

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

2011

E.T.A. Hoffmann's Marketplace Vision of Berlin

Alexander M. Schlutz
CUNY John Jay College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/jj_pubs/246

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Trauma, Transcendence, and Trust, by Thomas J. Brennan, S.J.
The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America, by David Dowling
Popular Medievalism in Romantic-Era Britain, by Clare A. Simmons
Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism, by Ashton Nichols
The Poetry of Mary Robinson, by Daniel Robinson
Romanticism and the City, edited by Larry H. Peer
FORTHCOMING TITLES:
Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination, by Gregory Leadbetter
Romantic Dharma, by Mark Lussier
Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought, by Peter Swaab

ROMANTICISM AND THE CITY

Edited by

Larry H. Peer

New York: **palgrave** 2011
macmillan



E. T. A. HOFFMANN'S MARKETPLACE VISION OF BERLIN

Alexander Schlutz

A fantastical Berlin features prominently in many of E. T. A. Hoffmann's stories and novellas: secret trysts and occult rituals take place in the *Tiergarten*, an incongruous abandoned house on the luxurious avenue *Unter den Linden* becomes an object of dangerous obsession, brides show their faces from the tower of the old town hall at midnight on summer solstice, revenants and sorcerers mingle with petty Prussian bureaucrats, frequent local wine cellars and cake shops, and enigmatic women turn the heads of well-established noblemen, causing them to disastrously breach protocol at the fashionable tea parties of Berlin high society. In Hoffmann's 1821 story "The Errandies" Berlin even becomes an object of reverse ethnology in the fragmentary notes of a quite possibly imaginary Greek princess—notes that reveal her bewilderment about the city's exotic building materials and the strange dress of its inhabitants, in particular the men's tall, black and cylindrical headgear, and ultimately leave little to recommend for the would-be visitor but the *quadriga* on the *Brandenburg Gate*.

With his keen sense for the fantastic, the uncanny, the grotesque, and the absurd, in story after story, Hoffmann creates his very own indelible literary version of Berlin, the capital of the German Enlightenment and one of the centers of German Romanticism, and in so doing, he was one of the first, as Walter Benjamin remarks in a 1930 Berlin radio broadcast for children, "The Demonic Berlin," to put Berlin on the European literary map. Hoffmann, Benjamin suggests, could well be

called "the father of the Berlin novel," and Benjamin draws a direct line from Hoffmann's stories to Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (90, 92). Hoffmann's purpose in his writing, Benjamin contends, is *physiognomic* and stems from his ability to see the extraordinary in the concrete and the everyday; it is "to show, that this dull, sober, enlightened, sensible Berlin is, not only in its medieval corners, out-of-the-way streets, deserted houses, but also in its working population of all classes and neighborhoods, full of things that excite the story-teller, and which one only has to trace, which one has to see in them." It hence seems like a parting lesson to Benjamin that one of Hoffmann's last stories, dictated on his deathbed, is "actually nothing other but such a course in physiognomical seeing" (91).¹ The text in question is *My Cousin's Corner Window*, published a few months before Hoffmann's death in 1822, a novella that indeed puts both the art of seeing and the people of Berlin at the center of the reader's attention.

Benjamin is by no means the only one to look at Hoffmann's text as a parting lesson, and assessments of *My Cousin's Corner Window* as a literary testament are quite common in Hoffmann scholarship. Yet, as David Darby points out in a recent essay, while there is general consensus about the importance of the novella, critical interpretations of the art of seeing the text imparts and of the actual content of the testament Hoffmann may have wished to leave behind differ widely. Such discrepant readings can be traced back to the structural complexities of the text itself, for its aesthetic and stylistic rhetorical strategies are threefold: it not only offers a course in eighteenth-century modes of physiognomical seeing, but it also presents an elaboration of Hoffmann's own "Serapiontic" poetic principles, while its specific observations of socioeconomic realities in post-Napoleonic Berlin, rather unusual in their realism for Hoffmann's work, equally allow the novella to be read as performing a shift in Hoffmann's aesthetic priorities and as an anticipation of the "poetic realism" German writers would develop by the mid-nineteenth century. The novella can thus be seen to simultaneously champion three seemingly contradictory aesthetic credos: an Enlightenment aesthetics based on assumptions about the world's readability; Hoffmann's own late-Romantic poetics of creative narrative vision; and a nascent aesthetics of nineteenth-century realism. Undoubtedly, Hoffmann's narrative achievement lies in holding all three of these stylistic directions together in one relatively short text, and any balanced interpretation of *My Cousin's Corner Window*, as Darby rightfully suggests, will need to consider their "complex interweaving" in Hoffmann's novella (283).

Beyond these narrative and stylistic complexities, Walter Benjamin's comments on *My Cousin's Corner Window* in his unfinished book

on Charles Baudelaire, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (rather than those in the little-known "The Demonic Berlin") have had a considerable effect on the critical discussion of the novella, which has consequently also been drawn into the orbit of the critical debate about the nineteenth-century modern urban aesthetics of the flaneur. For that reason, this chapter, as it attempts to unravel the intricacies of the "art of seeing" developed in *My Cousin's Corner Window*, also engages the question whether the novella could be understood as a flaneur's testament, a claim Benjamin makes in one of the notes for his *Arcades Project*. In fact, Benjamin's own—quite contradictory—assessments of Hoffmann's text on different occasions faithfully mirror the novella's narrative complexities, and they can usefully serve as a guiding thread connecting the discussion of its aesthetic strategies. An untangling of the text's aesthetic play with stylistic modes and narrative perspective will then not only reveal how physiognomical practices continue to inform the flaneur's urban vision, but it will also demonstrate that the text's ultimate narrative positioning, its true art of seeing as well as its modernity, lie in a metanarrative perspective that remains unconfined by the respective visions of the text's two protagonists. Only from this self-reflexive position of narrative distance can we possibly hope to attain a glimpse of the vision Hoffmann's "literary testament" may provide, both in terms of aesthetics and with respect to the socioeconomic realities of post-Napoleonic Berlin.

A FLANEUR AT THE WINDOW?

Both in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" and in its partial revision, "On Several Motives in Baudelaire," Benjamin briefly discusses Hoffmann's novella in a few short paragraphs, and his judgment about Hoffmann's text here is much less flattering than the one he had pronounced a few years earlier in his radio broadcast (551–52, 628–29). While Benjamin still calls the novella "probably one of the earliest attempts to grasp and conceive the street scape of a bigger city," he does not look at Hoffmann's text as a point of origin for a modern urban genre, but rather uses it as a foil that serves to highlight the modernity of Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd," which interests him in his discussion of the modern flaneur (628). Benjamin, in fact, now pays little mind to Hoffmann's art of seeing or the structural complexities of his novella, which seems almost like a straw man in the discussion of Poe and Baudelaire, and the "course in physiognomical seeing" now turns into a presentation of "all sorts of little genre pictures," interpreted by "edifying comments" for a bourgeois audience (551; 629). Hoffmann, the keen observer and master of the

fantastic, whom Benjamin knew so well, has disappeared, and *My Cousin's Corner Window* turns into an example of Berlin *Biedermeier* that does not hold up to scrutiny in comparison to Poe's London and Baudelaire's Paris of the 1840s. Berlin in 1822, its rapid rise to a fully industrialized metropolis still ahead, is not yet a true capital of the nineteenth century, and Hoffmann's vision not yet quite modern. Had he ever visited London or Paris, Benjamin now speculates, Hoffmann might have written differently.²

Benjamin, however, is only too aware that the last thing that could fittingly describe the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann is a *Biedermeier* sensibility. In another radio broadcast of 1930 devoted to E. T. A. Hoffmann and Oskar Panizza, Benjamin strongly emphasizes Hoffmann's pronounced hatred of the everyday and his conviction that the virtues of the "good citizen" are the product of an artificial, mechanical, and ultimately satanic sensibility: "The ordinary person [Alltagsmensch], at whom his whole hatred had always been aimed, seemed to him more and more, in his virtues as well as his beauties, the product of a despicable artificial mechanism, the innermost core of which is governed by satan" (643–44). In this broadcast, even more so than in "The Demonic Berlin," Benjamin captures in a few short paragraphs the essence of Hoffmann's artistic convictions, and it is unlikely that Benjamin was fully convinced that *My Cousin's Corner Window* could have been written for the edification of a bourgeois audience. Indeed, Benjamin seems to have had some misgivings about his drastic juxtaposition of Hoffmann and Poe in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," for he adds, almost as a note of caution, "And yet Hoffmann was in his disposition part of the family of the Poe and Baudelaire" (551). Benjamin quotes Hoffmann's friend and biographer Julius Eduard Hitzig, who notes Hoffmann's enjoyment of observing and interacting with people and highlights his need and desire to be in human company whenever possible. Hoffmann, too, Benjamin implies, was by his nature an urbane and a flâneur like Poe and Baudelaire, an assessment that he makes much more explicitly in one of the unused entries in the *Arcades Project*, which describes "E. T. A. Hoffmann as the type of the flâneur" and which continues, in an impulse completely contrary to that taken in the Baudelaire book but quite compatible with that of "The Demonic Berlin": "'My Cousin's Corner Window' is his [this type's] testament. And hence Hoffmann's great success in France, where one understood this type particularly well" (536).

