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Coming to Our Senses: Narratology and the Visual

1 Introduction

Marco Polo is believed to have traveled about 14.000 miles during his lifetime; Ibn Battuta, the great Arab explorer of the middle ages, managed about 75.000. But both were dwarfed by the Englishman James Holman, a retired naval officer, who traveled roughly 250.000 miles in the first half of the 19th century—before the arrival of trains, steam boats and planes. He trekked deep into Siberia, sailed to Brazil, rode through southern Africa, explored unmapped parts of Australia and survived the bandit-infested Balkans. However, the most remarkable thing about all this is that Holman had been blind since the age of twenty-four—he made all his travels without seeing where he was going: he heard, smelled and felt his way cautiously through the world. “While vision gulps, tactility sips,” his biographer notes, “an object yields up its qualities not all at once, at the speed of light, but successively over time, and in sequence of necessity.” (Roberts 2006: 69) However, despite his obvious achievements, Holman was never taken seriously by his contemporaries, and was soon forgotten. His experiences were deemed invalid for the simple reason that he could not use his visual sense: “*His sightlessness makes genuine insight impossible*” (Roberts 2006: xii). The Enlightenment’s epistemological paradigm of the eyewitness did not allow for other sense data to become the basis for new knowledge.

In this article, I want to compare two travelogues that mark the submission of the travel report to the paradigm of the eyewitness. The two texts in question are Daniel Defoe’s *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–26) and Edward Ward’s account of his ramblings through London in *The London Spy*, originally published as a periodical between 1698 and 1699. While the two texts deal with roughly the same subject matter, London around the year 1700, they present two very different accounts of it. In line with the century’s empiricist imperative to

observe, both emphasize that they will only report those things they have personally witnessed. However, the resulting reports could not be more unlike. Defoe's calm, plain, and objective description of the streets and buildings of the city is contrasted by Ward's rushed, exuberant and excited account of its inhabitants. How can the two descriptions be so different, when the perceived object is basically the same?

A literary historian might credit this difference in description to different political aims: the Whig Defoe is trying to present an economically progressive Britain, while the Tory satirist Ward attempts to ridicule the human follies of his fellow citizens suffering the consequences of (early) modernity. Narratologically speaking, they consequently show very different points of view, they reveal a markedly different "perspective" on things, they "focalize" different aspects of the city. However, instead of explaining the differing accounts with reference to the ideological backgrounds of the authors and thus making "only" metaphorical use of the terminology, I want to analyze a difference manifested in the creation of two specific narrator-figures, the employment of their senses, and the relation between perception and reporting which these narrators reveal.

It becomes obvious, when analyzing the two texts more closely, that while perception in Defoe's text is restricted to the visual, the narrator in Ward's text employs all kinds of sensory perceptions. The attempt to describe and theorize the different narrators, then, leads to the question, whether there is an aural, olfactory or even a haptic equivalent to a point of *view*: a point of smell, maybe, or a point of taste? What would be the difference between these? And could a specific mode of perceiving (a story) influence the mode of reporting (in discourse)? As there are few predecessors which to build on, and as studies of the impact of perceptual regimes on modes of writing are still rare, all I will be able to offer here is a tentative investigation of what is at stake in the relation between "perspective" and the senses, and a few suggestions concerning how and why this relation could and should be further explored.

2 The Rise of the Visual

However persistent and/or ambivalent the classical "Greek privileging of vision" (Jay 1993: 33) and however "ocularphobic" (36) the Middle Ages might have been, the "ocularcentrism" of post-Renaissance culture would be difficult to deny: "vision, aided by new technologies, became the dom-

inant sense in the modern world" (45). The importance of the visual soon became pervasive:

From the curious, observant scientist to the exhibitionist, self-displaying courtier, from the private reader of printed books to the painter of perspectival landscapes, from the map-making colonizer of foreign lands to the quantifying businessman guided by instrumental rationality, modern men and women opened their eyes and beheld a world unveiled to their eager gazes. (69)

