage in the gaze of the spectator, reveal their epistemological potential once they—having been rendered visible—present the representation.

⁴All translations from E.T.A. Hoffmann, here as elsewhere by Nils F. Schott.

⁵Outward reality plays a role for the articulation of the serapiontic principle in the *Serapions-Brüder* as well, since it is reality that acts as an external “lever” to set the powers of inward viewing in movement and at the same time (mechanically) checks their tendency toward pure self-reflexivity. This leaves an on the whole rather “negative light thrown on the external world” (Japp 71) untouched. For the external world fulfills a ‘framing’ function that is experienced as earthly limitation, as finitude, which highlights “a human being dug in in the external world” (72).

⁶Compare, for example, Stadler 508, Neumann 228, Lüdemann 115–118.

⁷Picking up on Ervin Goffman’s early and fundamental determination of the framing function. In his “analysis of social reality,” Goffman does not study reality “as such,” but the principles of constitution (framings) of a perception that allow the viewer to assume that something is real: “The important thing about reality [. . .] is our sense of its realness in contrast to our feeling that some things lack this quality. One can then ask under what conditions such a feeling is generated, and this question speaks to a small, manageable problem having to do with the camera and not what it is the camera is taking pictures of” (2).

⁸According to Lessing’s media theory, poetry—under pain of being just a bad “depiction”—cannot represent objects in space. The quote from the *Eckfenster* as if ironically draws the conclusion from this idea when it has the painter, who has been de-ranked into the other medium, *speak* about an image that can only exist as a painted image (in conformity with its medium) but precisely not as an image merely spoken about.

⁹On the history and aesthetics of the panorama, see Oettermann; on its relevance to Hoffmann’s *Eckfenster*, also compare Eicher.

¹⁰We find the alignment of window and medium in Lutz Koepnick: “Windows are nothing other than media. They transmit or transpose perceptual data. [. . .] They construct and convey images of the real according to a certain code or program. Moreover [. . .] windows

have the ability to remediate the forms and contents of other media. They can display and appropriate the work of other media" (3).

¹¹On Lavater's physiognomic theory and its "literary transvaluation" at the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Pabst.

¹²For example within the project of an "historicist pluralism of styles and perspectives" (Oesterle 105). Certain aesthetic and social-political possibilities that were essentially tied in with Enlightenment thought, according to Oesterle, acquire the preconditions for their (plural) developments only in Hardenberg and Stein's post-reformist Prussia.

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