For readers only familiar with Benjamin's comments in the Baudelaire essay, this statement must seem utterly puzzling, but his assessment of the novella as a physiognomical testament in "The Demonic Berlin"

provides the necessary context: The flâneur needs to be a practiced physiognomist, even though his penetrating gaze may turn up unsolvable mysteries in the crowds of the modern city—the narrator of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" after all classifies most of the people he observes quite adroitly and securely, before his art of inductive physiognomic reasoning is baffled by the unreadable figure who gives the story its name. The flâneur may ultimately desire to lose himself in the labyrinth of the city, to fall into a trance-like reverie induced by the surrounding crowds, but he can only do so because of his keen eye and his skill in the art of observation, and a physiognomical trigger lies at the origin of the flâneur's experience. "The phantasmagoria of the flâneur," notes Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*, "reading the profession, the origin, the character in the faces" (540).

It would of course be a misunderstanding, as Benjamin points out only a few entries later, to believe that the flâneur's goal is physiognomical study as an end in itself. He is not walking the streets in an attempt to settle people's identities and to determine their characters from clues in their behavior and outward appearance. Rather, he seeks the phantasmagoria in which he can lose himself, the ghostly and ephemeral show of projected images that is the outcome of physiognomical efforts on the streets of the city, where all attempts at reading lead to unstable visions and to hallucinations not unlike those induced by hashish. The physiognomy of the crowds is the flâneur's drug of choice.³ There is hence ultimately nothing surprising in seeing "a course in physiognomical seeing" as a flâneur's testament, even though its main protagonist may seem an anti-flâneur, paralyzed and confined to his apartment, surveying the streets from his perch high above the crowds, and who cannot join them even if he wanted to. Telescope in hand, he can still enjoy the spectacle of the crowd even though he is unable to immerse himself in it, and Hoffmann's novella, while it indeed does not portray the crowds on the thoroughfares of a high-capitalist metropolis, is for that reason neither provincial nor backward looking.⁴

At this point, a précis of *My Cousin's Corner Window* will be helpful: The protagonists of the novella are two cousins. The younger of the two is the first-person narrator of the text, who commands the relatively brief opening and closing frame narrative, and who pays an unexpected visit to his older cousin, a dying writer, who, much like Hoffmann at the time he composed the novella, is paralyzed, wheelchair bound, and unable to leave his apartment. This apartment overlooks the *Gendarmenmarkt*, from where the older cousin enjoys the same view Hoffmann himself cherished from his own corner window of his apartment in the *Taubengasse* 31 ii, corner *Charlottenstrasse*.⁵ We learn from the narrator in the opening frame that his older cousin has

become a recluse of late, refusing to see any visitors, having fallen into a deep depression because his illness not only paralyzes his body but also disrupts his creative process. The "evil demon of the illness," as the older cousin puts it, has blocked the crucial path from inward conception and invention to outward expression on which the writer depends for his craft. The cousin is not only physically unable to write; as soon as he begins to formulate his thoughts in an attempt to externalize his inner vision, these thoughts immediately disintegrate and vanish into thin air. In utter despair, the older cousin told the narrator in their last encounter that he has given up on the creative life altogether and has decided to shut himself off in the inwardness of his spirit like a hermit in his cell: "Cousin, it's over with me! . . . I give up the productive creative life, which emerges from within myself, shaped into outward form, befriending the world.—My spirit withdraws into its cell!" (597–98). Unable to befriend the internal and external worlds, subjective vision and objective reality, the cousin had ended all outside contact. The narrator is hence quite surprised when, crossing the *Gendarmenmarkt* on the day the events of the novella take place, he sees his cousin quite happily and contentedly sitting at his corner window, smoking a pipe. He makes his way up to his apartment, is granted entry, and his older cousin tells him that, while his illness is as destructive as ever, his window, or rather the view it affords, has given him solace: "But this window is my solace, here again I have understood life anew in all its colorful variety, and I feel befriended with its ceaseless activity. Come, cousin, look outside!" (599).

The bulk of the novella then unfolds as a dialogue between the two cousins, in which the older cousin, who now commands the narrative scene, attempts to communicate to the narrator the revelations of the view from his window affords and to teach him "at least the first principles [Prinzipien] of the art of seeing" (600). The cousin's art of seeing necessitates a glass, either a telescope as most commentators presume, or an opera glass, as Benjamin has it, which allows the two cousins to focus in on various people or groups of people on the market square below them. Using the visual clues available to them, the cousins then develop hypotheses and probable narratives about the figures they observe, producing a sequence of narrative vignettes, inspired by the work of William Hogarth, Daniel Chodowiecki, and Jacques Callot, artists and engravers dear to Hoffmann, all of whom are mentioned by the older cousin on the opening pages of the dialogue. In short, as Benjamin points out in "The Demonic Berlin," the younger cousin receives a lesson in the popular eighteenth-century art of physiognomy, and the two cousins produce narrative and visual order, if one of a highly complex kind, from the—at least for the narrator—initially

impenetrable and potentially disorienting spectacle of the dense crowd below them.⁶

* * *

Hoping to counter Benjamin's disparaging remarks in the Baudelaire essay about *My Cousin's Corner Window* and the perspective of its eponymous older cousin, critics like David Darby and Robert McFarland have attempted to recuperate Hoffmann's novella for the aesthetics of a modern urban sensibility by questioning the identification of the older cousin's views with those of Hoffmann himself, a position taken by Benjamin and many subsequent readers of the novella, and by locating the modernity of Hoffmann's text in the figure of the narrator. From Darby's and McFarland's perspective, the older cousin and his exercises in physiognomy are ultimately a caricature of an obsolete aesthetics, while the younger cousin, who is seen in the middle of the crowd at the beginning of the novella and who will return to it at the end, is seen to represent an opening toward an emergent modern sensibility and an as yet uncertain aesthetic future.

Traditional criticism can identify many pointers in the text that seem to invite an understanding of the older cousin as an autobiographical figure: his illness, his dress (a Warsaw dressing gown and a red cap, as Hoffmann portrayed himself several times in drawings and sketches), the location of his apartment, his admiration for Callot, Hogarth and Chodowiecki, as well as the fact that he compares himself to the painter in Hoffmann's story "King Arthur's Court" ("Der Artushof"). Hoffmann, however, was too fond of the play with narrative illusion for one to take such equations without the necessary dose of ironic distancing, for which the doubling of the cousins and the splitting of narrative authority is undoubtedly intended.⁷ And there are, as Darby points out, also several significant differences between the older cousin and Hoffmann himself. Hoffmann's illness, no matter how debilitating, never kept him from writing, even if he had to resort to dictation in the final months of his life. The older cousin, Darby acknowledges, voices several aesthetic positions that were important for Hoffmann at various stages of his career, but they are tinged with irony, given the distancing produced by the fact that the reader receives them through the narrative voice of the younger cousin. This doubling of perspectives produces a radical indeterminacy that subtly undermines the older cousin's seeming aesthetic authority.

To locate a newly emergent aesthetic perspective in the perspective of the narrator, both Darby and McFarland again take their cue from Benjamin, Darby in particular from a footnote in Benjamin's Baudelaire

essay, which comments on the narrator's initial reaction to viewing the marketplace from his cousin's window. One's evaluation of the younger cousin's initial description of the crowd below him will indeed be pivotal to the understanding of the dialogue that follows, and it is worth presenting it here one more time in its entirety:

The view was indeed strange and surprising. The whole market seemed to be a single crowded mass of people so that one had to believe that an apple tossed into it could never fall to the ground. The greatest variety of colors glowed in the sunshine, in very small patches that is, I had the impression of a large tulip field, blown by the wind in rippling waves, and I was forced to admit that the view was pretty nice, but, in the long run, quite tiring, and that in excitable people it might cause a slight dizziness resembling the not unpleasant delirium of impending dream. In this I sought the pleasure the corner window afforded my cousin and told him so quite frankly. (599)

In the footnote taken up by Darby, Benjamin implicitly locates a later nineteenth-century impressionist aesthetics in Hoffmann's description of the narrator's perception, which after all turns the mass of people into a moving ensemble of tiny patches of light and color. In dialogue with Benjamin, Darby makes an explicit claim for an impressionist mode of seeing in the passage and consequently locates the narrator rather than his cousin as the bearer of Hoffmann's intimation of a modern aesthetics. The narrator, Darby claims, ultimately does not learn anything from his cousin, since their didactic dialogue only seems to suggest, rather, he is merely humoring an ailing relative, whose outdated views he does not hold in particularly high esteem. When all is said and done, he, like Hoffmann in his better days, returns to the streets of Berlin to immerse himself in the crowds. The cousin's imminent death is hence not meant to mirror Hoffmann's own, but is rather emblematic of the death of a worldview no longer adequate to grasp the emerging realities of nineteenth-century industrialized urbanity.