Although by no means a homogeneous field, the visual sense came to be dominated by the particularly influential scopic regime of linear perspective, embodied by the technical device of the *camera obscura* (cf. Crary 1990: 27–29). Lüdemann outlines how this scopic regime establishes a specific observer position: It gives

the observer the illusion he could see without being involved, that he could see, without being seen, without changing the observed through observing and without himself being changed by the act of observing: The subject that sees by means of linear perspective installs itself behind the window of the "peep show" [...] in the position of a secret, for himself and others invisible voyeur. Consequently, he is an empirical subject only in a very limited sense. While he is *in* the world in the emphatic sense that the things of the world organize themselves according to his perspective [...], he is at the same time distanced from the world by this very act. Like the Cartesian *cogito* the observer is bereft of his body. (Lüdemann 1999: 66)¹

As I want to argue in the following, it is such an observer position that a text like Defoe's ascribes to its narrator, a narrator curiously situated at the same time in and out of the world he describes. But it is also the observer position that forms the basis for the concept of the perceptive/reflective figure in (classical) narratology².

Throughout the nineteenth century, a new mode of observing evolved: the "mirror" was replaced by the "lamp" as the paradigm for (artistic) vision (cf. Abrams 1953). This new scopic regime was one of "subjective vision, a vision that had been taken out of the incorporal relations of the *camera obscura* and relocated in the human body" (Crary 1990: 16). Two aspects of this new development appear crucial. On the one hand, the replacement of the mirror by the lamp, or of the *camera obscura* by the *la-*

¹ Here, as in the following, English translations of German texts are mine.

² On perspective see also Jay (1993: 51–55). Crary emphasizes that linear perspective does not necessarily lead to the observer position embodied in the *camera obscura*, and that the two are similar but not identical (cf. Crary 1990: 34). The observer position described above is the effect of a scopic regime influenced by linear perspective and the *camera obscura*.

terna magica, is a replacement of one scopic regime for another; the dominance of the visual remains unaffected. On the other hand, the new scopic regime has to be interpreted in a specific way so that it can be integrated into the narratological framework. As Klepper (2004) has recently argued, the central shift from the old to the new scopic regime is based on the deconstruction of transparency: while older texts assumed the possibility of an impartial observer, later ones reveal the partiality of every (subjective) observation. It seems to me that narratological theory takes this later, adaptive, “Jamesian” stance as its starting point and reinterprets earlier narratives accordingly, i. e. that they, also, were biased. However, this theory inherits or adopts both the visual bias and the epistemological model of the older scopic regime, because it interprets a constructive mode of observation within the wider framework of perspectivism, of which the (Cartesian) linear perspective is understood to be only one particular instance. In the framework of narratology, the observer is, as I will argue, still watching from inside a *camera obscura*, albeit one which has a distorting prism in its hole.

3 Ut pictura poesis: Narratology and the Visual

Classical narratological theory, from Henry James to Franz Stanzel and Gérard Genette, was developed in response to the novel of the 18th and 19th centuries. Given that these centuries mark the heyday of the primacy of visual observation, it comes as no surprise that the classical texts of this era and subsequently the theories concerned with these should also show a strong visual bias (cf. Klepper 2004). The narrator—or character whose perceptions the narrator reports—is generally conceived as a subject that perceives its (fictional) world almost exclusively visually.

The question whether such visual bias poses a problem for narratology did not seem important to most theoreticians, who touch on it only slightly—if at all. Bal’s definition of “focalization”, for example, could not be more visual: “Whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle”. “Focalization is,” she continues, “the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen’, perceived” (Bal 1985: 100). Without further ado, she makes “seeing” stand in for all forms of perception. Bal seems to follow Genette, who thinks it enough to “take up [...] the slightly more abstract term *focalization*,” to “avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms *vision*, *field*, and *point of view*”

(Genette 1980: 189). However, when revisiting his theory, Genette claims that his “only regret is that [he] used a purely visual, and hence overly narrow, formulation”. Consequently, he wants to “replace *who sees?* with the broader question of *who perceives?*” (Genette 1988: 64). Similarly, in their chapter on “Focalization” Martinez and Scheffel appear to realize the reductive pairing of “who sees” and “who speaks”, but think it enough to add in brackets: “(‘seeing’ should be understood here in the more general sense of ‘perceiving’)” (Martinez & Scheffel 1999: 64). Finally, Rimmon-Kenan also hopes with Genette and Bal that the more abstract term of “focalization” can avoid “the specifically visual connotations of ‘point of view’,” but admits that even this new terminology “is not free of optical-photographic connotations” and proclaims that “its purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation” (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 71). But although she declares her intention to transgress the limits of the “purely visual sense of ‘focalization’” and acknowledges that perception also includes “hearing, smell, etc.,” all her examples remain within the realm of the visual (77).

