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AMERICAN FLANEUR: THE COSMIC PHYSIOGNOMIES OF EDGAR A. POE

by

JAMES V. WERNER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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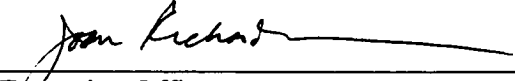
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Abstract

AMERICAN FLANEUR:
THE COSMIC PHYSIOGNOMIES OF EDGAR A. POE

by

James V. Werner

Adviser: Professor Joan Richardson

Theorist Walter Benjamin refers to Edgar A. Poe as a “physiognomist” of the “crowd” and the “interior” within his discussion of the nineteenth-century flaneur, the strolling urban observer. He also alludes to Charles Baudelaire’s treatment of Poe and the flaneur in “The Painter of Modern Life.” But both writers treat Poe’s relation to the flaneur superficially; this study is an attempt to delineate that connection more fully. Most scholars conclude that the flaneur’s importance was only temporary, his spectatorship inevitably obliterated by the forces of capitalism. This study maintains that the flaneur’s perspective helps to clarify Poe’s relation to his magazine publishing milieu, and was in fact as central to his fictional aims as it was for Baudelaire and Benjamin, though in markedly different ways. Like Benjamin’s flaneur, Poe was a liminal participant in his magazine marketplace, “neither in nor out,” crafting literary commodities even as he satirized fugitive genres. Like Baudelaire’s “painter of the passing moment,” Poe found within such ephemeral forms— among them literary flanerie— opportunities to apprehend eternal truths. He applied the principles of flanerie in ways ungrasped by both his generic flaneur predecessors and literary acolytes like Benjamin and Baudelaire. At a time when

the nature of science and scientific methodology were hotly debated issues, Poe sought in *Eureka* to displace the “professional scientist” with the intuitive artist, the brilliantly casual observer of external appearances— the cosmic flaneur. In his horror, detective and sensational fiction, he dramatizes the potential revelations of this flanerrie, as well as its limitations and even dangers. Poe’s narrators negotiate the flaneur’s blend of critical detachment and an intoxicating immersion that has both redemptive and destructive potential. In natural as well as urban settings, they perform a physiognomy of faces, interiors, cities, landscapes and seascapes, one that demands oblique thinking and a groping experiential logic, but permits only brief, incomplete and possibly fatal readings of metaphysical truth. Seen in this light, Poe becomes not a cultural anomaly, but grounded in (yet transforming) a historical moment and a literary tradition, reinscribing the mystery of the universe as he attempts to read its physiognomy.

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This work is dedicated to all the family members and friends whose love, patience and support made it possible; you know who you are, and I thank you with all my heart. I also owe a world of gratitude to Professor Joan Richardson, for keeping her hand at the helm and her eyes on the stars, and to Professors William Kelly and David Reynolds, for their matchless wisdom and guidance. More than anyone, this is for Janine, who— despite all my words— leaves me speechless.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Physiognomy of the Flaneur	1
Chapter Two: Neither In Nor Out of the Market	47
Chapter Three: The Sacred Fury of the Cosmic Flaneur	105
Chapter Four: Physiognomic Revelation: Faces and Interiors	166
Chapter Five: Imperfect Readings of Perfect Plots	228
Notes	280
Works Cited	292

Chapter One: The Physiognomy of the Flaneur

One of the most fascinating cultural figures to have appeared, disappeared and subsequently reappeared in the landscape of Western culture has been the flaneur, the strolling urban observer. In the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe, flanerie was considered more than a hobby; it was seen as an appropriate (indeed, perhaps the *most* appropriate) perceptual and intellectual perspective for viewing and negotiating the complexities of the city. With the changes in urban design wrought by industrialism (for instance, its imperative to accommodate vehicular traffic and maximize space efficiency), it was thought that the flaneur's seemingly aimless ambulations were doomed, and with them his mode of observation. However, flanerie has not receded forever into intellectual or cultural obscurity, though it has languished there for extended periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its emphasis on the discontinuous nature of urban life and its dislocations have made it a significant influence on theories of modernity in general, but also in some very specific ways. Flanerie was poetized by Charles Baudelaire in his famous *Paris Spleen*, thereby making its mark on the French Symbolist movement. The flaneur plays a pivotal role in the theories of maverick Marxist Walter Benjamin, the subject of increasing interest that has recently prompted Harvard University Press to release a three-volume set of his collected works. And as Anke Gleber suggests, a "minor renaissance" (215) of interest in the flaneur himself has appeared since the 1980s, and more particularly in the 1990s, with the publication of

scholarly texts such as Dana Brand's *The Spectator in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1991), John Rignall's *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator*, Keith Tester's collection of essays, *The Flâneur* (1994), and most recently, Gleber's *The Art of Taking a Walk* (1999).