Darby and McFarland are undoubtedly correct in insisting that the perspectives of both cousins need to be taken into account in any interpretation of Hoffmann's text and that an overly simplistic equation of the older cousin's views, which are compromised in strategic moments of the novella, with Hoffmann's own is bound to lead to misreadings. But to locate a potential modern urban perspective exclusively in the figure of the narrator, let alone to turn him into a flâneur in the Baudelairean and Benjaminian sense, as McFarland suggests, seems equally hasty. Already a close look at the narrator's description of the market scene and his reactions to it might give one pause in this respect. To begin with, the underlying metaphor

of the tulip field the narrator chooses for the crowd on the marketplace is problematic in this context, for it evokes connotations that are not compatible with the unpredictable, ever-changing, and ultimately mysterious urban experience the flâneur enjoys. What could be more emblematic of the Enlightenment view of nature as an object to be controlled and readied for aesthetic consumption than the tulip field, orderly rows of plants, imported and disconnected from their original "exotic" locations and crossbred, cultivated and sold for the enjoyment of affluent European consumers? Nothing could be further from the deeply unsettling experience the narrator of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" makes in the streets of London than the narrator's reassuring view of the Berlin crowd below him as a colorful and pleasingly moving field of tulips, who will be forever unable to move from their appointed places.⁸ If the older cousin's perspective is disqualified because of his use of outdated eighteenth-century models of observation, with which he attempts to bring order to a disorienting urban experience—the *Biedermeier* nostalgia for by-gone certainties Benjamin condemns—the younger cousin's position is equally affected, for the metaphor he employs insinuates a similar predisposition for Enlightenment order and control. Whatever is already modern about the crowd on the *Gendarmenmarkt*, the younger cousin does not yet perceive it either.

Nor does he take any pleasure in what he sees or express any curiosity for it, two traits that are the precondition for a characterization of the narrator as a potential flâneur. "Pretty nice" ("recht artig") is the most he can bring himself to say about the spectacle his cousin presents to him, and studying it at length, he is sure, must be "quite tiring." True, "excitable people" might experience dizziness and the "not unpleasant delirium of impending dream," but it is quite clear that the narrator does not count himself among such people, so that one can only conclude that for him a longer viewing of the crowd might prove soporific. Contrary to McFarland's assertions, the narrator neither experiences this sense of dizziness and delirium when seeing the crowd (although he may be familiar with such hypnotic experiences from the moments preceding sleep); he merely predicates it to "excitable people" such as his cousin, whose interest in the view he tries to explain. Nor is he "drawn to the urban spectacle and the intoxicating experiences offered by the city," as would be the nineteenth- and twentieth-century flâneurs following in his wake (McFarland 113–14). Quite the contrary, if it were not for the older cousin, the above-quoted paragraph would be the last glimpse of the *Gendarmenmarkt* the story could afford us, for the younger cousin is initially not particularly interested in the scene and would not have deemed it worthy a closer look.

Both McFarland and Darby quote from Baudelaire's crucial essay on Constantin Guys, "The Painter of Modern Life," to illustrate the aesthetic predisposition of the flaneur, which Baudelaire finds embodied in Guys in exemplary fashion:

For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate observer it is an immense joy to establish one's domicile of choice in number, in the undulating, in movement, in the fugitive and the infinite. To be outside of oneself and yet to feel everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world and to stay hidden to the world, these are some of the smallest pleasures of these independent, passionate and impartial spirits that language can only clumsily define.... One can also compare him to a mirror as immense as this crowd, to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each of its movements, represents the multiple life and the moving grace of all elements of life. It's an *insatiable* for the *Not-I*, which, in each instant, renders it and expresses it in images more alive than life itself, always unstable and fugitive. (*Baudelaire* 464)

Yet, the only trait in this description that fits Hoffmann's narrator is the latter's ability to establish his domicile in the crowd should he desire to do so. The novella does not suggest that he possesses any of the artistic qualities attributed to the flaneur by Baudelaire, and it seems appropriate to add the sentence immediately following, in which Baudelaire reports Guys to have commented in conversation that "every man who is not overwhelmed by one of those sorrows of a nature too positive not to absorb all mental faculties, and *who gets bored in the bosom of the multitude*, is an idiot! an idiot! and I despise him!" (464). To see the multitude from above is certainly not the same as to be immersed in it, but a true flaneur would no doubt have found the view afforded to the narrator from the cousin's corner window equally fascinating. There is also no indication on the opening pages of the novella that the younger cousin experiences any such overwhelming emotions or pleasures in the crowd as he makes his way across the *Gendarmenmarkt*. If anybody has the eyes and the kaleidoscopic consciousness of a flaneur in Hoffmann's story, it is indeed the older cousin, who alone is able to extract the multitude of stories—the phantasmagoria—hidden in the narrator's "tulip field." Clearly, he cannot become a flaneur, he cannot leave his apartment to join the crowd and experience its electrifying and intoxicating flow, and he does express positions, as Darby and McFarland rightfully remark, that portray him as out of touch with his surroundings, but he alone has both the physiological talent and the passion for observing the crowd that can make a flaneur. If the narrator indeed leaves his apartment at the end of the novella to return to the street as a potential flaneur, he does so thanks to the

interaction with his cousin. The emerging esthete of the nineteenth-century urban experience depends on a trained eye and on practices of seeing that, while about to be radically transformed, are far from obsolete. The opening both Darby and McFarland perceive can hence not be exclusively located in the figure of the narrator but must rather be seen as emerging from the dialogue between both protagonists, while the modernity intimated in the novella's art of seeing lies on a narrative meta-level that transcends the perspectives of both the narrator and his "worthy lame cousin."

AN EYE THAT TRULY SEES

There are other reasons, too, to be cautious about a wholesale dismissal of the older cousin and his art of seeing. For the older cousin's conviction that the writer, if he or she is to deserve the name, must first of all be a keen observer is most emphatically also Hoffmann's own. In terms of poetics, the dialogue between the two cousins is clearly designed to illuminate processes of perception, the interplay of observation and imagination, seeing, reading, and writing, and as such it is also a comment on the creative process itself. Reflections on the processes of seeing and of vision are central to Hoffmann's work, in which little is more important than the ability to distinguish the lies of mechanical optical illusions, and be they those of a consciousness-consuming occult magic enveloping the mind's eye, from the real revelations of the truly felt and the truly alive. Hoffmann's humor and his satirical wit are ultimately optical instruments, meant to open the reader's eye to the ridiculousness of those who would force others to live by the rules of their own ignorance. They are instruments that cut through all the layers of artificial social custom and convention that stand in the way of a life of creative integrity. When the narrator admits that the only benefit he can imagine his cousin might derive from the view from his window to be the pleasant delirium the sight of a great crowd might induce, the cousin responds: "Cousin, cousin! Now I see that not even the smallest spark of writerly talent glows within you. You lack the first requirement to ever follow in the footsteps of your worthy lame cousin; namely, an eye that truly sees" (600). Little could be more important to Hoffmann than such an eye, and this assertion, the cousin's ironized self-importance notwithstanding, should give one pause in any assessment of the art the cousin professes to teach.

The novella's obvious focus on processes of seeing has led several critics to turn to an open "Letter to the Publisher," published by Hoffmann in the Fall of 1820 in the journal for which *My Cousin's Corner Window* was written and in which the novella was first published serially from

April 23 to May 4, 1822: Johann Daniel Symanski's new Berlin journal, *Der Zuschauer*, was inspired, as the title makes clear, by Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. The opening passage of Hoffmann's public response to Symanski's request for collaboration, in its development of a spectral poetics easily suggests itself as a theoretical reflection to accompany the novella it seems to anticipate when Hoffmann closes his letter by saying that "there is already something going round in my head, which probably will soon see the light of day for you" (*Nachlese* 102). Showing himself, as Benjamin assumes, to be "the type of the flaneur," Hoffmann here unequivocally presents watching, looking, and creative observation as his "favorite past-time".