Quite obviously, this visual bias of narratological terminology and the failure to amend it have not gone unnoticed. In what might be called post-classical narratology, I found at least two possibilities to interpret these findings. The first follows the line set out already by Rimmon-Kenan and claims, in the words of Niederhoff, that “the metaphorical character of a scientific term does not diminish its suitability” (Niederhoff 2001: 4–5). The conceptual model, this suggests, remains unhampered by the terminology. Chatman, for example, claims: “Genette has always seemed to mean more by focalization than the mere power of sight. He obviously refers to the whole spectrum of perception: hearing, tasting, smelling, and so on” (Chatman 1986: 192). Prince takes the substitution of “seeing” for “perceiving” even further:

Note [...] that the verb “perceive” is to be taken in a broad rather than narrow acceptation: to apprehend with the senses (to see, hear, touch, etc.) or with the mind, or with something like their equivalent. In other words, what is perceived may be abstract or concrete, tangible or intangible—sights, sounds, smells, or thoughts, feelings, dreams, and so on. (Prince 2001: 44)

According to this line of thinking, one can amend the terminology and leave the underlying model untouched. Consequently, Nelles, following Jost, distinguishes between “ocularization”, the visual element of focalization, “auricularization”, the “aural point of view” (cf. Jost 1983), gustativization, olfactivization, and tactivilization (cf. Nelles 1997: 95–96).

The problem I have with such supplementation lies in the subordination of different senses under a model that was quite obviously developed with the visual in mind. When Prince defines point of view as “yielding that which *might* be perceived from a certain perspective” (Prince 2005: 442), he is simply substituting the wider term perceiving for the old “seeing”, but consequently must suggest that we smell or taste “from a certain perspective”—which, I think, already stretches the metaphor, and the model, a bit too far, as does the idea of an “aural point of view”. I will return to the problem of “perspective” in regard to other senses later.

A second line of response to the visual bias of the terminology seems to accept that the terminology is not just arbitrary, but a metaphor we live by, not a surface problem, but one that conceptually frames our thinking. Consequently, Lanser affirms the visuality of the concept of “point of view” by conceding, with John Berger and others, the primacy of the visual over all other senses: “perception is always structured upon a relationship of perceiver and perceived—upon a *point of view*” (Lanser 1981: 4). In a similar way, Nünning and Nünning affirm the visual bias of their term “perspective”: “The traditional correlation of visual-optic and cognitive aspects, which is already conditioned etymologically, is as much a constant of the term perspective as is the close relation to epistemological dualism.” (Nünning & Nünning 2001: 8) Quite obviously, this is a perfect tool for analyzing works created within the 18th and 19th century framework of representational realism. For Nünning and Nünning, however, perspective is, systematically, “the prism through which all environmental stimuli are refracted” (12)—thereby turning a historically and culturally situated philosophical framework into a given premise for narratological reasoning. Neither can this model incorporate a sense like tactility, which defies a neat compartmentalization of object, idea and subject-observer, nor is it suitable for radical forms of subjective perception, where the creative act goes beyond the “refracting” of given stimuli. As I understand it, Nünning and Nünning’s metaphor of the “prism” allows them to include a subjective/constructivist “perspective” into an otherwise Cartesian epistemology—by putting a prism into the hole of the *camera obscura*, and leaving it otherwise intact. As a consequence, the narratologically conceived observer sees the (fictional) world through a prism even if he is smelling or hearing.

Is “point of view”, as much as focalization and perspective, then, just another example of the primacy of the visual in our culture and the hegemony of the scopic regime of perspective within this culture? Is nar-

ratology simply mirroring what a plethora of recent studies have identified as the dominance of the visual in modern culture? Is narratology, then, just another instance of what McLuhan understands as a central consequence of the rise of the Gutenberg Galaxy, that is, the “reduction of experience to a single sense, the visual, as a result of typography” (McLuhan 1962: 125)? Is there, as Uspenskij claimed in his article, a “Structural Isomorphism of Verbal and Visual Art” (1972)?

