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Observation in Science and Literature

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Rüdiger Campe, Jocelyn Holland, and Elisabeth Strowick

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**The Art of Observing the Small: On the Borders of the**  
***subvisibilia* (from Hooke to Brockes)**

The invention of the microscope and its adoption into widespread use from the mid-seventeenth century on affected the way natural philosophers and writers thought about observation. But instead of retracing the microscope's enhancement of the visible, this essay explores how, under the impact of the microscope, the *relationship* between knowledge and the visible is repeatedly renegotiated and displaced in natural philosophy and poetry. Robert Hooke's ethos of observation limits knowledge to the realm of the visible; Leibniz reintroduces the invisible into knowledge while setting new limits between human and divine knowledge; Brockes develops new figures of limitlessness. These and other examples show how the look through the microscope could lead to divergent and even contradictory epistemic consequences. (CF)

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**Intensification of the Morphological Gaze**

In his scientific writings, Goethe accords to that which is non-observable yet everywhere evident in the visible world a significant ontological status. Influ-

enced by Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, Goethe's morphology seeks to uncover patterns of natural organization while considering its own empirical and discursive activity to be a product of these very patterns. When Goethe turns the scientific gaze onto itself, he discovers that non-observability is constitutive of morphological observation. In his notebooks, the meta-observation of the morphological gaze is often represented poetically. As one may see from an analysis of the poem "Parabase," literary representations become morphological objects just as morphology itself becomes coextensive with the creativity of the poetic subject. The morphological gaze functions poetically inasmuch as it posits a system that, although it ostensibly seeks a "primordial phenomenon," holds open a space in which the totality of phenomenality itself remains obscured, leading to ever more differentiated acts of observation. (GT)

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#### **"Rahmenschau": Scenes of Observation in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Des Vettters Eckfenster***

If "observation" can, at least since the seventeenth century, be understood as an experimental practice of perception that produces a specific form of methodically instructed attention, then this suggests certain affinities to literary framing methods as well. From an epistemological point of view it is notable that frames, in as far as they detail something particular and allow for its observation, both "show" this particular thing and through this showing present the "instances" of such showing at the same time. Within the mode of framing, representation observes itself in the process of representing. This essay investigates such a self-observation of representation with regard to E.T.A. Hoffmann's late narrative, *Des Vettters Eckfenster* (1822). This narrative brings to light—through a confrontation with rationalist framing, physiognomic hermeneutics, and modern panorama—a discontinuous constellation of orders of visibility, and it investigates their conditions. The embedded interplay of optical perception, language and writing produces a media-interference that does two things: it stages as belated construction the realism of the modern panorama, grounded in the natural sciences, and at the same time it stages seeing as writing (or grammatology). (AK)

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hidden beneath the more conspicuous surface turbulence of exceptional phenomena. (DM)

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The article discusses a problem of observation that arises in the wake of a psychological “turn” in late 19th-century German aesthetics. This problem results from a confluence of two factors: a) the new theoretical claim that any form of aesthetic experience is to be explained as the effect of physiological and psychological processes that need to be studied empirically; and b) the methodological crux that the “crossing point” of nervous system and soul—the link between the two levels of neuronal activity and conscious mental states—remains a blind spot that can be accessed neither by means of objective measurement nor through subjective introspection. Pursuing the ways in which scholars like Friedrich Theodor Vischer and Theodor Lipps address this observational gap, the article analyzes how “psychological aesthetics” comes to turn on increasingly self-reflexive strategies of linguistic figuration—strategies that serve to model psycho-physiological causality as a mechanism of metaphorical translation. (TW)

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