You ask me, most worthy sir!, for my collaboration with a journal that you plan to publish under the title, "*der Zuschauer*." I will happily fulfill your wish, particularly since the well-chosen title reminds me of my favorite past-time. For you probably already know how much I like to watch (*zuschauen*) and to look at (*anschauen*) and then express in black and white what I have just perceived in lively fashion (*recht lebendig erschaut*). (99)

Several critics, as Ulrich Stadler points out, refer to this passage as proof that Hoffmann effected a turn toward poetic realism in *My Cousin's Corner Window*, and that the novella, with its extensive observation of an everyday market scene, marks a shift in Hoffmann's aesthetic priorities at the end of his life (Stadler 500). But the carefully chosen verb "erschaut," which, in contrast to the passively receptive "zuschauen" and "anschauen," denotes an active and productive process of creative inner vision that is at odds with such a position. The observations as such are not what are to be expressed and communicated in an effort to produce the rhetorical effects of aesthetic realism. Rather, they only serve as the raw material for an inner vision, which alone merits writerly communication. In and of themselves, they are only the first step in the process of perception and only as fuel for the creative process do they produce something alive that merits to be expressed "in black and white."⁹ If observation does not lead to imaginative vision, no writing will (or rather: should) follow. As the subsequent passage makes quite clear, Hoffmann is here simply reaffirming his much-discussed Serapionitic principle developed in the frame narrative of his third and last story collection, *The Serapion Brothers*. In the next sentence, clearly meant to qualify the opening paragraph, Hoffmann presents the essence of this poetic principle one more time: "I think, after all, that one could not talk about anything but about what has arisen in perfect shape in one's interiority, in such a way that the people

to whom one talks can perceive it in equally lively fashion (*Nachlese* 99–100). Hoffmann then remarks himself, tongue in cheek, that this principle was first presented in a book familiar to him, *The Serapion Brothers*, and he declares that he will stay faithful to it despite the criticism expressed by some reviewers:

I think meanwhile, since the inner eyes, whose vision determines poetic perception, are situated in the head just as much as the understanding, that Saint Serapion, when he posited the principle according to which one can only bring *that* to light alive and truthfully, which one perceived internally in just this fashion, always presupposed the unchanging, faithful marital bond in which both understanding and imagination must remain if anything decent is to be the outcome. I stick to this principle! (100)

Keeping this poetic principle in mind is helpful in several ways for a discussion of *My Cousin's Corner Window*. First of all, it illuminates the breakdown of the older cousin's creative processes, which is ultimately due to a crisis of written communication. His inner poetic perceptions, the narrator tells us, are still as vivid as ever and can be transmitted orally, but they dissolve as soon as he attempts to express them in writing:

[T]he most severe illness could not stop the rapid wheels of imagination, which continued to work within him, constantly producing something new. So it was that he told me all kinds of charming stories he had invented, despite the manifold pain he suffered. But the path which the thought had to follow in order to take shape on paper had been blocked by the evil demon of the illness. (*Spatte Werke* 597)

This crisis of writing causes the older cousin to become a recluse and to "give up the productive creative life, which emerges from within myself, shaped into outward form, betrending the world" (598). The cousin here again echoes, albeit in negative form, the Serapionitic directive as it is formulated by Lothar, one of the Serapion brothers:

Everybody should examine well, if he indeed truly saw what he endeavors to pronounce, before he dares to make it heard. At the very least everybody should strive quite seriously to capture well the image that had arisen internally in all its figures, colors, lights and shadows, and then, when he feels quite inspired by it, to carry the representation into outer life. (*Serapion Brothers* 55)

David Darby suggests that "it is tempting to see the paralysis of the Vetter as a writer . . . as resulting from a creative impasse precipitated by

the collision of his enlightenment-driven vision, his Serapiontic narrative practice, and the development of a new post-Napoleonic social context" (284). Other than Hoffmann, who skillfully combines all three stylistic approaches, the cousin, one could then assume following Darby's suggestion, is no longer able to communicate with a reading public whose social realities have become incompatible with his creative vision, an alienating disconnect that drives him to despair. In writing that he can no longer "befriend" the inner and the outer world, he can hence no longer heal the inherent doubleness or duplicity, which Lothar pronounces in *The Serapion Brothers* to be the fundamental condition of human existence. "There is an inner world and the mental power to see it in complete clarity, in the most perfect brilliance of the most active life, but it is our earthly inheritance that precisely the outer world into which we are nestled works as the lever that puts this power in motion" (54). The creative vision, set in motion by the outer world, must be communicated in writing if the identity of the writer is to be preserved, and Hoffmann's novella must effect such a return to writing if the "demon" of the cousin's illness is to be overcome.

It is hence no accident that his window and the view of the marketplace it affords become the "lever" through which the cousin is once again "befriended" with the outside world, and that the narrator's writing of the story is made possible through a dialog between the two cousins about the art of seeing. These narrative devices, focused on and in the motif of the window, allow for a reconciliation of the cousin's orality and the written medium through which his vision needs to be communicated. The window, as the transparent screen interposed between the seer and the seen, becomes the surface on which the preconditions for any act of seeing are made visible, on which they are written. It highlights the processes of representation that make all perception possible while simultaneously putting any direct access to an objective reality out of reach. In this sense, any act of seeing is an act of writing and vice versa, while the narrative device of the window makes the connection of both processes visible. Written communication, which cannot naively attempt to imitate the structures of oral communication, thus becomes most transparent and communicates most effectively when it includes a reflection on the processes of representation themselves, and writing is self-reflexive by nature. The modernity of Hoffmann's novella lies in its self-reflexive treatment of processes of seeing and writing, an art of seeing that is transmitted using the vehicle of eighteenth-century physiognomy the two cousins employ.

Gerhard Neumann articulates this structural feature of Hoffmann's novella most emphatically and places the text squarely in the long history of Western reflection on processes of representation developed

in the extensive catalogue of window scenes in Western literature, philosophy, and art history. In the basic scenario of the novella—two characters in dialog about a scene they observe through a window—Neumann argues Hoffmann quotes something like an "originary scene of European cultural history," the view through an opening that simultaneously marks the distinction between an inside and an outside, and which consequently opens up the space of perception in which a dialogue between a self and an other can take place (224). And this originary view, one might add in support of Neumann's position, quite literally opens on a scene, for the backdrop for the market scenes the two cousins describe and decode—visible, remembered, and imaginary—is the theater, the *Schauspielhaus*, about which the reader of the story is reminded in strategic moments of the narrative. The cousin's corner window is also the fourth wall of the traditional proscenium stage, itself a picture frame that opens up on an imaginary reality, and Hoffmann, in his narrative creation of physiognomic scenes, their description, interpretation and invention, indeed dramatizes processes of seeing as both observation and creation. For Neumann, the protagonist of this drama is the process of perception (Wahrnehmung) itself, and the "genre pictures" the novella presents become for him distinctive experiments in perception (Wahrnehmungsexperimente), in which the modernist potential of Hoffmann's text is located (230, 236). From this perspective, the novella's realism and its modernism consist not so much in what it represents but rather in its reflection on representation itself. Rather than giving us an objective reality formed by realist convention, *My Cousin's Corner Window* offers a view of the processes through which a self constructs its world in dialogue with an other. In presenting an art of seeing, it writes writing.

Such self-reflexive strategies are already implicit in Hoffmann's Serapiontic principle itself, which takes account, as Walter Müller-Seidel points out, of the inescapable intertextuality of all writing and of the fact that its mimesis is always already the mimesis of preceding texts (*Serapion Brothers* 1005). The Serapiontic exhortation always to ground one's writing in a clearly perceived inner vision is meant first and foremost as a check against the mere mechanical copying and repetition of other texts. It recognizes that originality in the literary marketplace can only lie in the creative recombination of one's sources since texts always already interpose between us and our perception of the world. In the frame narrative of the *Serapion Brothers*, the literary friends indeed comment on precisely this phenomenon when they ridicule critics who track down a writer's sources in order to then accuse him of mere copying, with no understanding of the fact that the

creative act lies precisely in the original appropriation of sources, not in an impossible *creatio ex nihilo* (*Serapion Brothers* 531).

Hoffmann's texts make no attempt to hide this fact and present themselves quite self-consciously as born of other texts. *My Cousin's Corner Window* is no exception. When the narrator likens his cousin to the seventeenth-century French writer Paul Scarron at the beginning of the novella, he alerts the reader to the text that Hoffmann's novella reinvents, Karl Friedrich Kretschmann's *Scarron at the Window* (*Scarron am Fenster*), published serially from 1798 to 1799, a story that would in all likelihood by now have been thoroughly forgotten had it not been for Hoffmann's creative remaking. Just as much as the view from his own window overlooking the *Gendarmenmarkt*, Kretschmann's tale of the paralyzed Scarron, looking out on the Parisian *Tuileries* becomes the pretext for Hoffmann's novella, which presents an utterly different scene as it moves the action from seventeenth-century Paris to early nineteenth-century Berlin, while changing the subjects of observation from noblemen and -women at the Parisian court to members of the bourgeoisie and the lower social classes in the Prussian capital.¹⁰ *My Cousin's Corner Window*, which produces a view that differs widely from Scarron's as rendered by Kretschmann, is unmistakably Hoffmann's creation, but it is equally unmistakably mediated through other texts, including the prominent visual intertexts of Hogarth's, Callot's, and Chodowiecki's prints and drawings, so that the novella by no means presents itself as an unmediated view of a directly observable *Gendarmenmarkt*.