To a certain degree I would answer these questions positively. Consequently, a use of terms such as “point of view” or “perspective”, which affirms its visual bias and consequently limits itself to analyses of visual perception within a certain cultural framework, is surely appropriate; also, such analyses should do justice to the bulk of mainstream 18th and 19th century novels. When it comes to dealing with other than visual sense perceptions, though, I would disagree with Nelles that we can successfully examine these within the given framework. In the following, I will attempt to exemplify the limits of the visual narratological terminology (and framework) in a comparative examination of the above mentioned texts by Defoe and Ward—and their differing perceptual and narrative modes. Here, McLuhan’s claim of the relation between seeing and printing will also have to be re-examined.

4 A Terminological Re-Approximation

The fact that I am dealing with two factual texts seems to by-pass large parts of what is normally discussed under the terms perspective, focalization, or point-of-view, and what the title of this book reveals as the central function of these terms: mediation. As Nelles defines it: “Focalisation is a *relation* between the narrator’s report and the character’s thoughts” (Nelles 1997: 79). Or, as Jahn elaborates in more detail:

Focalization denotes the perspectival restriction and orientation of narrative information relative to somebody’s (usually a character’s) perception, imagination, knowledge, or point-of-view. Hence, focalization theory covers the various means of regulating, selecting, and channeling narrative information, particularly of seeing events from somebody’s point of view [...]. (Jahn 2005: 173)

Stanzel’s “Typenkreis”, Genette’s tripartition and Bal’s refinement as much as Nünning’s “Perspektivenstruktur”, all deal, essentially, with the informational relation between a “character” and a “narrator”. So what if

there is no character-perspective from which to distinguish a narrator-perspective, and consequently no mediation between the two?

At first glance, there seems to be no immediate distinction between a subject of perception and a subject of narration in factual texts. Who perceives? Daniel Defoe. Who narrates? Daniel Defoe. Genette's famous incentive for dealing with focalization in the first place, the intention to distinguish between "who perceives" and "who speaks", seems to become rather irrelevant. But is that true? It is quite obvious that what Daniel Defoe perceives is not the same as what he narrates: the diegetic world, although not fictional, is still a "version" of the real world. It is as unlikely that Defoe never smelled anything in the whole of Britain³ as it is that he never interacted with anyone on his travels—and of neither of which does he tell us. But that does not mean he is lying, he does not necessarily hold back information.

It is my conviction that both Defoe and Ward create a specific narrator-figure whose conception is responsible for the selection of perceptions. The relation that I want to focus on, then, is the relation between the "bias" of perception and the "bias" of narrating. As mentioned above, I am going to concentrate on sensory differences of perception, leaving ideological questions aside⁴. Also, I will leave aside the question what degree of "reality" the perceptual position of the narrator actually had for Defoe: was he so convinced of this perceptual position that he actually masked any smell, sound, etc., so that his conscious perception actually became purely visual? Or is it just a conceptual constriction of which he was well aware? Was his perception determined by the discursive cultural framework or did he simply write what he thought was expected from him?

Putting aside questions like these and despite the dangers of adding even more narratological terms to an already well stacked pile, I want to distinguish the two separate acts involved here as "slanted perception" on the one hand and "narrative focalization" on the other⁵. I think it important to uphold a distinction, terminologically and conceptually, between the act of perception and the act of reporting (cf. Schmid 2008: 129–

³ See further Cockayne's (2007) timely reminder of the sensual assaults the eighteenth century provided.

⁴ However, as might be deduced from the following, certain ideological positions seem to go hand in hand with certain perceptual positions.

⁵ Etymologically, the optical connotation of "focus" supplanted the older sense of "hearth". For me, then, "focalization" means concentrating on the heated center.

30)—even when dealing with factual accounts. My proposed distinction seems close to Jesch and Stein's contribution in this collection, although mine is not restricted to fictional texts, and neither does it deal with the perceptual act of characters as such: "The first element is the perception of the world invented by the author through narrators and other agents also invented by the author; the second element is the regulation of narrative information within the communication between author and reader" (59).