Any discussion of the flâneur that seeks to begin with a straightforward definition and description of this figure faces immediate challenges. As Keith Tester indicates, "definitions are at best difficult and, at worst, a contradiction of what the flâneur means. In himself, the flâneur is, in fact, a very obscure thing"(7). Baudelaire, whose *Paris Spleen* and "Painter of Modern Life" incorporate the practice and methodology of flânerie respectively, describes the flâneurs of nineteenth-century Paris as "independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define"(9). The difficulty in defining exactly who the flâneur is and what he does has given rise to both the flâneur's literary richness and a wide range of differing interpretations, many of which will be discussed in this chapter. Which of these is the "true" or original flâneur? Tester has admirably summed up the dilemmas of reading and (re)constructing the flâneur:

There is a certain ambiguity concerning the historical specificity of the figure of the flâneur. On the one hand, there seems to be little doubt that the flâneur is specific to a Parisian time and place. On the other hand, the flâneur is used as a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place.... The greyness of the historical specificity is perhaps as intrinsic to the debate as the problem acknowledged by Baudelaire of defining exactly what the 'flâneur' means. (16)

The route one takes in analyzing the flaneur (historically specific or mythic-conceptual) carries important ramifications: “it could lead to flanerrie being made so specifically about Paris at a given moment in its history that flanerrie becomes of no contemporary relevance at all. Either that, or flanerrie becomes so general as to be almost meaningless and most certainly historically rootless if not seemingly somewhat ahistorical”(Tester 17). Further, the historical roots to which Tester refers are themselves the subject of contestation.

Walter Benjamin locates the origins of flanerrie in nineteenth-century Paris, while Dana Brand finds sources in Renaissance England.

In this study, I shall mediate these two approaches to interpreting the flaneur, examining the significance of the flaneur in the work of Edgar A. Poe, whom both Baudelaire and Benjamin elliptically connect with flanerrie. I shall implicitly seek both historic specificity and cultural flexibility for my definition, in linking the Parisian flaneur to Poe, an American who was writing at the same historical moment Benjamin identifies as the age of flanerrie. At the same time, it is absolutely essential to emphasize the more distant roots of flanerrie, in the ancient “science” of physiognomy, originating with the ancient Greeks and Romans. Furthermore, I argue for an expansion of traditional definitions of flanerrie, suggesting that Poe’s flaneric readings elucidate not only individual faces, interiors, and cities, but the world and even the universe. To preface these assertions, I shall provide in this first chapter a survey of the flaneur’s various manifestations, and the multiform interpretations suggested by different scholars. This survey will take the form of a loosely chronological catalogue; in proceeding in this fashion, I do not mean to imply that there is any “pure” or primordial version of the

flaneur. Rather, such a chronology is simply a useful device for presenting in suitably “panoramic” fashion the flaneur’s sundry historical incarnations. In fact, this chronological tour will demonstrate how the flaneur figure has been essentially mutable, and appropriated by various authors, critics and historians for divergent purposes. Such a delineation of the flaneur’s characteristics will set the table for my discussion of how Poe adopted but transformed the practice of flanerie in ways that have not been acknowledged to date.

* * * * *

If one could address the nature of the flaneur in broad strokes, one would note certain features that recur in most, if not all, of his shapes. One consistent element has been the action of seeing and observing his surroundings.¹ This act of observing has a particularly analytical dimension, though; it is not simply “taking air” or “window-shopping.” In most of the earlier versions of the flaneur, this optical engagement with the metropolis involves scrutinizing the faces of passers-by, and somehow making sense of them, identifying characteristics by means of facial features, mannerisms and gestures. This practice of interpreting the countenance predates nineteenth-century Paris by over two thousand years, in the “science” of physiognomy, as Elizabeth C. Evans notes:

The study of the relation of the features of a man to his inner character is no modern development; for in Greece and Rome there existed, at least during certain periods of their literary history, a definite interest in the subject.... This

interest had gained considerable impetus through the influence of the Peripatetic and Stoic schools of philosophy, and embraced a careful study of the significance of the various aspects of the body.... (5)

According to the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica* (third century B.C.), “the sources from which physiognomic signs are drawn are: movements and gestures of the body, color, characteristic facial expressions, growth of hair, smoothness of the skin, the voice, the condition of the flesh, the parts of the body, the build of the body as a whole” (8).

Evans also points out that in this text, one finds “a clear statement of the basis on which the ‘science’ of physiognomy rests: ‘Dispositions follow bodily characteristics and are not in themselves unaffected by bodily impulses. Conversely, that the body suffers sympathetically with affections of the soul is evident in love, fear, grief, and pleasure.’”

(7)

This assumption, that there is a correlation between outward appearances and inner characteristics, and that through careful scrutiny of the former one may discern the latter, is at the heart of both physiognomy and flanerier. The principle may seem self-evident, as it is fundamental to the way humans negotiate their surroundings and assess the nature of the people around them:

Long before these words [physiognomy and metoposcopy] had found a place in our dictionaries, and in the history of science, man had looked into the face of his fellow-man to read there joy and pain, hatred and love, and had sought to draw thence conclusions both curious and of daily practical use. There is no untutored people, no rudimentary language which has not incorporated in some proverb the

results of these first sports of divination. Humpbacks, squints, sparkling or dull eyes, the varying length of the nose, the varying width of the mouth, all are honored or condemned in popular proverbs. These proverbs are the first germs of the embryonic substance, which later on yield materials for a new science.