In fact, the originality of Hoffmann's narrative can also be seen to lie precisely in his creative use of his visual sources, as Günter Oesterle has convincingly demonstrated. Hogarth, Chodowiecki, and Callot, Oesterle reminds us, can be seen as representatives of specific styles in German eighteenth-century art criticism, styles analogous to Jean Paul's classification (in *Pre-School of Aesthetics*) of the novels of world literature into an Italian, Dutch, and a German school. In this context, Oesterle points out, Hogarth's prosaic didactic satire and Callot's unbri-dled fantastic style become emblematic of enlightenment and romantic perspectives, an aesthetic distinction indeed employed by Jean Paul himself in his preface to Hoffmann's first story collection, *Fantastic Pieces in the Manner of Callot*. Oesterle shows that the mixing and combining of the literary equivalents of the styles of all three artists in Hoffmann's text—with Chodowiecki representing a moderate and humorous German style—can ultimately be read as a poetic statement. From this perspective, Hoffmann's free recombination of all three styles in *My Cousin's Corner Window* constitutes more than a mere exercise in ekphrastic technique, let alone a reactionary commitment to by-gone

artistic conventions, but rather lets another metanarrative emerge from the story. In developing an art of seeing that encompasses, combines, and transcends the didactic, the satirical, and the humorous, as well as both an enlightenment and a romantic aesthetics, Hoffmann's text hovers in a narrative distance of potentiality above all of them (Oesterle 105–09).¹¹ The novella's physiognomical vision is thus free of any specific instrumentalization of physiognomical perspective and allows its readers to sharpen their eyes on an aesthetic meta-level.

In fact, the text presents physiognomical observation precisely as the combination of understanding and imagination Hoffmann had advocated in the open letter to the publisher of *Der Zuschauer*, for the two cousins develop narratives that are clearly marked as hypotheses—imaginative constructions that are nevertheless arrived at through rational processes of induction and deduction. They may not be true, but they are nevertheless internally consistent and eminently believable. "Not a word may be true of everything that you've deduced here, dear cousin," the narrator remarks after the cousin develops a hypothesis about the interaction of two market women with a young girl, "but as I look at these women, thanks to your lively presentation, it all seems so plausible, that I have to believe in it, whether I want to or not" (602). These processes of creative observation are ultimately no different from the processes of ratiocination Poe describes in his Dupin stories, and the flaneur and the detective, as Benjamin points out, share the same physiognomical origins. This affinity, rooted in the uncanny potential of the urban crowd, can now lead us—again via Benjamin—to the vision of the people of Berlin that is presented in Hoffmann's text.

MORAL PEACE IN PUBLIC PLACES

The immediate context for Benjamin's brief discussion of *My Cousin's Corner Window* in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" is precisely his attempt to develop a connection between the flaneur and the detective and to trace the origin of the detective story to the increasingly uncanny experience of the anonymity of the great crowds in the modern nineteenth-century city. Benjamin sees two basic responses to the uneasiness these crowds produce in the Paris of the 1840s: On the one hand the efforts on the part of the state to police its people and to impose order on the growing urban chaos in the form of more efficient registration of citizens, the counting and numbering of houses for more reliable tracing of residents, and through increased censorship in the volatile years leading up to the bourgeois revolution of 1848. On the other hand, Benjamin notes the popularity of the *physiologies*, guidebooks for reading the faces of the city, which were

published in great numbers in the 1840s, and which provided the reassuring illusion that everybody could easily acquire the ability to read the only seemingly overwhelming urban spectacle surrounding them. By reducing the complexity of what could actually be seen, heard, and perceived, the *physiologies* thus pretend to give the bourgeois citizen the semiotic tools to decipher the undecipherable. Benjamin sees such soothing mass publications as working hand in hand with a reactionary regime in its effort to contain potential unrest in the unpredictable gatherings of people in the modern city, and he concurs with the thesis of the German Marxist scholar Eduard Fuchs, who places the increased censorship of the "September laws" of 1836, which effectively destroyed the genre of political caricature and visual satire, at the origin of the *physiologies*' flood of vapid and reassuring, apolitical publications (*Baudelaire* 538). The *physiologies*, Benjamin claims, while living on the literary credit of their eighteenth-century physiognomical precursors, lack any of the latter's artistic seriousness. Purporting to provide their readers with a semiotic code for their daily life in the city, they must refrain from encouraging or enabling any real empirical observation in order to spare their audience the unsettling experience of Poe's "Man of the Crowd" and to avoid opening their eyes to the dangers of the city the *physiologies* "art of seeing" is meant precisely to hide.

Returning to *My Cousin's Corner Window* in this context must have predisposed Benjamin unfavorably to Hoffmann's novella, in which the two cousins can observe the "tulip field" of the *Gendarmenmarkt* without any sense of vertigo. The glass the two cousins are using—be it a telescope or an opera glass—can be employed without dangers to their sanity, and no sandman, no Coppola, no Coppelius arrives among the market women and the bourgeois housewives stocking up for their kitchen pantries to induce the younger cousin to jump headlong to his death from his vantage point high above the crowd. The people on the square remain orderly, the cousin's window seat is quite safe, and Hoffmann's text begins to resemble a Berlin *physiologie* more than a physiognomical testament. One must assume that this is the reason why Benjamin now defines the cousin's "art of seeing" as "the ability to derive pleasure from living images, which the *Biedermeier* also pursues usually. Edifying mottoes provide their interpretation" (629). If the cousin is perceived as a *physiologue* rather than as a physiognomist, his art will become a provincial and ultimately a reactionary undertaking.¹² Strikingly, Benjamin's characterization of his art of seeing is now diametrically opposed to the definition he provides for the flaneur's in the *Arcades Project*, in which he notes that "[t]he category of illustrative seeing is foundational for the flaneur. He writes... his reverie as

a text accompanying the images" (528). The physiognomist will treat the visible as a text to be read, as so many signs to be decoded, but where the flaneur takes this impulse as the starting point for his own reverie or phantasmagoria, producing a text that is as labyrinthine as the streets of the city he walks, the *physiologue* will insist that the process of reading is finite and can be brought to a close, that meanings are stable and that clear lessons and morals can be derived from what is to be seen. As he surveys a market square that is bounded on all sides, producing a series of vignettes with the help of the narrator that suggest readability even though they do not claim a totality of vision, the older cousin becomes an ambiguous figure.¹³ The obvious pleasure he takes in watching the crowd while spinning tales from the visual clues at hand are the prerogatives for the flaneur's urban sensibility, while the world he sees and creates is nevertheless still that of a clearly delimited provincial town.

The unfairness of Benjamin's comparison of Hoffmann's novella with Poe's story has often been remarked upon—Hoffmann writes in the early 1820s, not the 1840s, and Berlin is at the time still a relative backwater in comparison to Paris and London—but such factual defenses are ultimately insufficient to dispel the charge implicit in Benjamin's assessment. What vision of Berlin does the novella provide, if it is not that of "a series of little genre pictures" meant to assuage the discomfort of bourgeois readers? Does Hoffmann's text, beyond its metanarrative engagement of matters of seeing, writing, perception, and representation, have something to say about Berlin as a city that might make it unfit for the "edification" of the readers of Symanski's *Der Zuschauer*?

An attempt to answer such questions can begin with the fact that Hoffmann's novella was written in a repressive climate of strict censorship and increasing governmental control and policing of the Berlin citizenry quite similar to the one Benjamin describes for the Paris of the 1840s. During the era of post-Napoleonic restoration, Prussia had issued its own "September laws" in the infamous Carlsbad Decrees of 1819, and the Prussian state was quite serious in seeing its biggest city as a potential hotbed of subversive political activity. The assassination of the writer August von Kotzebue by the radical student Karl Ludwig Sand in 1819 provided the necessary justification for repressive legislation, which made the politically engaged student fraternities illegal, greatly increased censorship throughout the German confederation, and severely restricted academic freedoms. The Prussian state and its people coexisted most uneasily in the capital, where "demagogues" were suspected of instigating popular uprisings, leading to the so-called Demagogenverfolgungen, the increasingly

paranoid persecution of Berlin citizens by the city's formidable police force. Hoffmann not only passively observed these persecutions as a resident, as a judge and employee of the state he was directly, if very grudgingly, involved in their unfolding. In October 1819, Hoffmann was appointed to a juridical commission instituted to "investigate liaisons for purposes of high treason and other dangerous activities" ("Immediat-Untersuchungskommission zur Ermittlung hochverräterischer Verbindungen und anderer gefährlicher Umtriebe"), an appointment he greatly resented. In a letter to his close friend Theodor Gottlieb Hippel on June 24, 1820, Hoffmann characterizes the work of the commission as a "web of unholy arbitrary despotism, blatant disregard of all laws, and personal animosity" (Schnapp 263). He concedes that the state needed to step in to regulate the excesses of "some young swiftheads" and presents Sand's assassination of Kotzebue as a despicable act born of fanaticism, but the current laws, he tells Hippel, rather than being directed at actions, unjustly target individual convictions.