However, against Jesch and Stein I would argue that both entities are always present: never is there a perception without slant, and never is there a narration without focalization. While this, I assume, should be undisputed, as Schmid has successfully argued (cf. Schmid 2008: 120–21), the much more interesting question for me is whether there is a connection between the way perception is slanted and the way reporting is focalized. And more specifically: how does the way perception is conceptualized influence what one has to say about the world one travels? In my analysis of Defoe and Ward I will argue that there are culturally and historically specific models that suggest specific relations between the two acts, limiting the systematically available possibilities.

However, while the proposed terminology might be better adapted to different sense perceptions, it still remains within the realms of epistemological dualism. As long as the conceptual framework of diegetic world-making, of the distinction between narrator and story-world, forms the foundation of narratological theory (and it might turn out to be indispensable), "point of view" and related concepts remain central: "The novel and other narrative genres cannot escape the question at stake because they necessarily model a world and afford a specific viewpoint on this world" (Klepper 2004: 460). As will become clear, texts like Ward's reveal the limits of such frameworks; and all I can offer here is a pointer towards these limits from within this framework.

5 The Traveler's Senses

Daniel Defoe's *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* formed part of a new vogue in travel writing, dealing with Britain instead of far-away and exotic places on the one hand, and discarding scholastic accounts on the other. A predecessor to Defoe admits in his preface that "voluminous Treatises of this Nature" already seem to exist. But: "what so eminently distinguishes our Ingenious Author from most, if not all, is

that he presents you here with nothing but his own Ocular Observations.” Older authors, “confining themselves to their Studies,” can only report what they “have taken upon the bare Credit of those, who were, perhaps, more slothful than themselves” (anon. 1694: n. pag.).

Defoe follows this new tradition. He also promises to report nothing “but what he has been an Eye-witness of himself” (Defoe 1724–26: I, 48), and he, too, praises his own work for not being “rais’d upon the burrow’d lights of other Observers” (48). When he relates a “long Fabulous Story” that some “Historians” (108) tell, he discards the fable with the following words: “I satisfy myself with transcribing the Matter of Fact, and then leave it as I find it” (108). However, this commitment is at the same time the source of a central problem in Defoe’s book. Defoe’s use of letters, which are supposed to be reports of several separate circuits, is to ensure his status as an eyewitness. In order to prove that his report is accurate, Defoe creates an easily discernible narrator figure who gives detailed descriptions of the traveled topography. In keeping with the empiricist doctrine of the age, the subjective point of view is to guarantee an objective account⁶. However, as we know today, the (empirical) author Daniel Defoe not only collected information on diverse travels that failed to match the reported circuits, he also used several secondary sources, and only much later brought the collected information into a coherent form. The narrative account, it appears, was created at another place, and another time, than the diverse perceptions.

What I want to argue now is that the temporal and spatial detachment of the act of perception and the act of reporting is mirrored in the perceptual position Defoe ascribes to his narrator. In whatever way the real author’s perception was slanted, the narrator in the text has a peculiar and easily discernible slant of perception. In alliance with the 18th century’s predominant concept of visual perception, Defoe seems to be traveling within a transportable walk-in *camera obscura*; he poses as a distanced observer to whom the world presents itself as if through an incorruptible machine. The following depiction of a *camera obscura* represents this conception perfectly.

⁶ See Jay (1993: 64): “Intersubjective visual witnessing was a fundamental source of legitimation for scientist like Robert Boyle.” See further Crary (1990: 41).

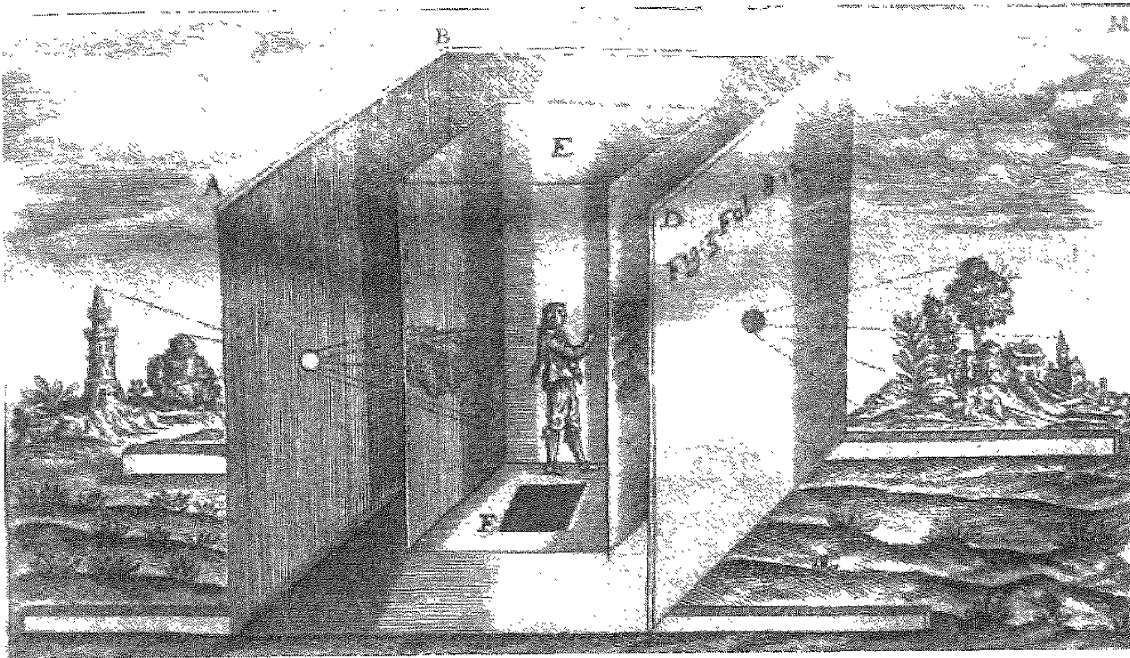


Figure 1: Athanasii Kircheri, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, 1671: 709 (extract).

The distance between Defoe's narrator, who poses as an experiencing figure, and the described objects correlates with the effects of the process of writing. The distance which the writer, sitting in his study, experiences in relation to the described objects finds its perfect embodiment in the idea of a transportable walk-in *camera obscura*. The *camera obscura*, as Crary has analyzed, "performs an operation of individuation; that is, it necessarily defines an observer as isolated, enclosed, and autonomous within its dark confines" (Crary 1990: 38–39). The observer is cast as "a free sovereign individual and a privatized subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world" (39). Incidentally, this is also a perfect description of the situation of writers and readers emerging in the eighteenth-century⁷, sitting alone in their respective domestic, private closets (cf. Heyl 2004: 506–26): "The reader can open the door of a novel, enter, and quietly shut the door behind him" (Zimbardo 1978: 8). He or she is alone and not alone at the same time: "A thousand readers indeed stare, from their closets, into a single mirror of print, and each of them does it alone" (Hunter 1984: 285). The author, similarly writing on his or her own, by means of this device, can, as Fielding has it, "hold the

⁷ The changes in question here are to be seen in relation to the older paradigm of the scribe—collectively writing in a monastery—and the paradigm of the audience—experiencing collectively in the theatre.

Glass to thousands in their Closets” (Fielding 1742: 6). Here, scientific-philosophical empiricism, the technique of the *camera obscura* and the new situation of the reader seem to converge: “The camera, or room, [or book; C. H.] is the site within which an orderly projection of the world, of extended substance, is made available for inspection by the mind” (Crary 1990: 46).