Hoffmann, however, does not merely write to his friends about the abuses of power legalized by the Carlsbad decrees and in full display on the immediate-commission, he uses his considerable juridical talent to combat them to the best of his ability. The purpose of the commission had clearly been to rubber-stamp the arrests made by the Berlin police, but Hoffmann, in his carefully and diligently crafted legal positions and opinion papers, won over the other members of the commission, which ordered the release of several wrongfully imprisoned "demagogues," making Hoffmann a thorn in the side of both Karl Albert von Kamptz, Berlin's chief of police, later the Prussian minister of justice, and Friedrich von Schuckmann, the Prussian minister of the interior and the police. The highest profile case in which Hoffmann became involved concerned the arrest of the eccentric "Turnvater" ("father of gymnastics"), Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.¹⁴ Jahn, for whose chauvinistic views Hoffmann had little sympathy, had been arrested under highly dubious pretexts, and while Hoffmann was unsuccessful in bringing about his release, he made a lasting enemy in von Kamptz, whom Hoffmann forced to appear in court for testimony in a highly public confrontation. When news began to spread in Berlin in early 1822—news that quite imprudently originated with Hoffmann himself—that his next book, *Master Flea*, would include a satire of the state's repressive activities against "democrats and demagogues," von Kamptz and von Schuckmann began to investigate. The manuscript was intercepted and confiscated at Hoffmann's Frankfurt publisher, and when von Kamptz saw himself satirized in the figure of the malicious Secret Councillor Knarrpanti, the machinery of the Prussian state began its

work against Hoffmann, who, far from resorting to inoffensive writing in reactionary times, had put his legal career in jeopardy. Not only von Kamptz and von Schuckmann but even King Friedrich Wilhelm III himself became involved in Hoffmann's case, and Hoffmann could not escape an official examination on his deathbed. *Master Flea* ultimately appeared in censored form shortly before Hoffmann's death and was not published as originally conceived until 1906.¹⁵

It is unlikely that all these political concerns were far from Hoffmann's mind when he dictated *My Cousin's Corner Window*, which was sent to Symanski for publication on April 14, 1822, and it is probably no coincidence that the first of the text's more general comments about the citizens of Berlin involves the people's relationship to the police. Here, the narrator describes the development of a fight between two women selling vegetables, who are quickly surrounded by a great number of people and who seem on the verge of coming to blows. The narrator already sees the police making its way through the crowd when an unexpected development takes place: a group of other market women intervenes, separates, and appeases the two parties, and, to the narrator's surprise, the conflict is solved peacefully without any need for police intervention. The older cousin underscores the narrator's observation by remarking that this was the only confrontation that arose on the market square during the time of their dialogue, and he informs the narrator that "even a more serious, more threatening conflict the people usually end by themselves by coming between the quarrelers and separating them" (618). He recalls an indeed much more serious incident in which a "big, ragged fellow of insolent, wild appearance" got into an argument with a passing butcher's apprentice, whom he attacked with a huge club. The butcher's apprentice in turn picked up a meat cleaver, and blood, death and the criminal court seemed imminent (618–19). Yet here, too, the people on the marketplace themselves, first and foremost the strong and powerfully built women at the fruit stands, prevent any further violence. They hold back both men and leave nothing to the police but to pick up the wild-looking "fellow," who seems to the cousin "like a freed prisoner" when the officers lead him away (619).

The law and its enforcement, these episodes suggest, lie with the people themselves, and Berlin's police force is reduced to merely completing a job the people have already carried out themselves. Consequently, the narrator ends this episode by concluding that "hence the people are indeed governed by an internal sense of the order that needs to be kept, which cannot but be beneficial to everyone" (619). The older cousin then makes a larger claim about the people of Berlin as a whole, who in his opinion have greatly improved for the better since the end of

war veterans are well provided for, his cousin informs him that such trust in Prussia's system of social security is misplaced. The blind beggar, he tells him, is the servant of one of the market women, whose baskets full of wares he carries to the market each morning, staggering under their weight like a beast of burden. He is verbally and physically abused by his mistress regularly, and the cousin suspects that even the money he has made begging is taken from him come evening. The cousin overtly sentimentalizes the blind beggar, whose "inner eye" he believes—in a case of projection that clearly illustrates the limits of his own perspicacity—"strives already to view the eternal light shining toward him from the beyond, promising solace, hope, and bliss" (614).¹⁸ But despite the cousin's edifying projections, the figure of the former soldier, reduced to abject poverty and complete dependency, nevertheless stands in stark contrast to the bourgeois citizens who thrive in the city he helped to liberate, and it reveals that despite its outward peacefulness, all is not well on the marketplace.

In an extended exercise in physiognomical observation the blind beggar then serves as a semiotic touchstone for the two cousins, who attempt to discern the moral disposition of the passing citizens from the way they give him charity. In this sequence of observations only the poorer Berliners pass muster and give generously, while the richer citizens expose their miserliness and ulterior motives in the very act of giving. After the moral callousness of the more affluent citizens frequenting the market place is brought to light the older cousin concludes: "The blind man's deathly pale face, his emaciated body, his ragged clothing suggest that his situation is quite miserable, and an active philanthropist should really investigate this relationship more closely" (616). Active philanthropists the two cousins surely are not, however, and the narrator immediately changes the topic as their dialogue moves on to the next vignette. Ultimately, the cousins' exchange leads the reader to question the quality of the "moral peace" the older cousin sees displayed in the market square: What good is bourgeois courtoisie, if it can both hide and leave unaddressed the blatant inequities the cousins' observations reveal?

Such inequities are particularly palpable when one compares the blind soldier's fate to that of the first figure the two cousins observe, a "somewhat strangely dressed person," whom the narrator, because of her face, her whole appearance, and the "bright yellow cloth wrapped around her head in the French manner like a turban" readily identifies as French—"probably somebody who stayed behind after the last war to feather her nest here," as he surmises (600). The narrator is complimented on this guess by his cousin, who wagers that her husband "makes a good living thanks to a branch of French industry,"

which allows his wife to generously fill her shopping basket. Clearly the backlash against the former occupiers has done nothing to disrupt the economic ties that make life comfortable for those who know how to work them, and Hoffmann's narrative is not uncritical of the bourgeois opulence one can perceive on the market square. Exposed despite the cousin's optimistic views, the complexities of post-Napoleonic Berlin society remain visible, and the provincialism Benjamin detects in the older cousin's remarks need not be Hoffmann's, who may have hoped for a less sentimentalizing reaction on the part of his readers to the figure of an abused, blind war veteran begging amidst the opulence of a marketplace that can only become "a graceful image of comfort and moral peace" if the suffering that made and makes that comfort possible is overlooked.¹⁹

And there are other, if less prominent, scenes in the cousins' dialogue, which suggest that the vision the older cousin develops at the end of their exchange has its blind spots, and that his optimistic conception of the market must ultimately hide what both cousins have described but *not* truly seen. One might think for example of the two old market women, described at the beginning of the dialogue, whose smiles the narrator overtly describes as "demonic" and whom he sees gesticulating with "thin skeleton arms" (602). The older cousin informs the narrator that usually no love is lost between those two neighbors on the marketplace and that only the misfortune of a young girl he observed a few minutes ago had brought them as closely together as they can be seen at the moment. The girl, whose outward appearance signaled both her poverty, as well as her modesty and shame to the older cousin, had desired to buy a white scarf, but ultimately did not have enough money in her purse to cover the price that had been agreed upon after some haggling. As the girl turned away, deeply ashamed and with tears in her eyes, the old woman took back the scarf with a scornful and derisive laugh. The two women are now so deep in conversation, the older cousin surmises, because "the other satan" knows the little girl and can tell the sad story of a family fallen into poverty, "a scandalous chronicle of thoughtlessness, possibly even of crime" (602). In quite realistic guise, the demonic and the satanic here appear on the marketplace as the prosaic everyday enjoyment of innocent misfortune and melodramatic gossip. The complete lack of empathy the older cousin's description of the two old women unveils hardly provides the basis for lasting "moral peace."

And the first person to give alms to the blind soldier is an elegant lady in expensive costume, wearing a hat "in the latest fashion," who exposes, to the narrator's horror, "a blood-red, and in addition quite masculine-looking fist" as she pulls off with some difficulty the white

the Napoleonic occupation, an improvement for which the marketplace again provides evidence. "My observations of the market, dear cousin, have generally strengthened my opinion," he remarks toward the end of the dialogue, "that the people of Berlin have changed remarkably since that disastrous period when an insolent, presumptuous enemy overran the country and tried in vain to suppress *that* spirit, which soon sprang up again with renewed power like a spring held down in force. In *one* word: the people's manners (*äußere Sittlichkeit*) have improved" (619). The true spirit of the city, the cousin claims, proved irrepressible even by an occupational force and the loss of the city's autonomy. At the same time the Napoleonic wars, despite their atrocities, have also had a positive effect on the people of Berlin, who, through their exposure to European politics on a grand scale, have become more worldly, more open toward strangers, and more courteous: "The same thing has happened to the masses as that which happens to the individual who has seen many new things, has had unusual experiences, and, along with an attitude of *nil admirari*, has gained a certain ease in manners" (619). Overall, the cousin observes a desire for greater courteousness among the people, and he uses the French word "courtoisie," rather than the German "Höflichkeit" to describe it: "You will yourself observe," he tells the narrator, "even amongst lowly maids and day laborers a desire for a certain courteousness (*Courtoisie*), which is quite delightful" (619). Consequently, the market, which used to be "a hotbed of quarrels, fights, swindles, and theft, and no honest woman could dare to do her shopping herself without exposing herself to the greatest harassment," is now "the graceful image of feelings of comfort and of moral peace" (620).¹⁶

Günther Oesterle has proposed that despite its appearance of *Biedermeier* conservatism, this assessment of the people on the marketplace constitutes a "remarkably political" statement in the repressive climate of Prussia's restorational regime, while he sees the narrator's conclusion about the people's "internal sense of the order that needs to be kept" as Hoffmann's own "implicit criticism of the authoritarian state's paternalism, spying and revolutionary fears" (Oesterle 103-4). From this perspective, Hoffmann's depiction of the harmonious interaction of various social classes on the marketplace, historically still a relative novelty, is politically motivated and presents an argument against the repressive machinery of the police state and for the continuation of Prussian reform politics. The aesthetic strategy of Hoffmann's novella with its "calculated recourse to enlightenment modes of seeing," to use Oesterle's phrase, is tied to its political positioning, and the use of physiognomical divination is meant to dispel any charges of the inscrutable revolutionary dangers hidden in the urban crowd. The

"tulip field" has been socially and politically defined, and its peacefulness is meant to be read as a quiet protest against the sinister workings of a police state.

The cousin's position is by no means unproblematic, however. Benjamin for one, in another note in the *Arcades Project*, cites—next to the cousin's desire to teach the narrator the principles of the art of seeing—precisely the cousin's view of the people's improved morals since the French occupation, as well as his perception of the marketplace's development toward comfort and moral peace, as proof for the novella's "provincial character" (564). The cousin's patronizing view of the lower classes and the working poor, meanwhile, whose attempts to imitate bourgeois manners on Sunday outings strike him as "delightful," is also quite palpable. The joke of a wagoner's boy, related by the narrator to illustrate the famous Berlin humor, strikes him as "arisen from the sinking pit of deepest deprivation" (620).¹⁷ Indeed, little could speak more strongly for a *Biedermeier* sensibility than the belief that the general adoption of a bourgeois morality will lead to the general improvement of life in the city. From this vantage point, the cousins' culminating vision of the marketplace preemptively enacts the very desires of state surveillance. As the two cousins sketch the picture of a reasonable, self-governing people who have transformed the marketplace from a place of conflict and public danger to a safe space where goods can circulate while people from various social classes mingle and interact peacefully, the resulting image also suggests a Foucauldian vision of a self-policing people, no longer in need of public displays of state power to enforce their by-now internalized compliance with the law.

Given Hoffmann's own confrontation with the Prussian police state, however, it is quite unlikely that he intended his text as an ideological instrument to aid in the control of a potentially unruly urban citizenry, while his outspoken contempt for the philistines of his time make him an improbable candidate for advocating the civilizing qualities of bourgeois morality. The older cousin is most emphatically no Kapellmeister Kreisler, the artist figure that is Hoffmann's "true" literary alter ego, and unless one assumes that Hoffmann had given in to despair when dictating the final pages of the novella, the older cousin's voice is unlikely to be unequivocally his own. Upon closer scrutiny, in fact, the bourgeois utopia of a self-regulated populace is undercut in the cousins' dialogue at the same time it is being developed, particularly in their observations about the most abject character present on the marketplace. This figure is a blind war veteran, whom the older cousin sees as a "touching image of undeserved human misery and pious resignation in God and fate" (613). When the narrator voices his surprise over the fact that this former soldier is begging, even though

kid glove on her right hand. For a brief moment the uncanny does surface quite powerfully in the middle of this "genre picture," and the lady's blood-red fist, accompanied by the narrator's shriek of "heaven help!" reduces the glittering surface of bourgeois elegance and wealth to what it is—a mere illusion. We hear no story about this probably syphilitic "child of depravity" as the older cousin calls her, even though the narrator points to the "peculiar" contents of her shopping basket and is clearly desirous to find out more. The older cousin quickly silences him ("Quiet, quiet, cousin, enough of the rose-red!"), and the reader is led to understand that whatever story is hidden here is not one the older cousin would want to tell (613). The tale of the "rose-red," we are left to conclude, cannot be told, because it would—just like the uncanny—explode the vision of the peaceful marketplace the older cousin desires to uphold.

The perspective from which such discrepancies and blind spots can become visible, and from which the fantastic, the demonic, and the uncanny repopulate the marketplace despite their seeming absence, is again located in the ironic distance of a metanarrative position that remains just outside both the older cousin's and the narrator's field of vision. Its critical as well as its aesthetic potential is no less "real" for being unidentified with the text's characters, while it is certain to remain undetected and unassailable by the censor's prosaic eye. In that sense it may well be the position of a self-policed citizen, but it is not that of a citizen who abides by the law.

NOTES

1. All translations from the German and the French in this chapter are mine.
2. Rather ironically, it is Heinrich Heine, one of Hoffmann's great admirers, who serves as proof for Benjamin, that "other physiognomists of the big city" could very well detect the uncanny and the dreadful in the urban experience even of Berlin (629). Benjamin knows Heine as a fellow admirer of Hoffmann, and in "The Demoniac Berlin" he also references the former, quoting him there as a fellow connoisseur of Hoffmann's art: "The devil, Heinrich Heine has said about Hoffmann's writings, 'cannot write such devilish stuff'" (88). If Heine can see the uncanny in the streets of Berlin in the 1840s, he does so in part, as Benjamin knows, because his vision has been sharpened by Hoffmann's writings twenty years earlier.
3. "The phantasmagoria has been extracted from nature" is Baudelaire's résumé of the artistic process leading to the paintings and drawings of Constantin Guys, the artist-flaneur who is the subject of his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (466). This process begins with what Baudelaire calls "child-like perception," close and penetrating

physiognomical observation without predetermined goals or categories, a state of pure but nevertheless analytical visual alertness that furnishes the artist's memory with all the specific detail that will later be recombined, reclassified, and remade in the phantasmagoria that is the work of art.

4. Not coincidentally, the impetus behind Benjamin's *Arcades Project* itself is also physiognomical, as Rolf Tiedemann remarks in his introduction. Like the physiognomist, who desires to arrive at the invisible and the "inner" through inductive reasoning based on physical outward detail, Benjamin desires to uncover the "signature" of the nineteenth century in the signs—the imprint—left behind in the cultural artifacts of early industrialism (29). Pouring over book after book in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, Benjamin himself is something of a stationary flaneur, the *Arcades Project* his very own labyrinth of an unseen city.
5. In a well-known drawing, included in a letter to his publisher, Kunz, in Bamberg from July 18, 1815, Hoffmann sketched the floor plan of his new apartment and his view of the *Gendarmenmarkt* and the architectural monuments that frame the square: the *Schanspielhaus*, today called the *Konzerthaus*, where Hoffmann's opera *Undine* would have its triumphant premiere a year later, the French and the German cathedral and the adjacent streets, as well as a self-portrait in the window seat, smoking a pipe with his close friend, the actor Ludwig Devrient. Hoffmann's drawing is much more explicitly "hoffmannesque" than the verbal depictions of the scene in *My Cousin's Corner Window*: fantastical, literary, and historical characters populate the streets and buildings, a monkey is perched atop the *Schanspielhaus*, which takes center stage, with a lion and an ostrich close by, while the courthouse, the *Kammergericht*, Hoffmann's daily workplace, is barely visible in the distance, a tiny building in the upper right-hand corner.
6. For the roots of the cousin's art of seeing in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's pathognomy, see Stadler, 507. Lichtenberg sharply distinguishes his own practice of pathognomy—"a semiotics of affect or a knowledge of the natural signs of thoughts and emotions (*Gemütsbewegungen*) in all their gradations and mixtures" from a conception of physiognomy, particularly as practiced by Johann Kaspar Lavater and his adherents, which claims to be able to determine a person's character ("the constitution of the mind and heart") from their physical appearance (Lichtenberg 372). For a discussion of Lichtenberg's conflicted relationship to physiognomical practices of reading, see also Blumenberg, 199–213. A discussion of the physiognomy in the art of Hogarth, Galloway, and Chodowiecki can be found in Oesterle.
7. Some of Hoffmann's most elaborate play with the treacherous distinctions between reality and fiction and the figures of narrator, character, and author can be found in his story "The Secrets," in which the narrator introduces a character named E. T. A. Hoffmann, Hff. for short, the same shorthand often employed by Hoffmann himself. Hff., under pressure to submit a sequel to his story "The Errandies," is overjoyed