However, the concept of the *camera obscura* has consequences not only for the perceiving subject, but for the perceived object, too: a multifaceted “thing” is turned into a purely visual semiotic sign—sound, smell, taste, touch; nothing of this can be reproduced within the box. Finally, objects can be looked at without having the chance of looking back; perception is bereft of any reciprocity. Correspondingly, in the act of reading, the object of observation is present only as mediated and physically absent: one can observe the object, without having to experience it in its full presence and without having to fear that it might stare back. (And if it does, as in some printed pictures, this feels uncanny.) Therefore, the sort of actual and symbolic distance involved when perceiving an object visually through the *camera obscura* makes possible the uninvolved stance of Defoe’s account. Narratologically, this position is embodied nowhere better than in the heterodiegetic narrator of the classical realist novel, and although Defoe’s narrator is strictly speaking homodiegetic, i. e. a part of the story of Britain, he nonetheless appears to remain external to this world. From this position, Defoe develops his calm and objective mode of writing, his now legendary “concise, clear prose,” his “plain, easy, straightforward style” (Backscheider 1986: 46, 53). However, such narrative mode would seem quite at odds with an observer who claims to be “in the thick of it”, interacting and turn-taking. Rather, this mode of narrating is only credible in relation to the peculiar narrator-observer position developed by Defoe, being there but not there at the same time—like the camera (and the audience) in a classical Hollywood production, protected by the “fourth wall”.

The only time Defoe gets carried away is when describing the society at Tunbridge-Wells, a place full of “Fops, Fools, Beaus, and the like” (Defoe 1724–26: I, 165), where “you are surpriz’d to see the Walks covered with ladies compleatly dress’d and gay to profusion; where rich Cloths, Jewels, and Beauty [...] dazzles the Eyes” (164). Bedazzled by such spectacle Defoe rants about the dangers at such places, and the slander that increases such dangers, and finally has to cut himself short before becoming too agitated: “But this is a digression” (166). Apart from this

perplexing encounter, Defoe appears to have avoided every contact with living human beings while on his travels. Although the subtitle of his book promises an account of the “Customs, Manners, Speech, as also the Exercises, Diversions, and Employment of the People,” the inhabitants of Britain “receive little attention beyond the remark that the population is increasing” (Feldmann 1997: 37). When dealing with the capital, Defoe admits that “by *London* [...], I mean, all the Buildings, Places, Hamlets, and Villages contain’d in the line of Circumvallation” (Defoe 1724–26: II, 74)—an imaginary line Defoe has drawn in order to measure the city. The creation of this line seems to guarantee a vantage point, a perspective from which the “monstrous City” (74) that London is for Defoe can be tamed, that is, ordered, chartered. For him, London is nothing more than a “great Mass of Buildings” (74), and consequently he describes the appearance and function of every important building, market etc.—but never does he stoop to describe anything that cannot be contained within his “line of circumvallation” and would suggest a reciprocal, interactional approach: human beings, for example.

Ned Ward’s *London Spy* develops a markedly different narrator-figure. In stark contrast to Defoe’s distanced view of London’s buildings, Ward constantly reports on not only seeing other people, but also hearing, smelling, and touching them. His slant of perception is noticeably different from Defoe’s vision. Instead of looking down from above—Defoe variously describes ascents to specific vantage points in order to have a better (over-)view—, the Spy is at eye-level. Instead of being distanced, he is close. As a consequence, the Spy looks and is being looked at, he hears other people and is heard, he touches them and is touched. Unlike the linear perspective/*camera obscura* visual observer, Ward’s narrator is all too aware of his own physical presence, aware of the effects his presence has on the observed objects and aware of the consequence such observations have on him. Finally, he interacts with people—and his report is full of people.

However, this experience of the social does not necessarily depend on which senses are used⁸, but rather on how they are employed. The mode of observation, whether technically or discursively formed, determines whether co-presence, reciprocity and interaction, key elements of the social, are allowed for or not (cf. Bohn 2000). The perceptual stance of the

⁸ Kant thought the ear to be the privileged sense when it comes to the social, whereas Simmel opted for the eye; see Bohn (2000: 321–22).

narrator-observer predetermines, at least to a certain degree, the selection of as well as the relation to the objects described. And sometimes these “objects” even cease to be mere objects.

But Ward is no complete exemption from the 18th century’s craze for all things visual. Rather, the Spy employs his visual sense without completely subjecting his environment to the demands of unilateral perspectival spectating. Because the Spy includes other than visual sensations, it seems his mode of visual observation is also different from Defoe’s—he sees differently, because his relation to the objects of perception is formed by several senses. Most importantly, the Spy remains receptive on all channels. This, however, bears certain dangers. Again and again he seems overwhelmed by his sensory experiences: “nothing I could see but light, and nothing hear but noise” (Ward 1709: 29). He experiences the city with a very “acute, and sometimes over-powering awareness of [...] sensory experiences” (Hyland 1993: xv). His ears hear the “sundry passing-bells, the rattling of coaches, and the melancholy ditties of ‘Hot Baked Wardens and Pippins!’” (Ward 1709: 29); he sees the “dazzling lights whose bright reflections so glittered in my eyes” (29); his nose smells the “narrow lane, as dark as a burying-vault, which stunk of stale sprats, piss and sir-reverence” (39).