to receive a letter from one of the characters in this earlier story, which leads him to said character's address. When Hff. follows the lead, however, in hopes of gaining material for his new piece, he is shocked to encounter, not the character he expects, but rather his own double, wearing the familiar dressing gown and red cap, smoking Hoffmann's favorite Turkish pipe. Hoffmann greatly enjoyed wreaking this kind of havoc with narrative convention, with his unfinished novel *The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr* providing the best-known example, and the boundaries of the self and the real, between narrators and narration, are never easily established in his texts.

8. As such, the narrator's metaphor is diametrically opposed to the analogy, discussed by Benjamin, between the city and the North American wilderness commonly employed in French texts of the 1840s to highlight the dangers of life in the metropolis. Where Paris is made to resemble a forest full of unknown dangers, the narrator's *Gendarmenmarkt* is a park in which the exotic is already safely circumscribed and made familiar (Benjamin, *Baudelaire* 541-44).

9. Fundamentally, Hoffmann's rendition of the creative process is hence not so different from the one Baudelaire sketches in "The Painter of Modern Life." See note 3.

10. The structural similarities between both texts, as well as the crucial differences Hoffmann effects are described in detail in Stadler, 502-4. Günther Oesterle also presents a discussion of the relation of Hoffmann's text to Kretschmann's and of the other intertexts that inform the novella.

11. For a discussion of the novella's complex physiological, or pathological, "staging" of Hogarthian, Chodowieckian, and Callotian perspectives, see also Jörn Steigerwald's *Die fantastische Bildlichkeit der Stadt*.

12. In one of his notes for the *Arztes Projekt* Benjamin already presents the cousin's attempt to teach the principles of the art of seeing as a sign of the novella's provincialism: "In regards to the provincial character of 'My Cousin's Corner Window': the cousin wants to teach his visitor 'the principles of the art of seeing'" (505).

13. For an analysis of the narrative structures of Hoffmann's text with an eye to the techniques employed in the early nineteenth-century panorama to reach a totality of vision, see Eicher. See also Stadler, 509.

14. During the Napoleonic occupation, Jahn had established Prussia's first gymnastics ground on the *Hagenheide* in Berlin. The open-air gymnastics exercises performed there were meant to further the fitness of a patriotic populace preparing to overthrow their French oppressors, and Jahn and his followers were active in the Anti-Napoleonic resistance. Among Jahn's more outlandish propositions was the proposal to create an artificial "desert" in which German citizens would fight wild beasts to increase their manly vigor. For Hoffmann's extensive legal opinion in defense of Jahn, which does not attempt to hide Jahn's eccentricities, see vol. 6 of *Samtliche Werke*.

15. For a detailed presentation of Hoffmann's embroilment with the Prussian state over his role in the "Demagogenverfolgungen" and the publication of *Master Eica*, including Hoffmann's official defense of the text's satirical passages, see Wolf Segebrecht's notes in *Späte Werke*, 899-913, as well as Friedrich Schnapp's contextualizing comments to the letters from and to Hoffmann over the time of the "Master Eica affair" (Schnapp 346-71).

16. The cousin anticipates a rejection of such views from "enthusiastic rigorists, hypocritical ascetics," who "grimly attack the improved manners of the people, as they are of the opinion that with this polishing of manners the people's character (das Volkstimliche) is also polished away and lost" (620). He here has in mind the excessive patriotism of the student organizations and in particular of the followers of "Turnwater" Jahn, whose efforts to cleanse and purify the German body (politic) as well as the German language Hoffmann himself seized every chance to ridicule. In "The Bridal Choice," one of the stories collected in *The Serapion Brothers*, for example, Hoffmann's narrator performs a tongue-in-cheek act of self-censorship, letting one of the characters smoke a "Tabaksröhlein," a "little tobacco roll," "as the purists would like the cigar to be called." In the first printing of the text, Hoffmann had included an even more direct attack on Jahn, warning his readers through the narrator that anybody using foreign terms is in danger "to be exercised to the ground by some professor of gymnastics" (550; 1082). Hoffmann would vigorously defend Jahn against unjust persecution by the state, but he most emphatically did not subscribe to the latter's political views.

Hoffmann's text most certainly aims a barb at the potent force of chauvinistic nationalism in post-Napoleonic Prussia, and as if to spite such "rigorists" and "purists," the two cousins in fact quite happily employ French terms throughout their dialogue, which had of course long become part of German usage over the course of the eighteenth century. Not everything French is to be rejected, nor a long history of French presence in Berlin to be denied, recent Napoleonic imperialism notwithstanding, the cousin implies, while tolerance and courtesy, he insists, cannot possibly be harmful to the national character: "I for my part am firmly and thoroughly convinced that a people who treat both the local and the foreigner not with coarseness or scornful disdain but with courtesy (höflicher Sitte), cannot possibly lose its character in doing so" (619). Indeed, the very setting of Hoffmann's novella highlights the fact that Berlin could not be conceived as a purely Prussian or German city, for the *Gendarmenmarkt* is the historical heart of French, Huguenot Berlin. Before it became the *Gendarmenmarkt* in reference to the cavalry regiment that had its main station and stables nearby from 1736 to 1773, the square had been the *Friedrichstatter Markt*, the main square of *Friedrichstadt*, the Berlin neighborhood where the French huguenots, who had come to the city in the first half of the eighteenth century, seeking protection from religious

persecution, had mainly taken residence. The huguenots, whose immigration was actively encouraged by the Prussian state, became an important presence in Berlin, influencing the city's economy, culture and language—the word *Gendarm* itself is of course of French origin, derived from the French *gent d'armes* (armed man), and the very name of the *Gendarmenmarkt* speaks to the ways in which French and German culture are intertwined in Berlin. This relationship is symbolized most explicitly by the German and the French cathedral that frame the square on the left and the right, and which, although only the German cathedral is briefly mentioned in passing at the end of Hoffmann's narrative, loom large just outside the field of vision the cousins share with the reader. The two cathedrals were built in the early eighteenth century to commemorate and consolidate the ties between the huguenot and the Lutheran protestant communities in Berlin, and Hoffmann may be making a subtle argument for conciliation by alluding to French presence and Berlin's historic French heritage in his novella. The comparison of the older cousin with the French comic writer Scarron, as well as the hypotheses about the figure on the market square who is read equally plausibly as a German drawing instructor and a French pastry chef strikingly repeat such French-German doublings within the narrative.

17. The cousin's social conservatism is also obvious in an earlier remark, when he criticizes a recent custom—"even" among "higher employees of the state"—to send their daughters to shop on the market to gain practical experience in running a household. He can see no benefit that might justify the dangers inherent in exposing young bourgeois women to the "lowest kind of people" and their dirty jokes and loose talk, not to speak of the possible encounters with lovelorn young men (604).
18. In a footnote to "On Several Motives in Baudelaire" Benjamin presents the older cousin's characterization of the beggar as a prominent example of the "edifying" quality of his art of seeing and contrasts it with the final line of Baudelaire's poem "Les Aveugles" ("What do they look for in heaven, all these blind ones?"), a *Tublean Parisien* that offers no hint of religious consolation (629).
19. Hoffmann's unsparing if placative "Vision on the Battlefield near Dresden" of 1814, which depicts Napoleon being dragged to eternal damnation by an avenging dragon, also presents explicit and gruesome depictions of the dead and dying soldiers on the battlefield, which Hoffmann had seen in 1813. The text makes it clear that he was no stranger to the atrocities of war and the brutalities that brought the blinded soldier to his present state on the marketplace. See *Nachles*, 28–31.