In the realm of seeing there seems to be a strong preference for the observed object over the observer, especially under the scopic regime described in connection with Defoe. As described above, in the process of observation, the observed is turned into an independently existing object, while the observer is fashioned as a separately existing subject, uninvolved in the “creation” of the perceived object. On the other hand, most of the non-visual senses require a closer relation to the object of perception; hearing and tasting, for example, are often conceptualized as “taking in” the perceived object. The perceived object, finally, takes up such presence that a specific perspective, defining the individuality of the subject, is not necessarily easily to be made out—the distinction between observer and observed, subject and object threatens to collapse.

The completely opposite mode of writing—excited, emotional, exuberant—, with which Ward’s perceptions are reported, seems to result from this closeness to the perceived objects and the way this closeness affects him. Instead of traveling in a confined, distancing and sensually diminishing *camera obscura*, Ward’s experiencing figure walks among his fellow citizens. Being so close, he cannot help but experience other sensory experiences than purely visual ones. The writing style that results

from this might be best described as “linguistically overstuffed” (Wall 1998: 137)—drawing attention to the utterance itself rather than the utterer. The attempt to render the vast amount of multi-sensorially experienced details into language leads to an exuberant style that constantly escapes into similes and analogies when a complete rendering of the multi-sensorial experience becomes impossible. As a consequence, the reader has great difficulty locating a similarly well-defined point of view to the one we find in Defoe. Only rarely can the reader follow where the narrator is, and whom he is speaking to. Often, the reader learns more about how the narrator is affected by his experiences than about the object that (apparently) emanates the stimuli. And only rarely is the localization of the experiencing figure possible: from where is an event heard, or smelled in the dark? A well-defined, easily locatable perceptual stance appears to be the privilege of the visual. Impressions, otherwise, do not seem to add up to a well-defined diegetic world. And although I think there is no doubt that Ward is narrating, it is not clear whether he is actually involved in world-making.

6 Consequences

The slant of perception of every experiencing figure is heavily influenced by the inclusion or exclusion of specific senses, by their emphasis or suppression. The perceptual position that results from such a slant, in turn, influences what a report can include, and how the report is fashioned; this, then, is what I termed “narrative focalization”. No report, obviously, can render all sensory experiences. Therefore, every narration needs a specifically equipped and positioned experiencing figure, which filters what can be experienced and consequently determines, at least to a certain degree, what can be reported. In turn, every form of report needs an accompanying slant of perception. And while there is no strictly causal relation between a certain slant of perception and narrative focalization, there appear to be some culturally suggested default cases at least. Of course, there is no inherent superiority among different possible positions; Defoe is clearly able to see something that Ward can not, whereas Ward can render experiences that Defoe remains blind to. However, the specificity of these positions warrants close observation.

In the case of Ward and Defoe, attention to their perceptual stance helps understand their peculiar positions. Both pose as participant-observers, roaming the world they observe and subsequently describe.

Defoe's perceptual stance, however, reveals him as an observer rather than a participant, while Ward, on the other hand, is marked as a participant rather than a mere observer. The visual sense, and especially the scopic regime of the *camera obscura*, appears to appeal to those who try to be observers first, whereas a multi-sensorial approach seems to suggest participation. Closer attention to the perceptual situation and its technical and discursive determinations, then, might be able to distinguish historically and culturally specific embodiments of different narrative positions. Defoe's heterodiegetic narrator, who is at the same time close enough to see everything but distanced enough not to be seen, as well as Ward's specific homodiegetic narrator, can be more closely analyzed with regard to the use of their senses. And finally, looking at the cultural models or regimes of perception and reporting in factual accounts might also reveal what limitations and possibilities fictional narratives encounter.

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