(Mantegazza 8)

However, as a basis for a “new science,” the principles of physiognomy were problematical to say the least. In its earliest stages, “animal physiognomy” attempted to associate particular species of animals with identifying characteristics, and to draw analogies to human beings sharing the same physical features. In her introduction to Rudolphe Topffer’s “Essay on Physiognomy,” Ellen Wiese notes that

the “science” “actually functioned as a conventional code. Says the pseudo-Aristotle: ‘Oxen are slow-moving and lazy. Their muzzles are broad and their eyes large; men with a broad nose and large eyes are likewise slow and lazy.’ Thus a vocabulary for the language of physiognomy was built first of all on a physiognomic response: an animal was identified with a single, typical trait (or by several, provided these would evoke a homogenous image); its physical features were taken to be the material embodiment of this undifferentiated nature, and these, in turn, could be read off like ciphers whenever they appeared in the human face. (xx-xxi)

Wiese implicitly raises questions about some of the fundamental assumptions of this practice: does an animal have an “undifferentiated” or “homogenous” nature? Can we assume that this nature will be embodied materially in one feature of its appearance? Can

we assume that the occurrence of this same feature in a human countenance will signify a similar characteristic? Or is this not simply a projection of human interpretive schema onto nature? ²

But even among those nineteenth-century writers concerned with establishing physiognomy as a science *per se*, there was substantial discomfort regarding its initial stages. Paolo Mantegazza, a devoted acolyte of the science writing in the early twentieth century, was the first to admit its dubious beginnings: “In these first attempts we always meet the infantine inexperience of ignorance; sympathies and antipathies are there translated into irrefragable dogmas and verdicts without appeal; instinct and sentiment hold the place of observation and calculation. All is seasoned with the magic which is one of the original sins of the human family”(8). The same regret is evident in Mantegazza’s discussion of another type of physiognomy: so-called “celestial” or “astrological” physiognomy, in which parallels are drawn between configurations of the human face and particular constellations of stars:

And then man, not contented to examine the human face and translate it into proverbs and into physiognomical laws of fortuitous coincidences or suggestions of sympathy and antipathy, goes on to seek in the heavens and among the stars relations between the constellations and our features, and erects this odd edifice of judicial astrology-- a veritable white magic applied to the study of the human face. Magic demands a magician; he envelops himself in the mystery of the inconceivable to explain the unintelligible, and magic becomes an industry, a trade which fattens a small number of knaves at the expense of a large number of

fools.

Such is the true origin, little honorable as it may be, of Physiognomy. (8)

As anxious as Mantegazza is to distance himself from what he perceives to be the primitive and misguided efforts of his physiognomical forebears, his history of the “science” includes such notable figures as Plato, Aristotle, and later even Darwin, as all having considered, endorsed or practiced physiognomy at some point in their lives. However, none is so consistently associated with physiognomy as Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801). And although physiognomical principles were in circulation since these ancient civilizations, it was not until the Lavater’s work in the eighteenth century that physiognomy enjoyed another widespread era of popularity. Lavater’s essays on physiognomy were astoundingly popular; between its original publication in 1770 and 1810, his *Physiognomische Fragmente*, or *Physiognomical Fragments* went through “no fewer than sixteen German, fifteen French, two American, two Russian, one Dutch, and twenty English editions,” according to Ellis Shookman in his essay collection, *The Faces of Physiognomy* (2). In *Lavater’s Essays on Physiognomy: A Study in the History of Ideas*, John Graham provides the following quote from *The Gentlemen’s Magazine* in 1801:

In Switzerland, in Germany, in France, even in Britain, all the world became passionate admirers of the Physiognomical Science of Lavater. His books, published in the German language, were multiplied by many editions. In the enthusiasm with which they were studied and admired, they were thought as

necessary in every family as even the Bible itself. A servant would, at one time, scarcely be hired till the descriptions and engravings of Lavater had been consulted, in careful comparison with the lines and features of the young man's or woman's countenance. (61)

Certainly, Lavater's work caused quite a commotion, though a good deal of skepticism was mixed in this public reaction. By mid-century, the fame (or notoriety) of Lavater's theories was firmly entrenched as historical fact, as indicated by the following description from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1853-60): "Its publication created everywhere a profound sensation. Admiration, contempt, resentment, and fear were cherished towards the author. The discoverer of the new science was everywhere flattered or pilloried; and in many places, where the study of human character from the face became an epidemic, the people went masked through the streets" (qtd. in Graham 61).

The hyperbole of such statements is clear, as Graham points out; equally clear is the fact that Lavater presented physiognomy in a way that was at once more accessible and more controversial than any of its previous proponents had done. Lavater articulates the basic premise of physiognomy in the following passage from *Physiognomische Fragmente*: "All knowledge we can obtain of man (in his tripartite animal, intellectual, and moral life) must be gained through the medium of our senses.... Man must wander in the darkest ignorance, equally with respect to himself and the objects that surround him, did he not become acquainted with their properties and powers by the aid of their externals" (qtd. in Graham 47). Graham notes that Lavater's "insistence on a scientific methodology is his ground for dissociating himself from earlier physiognomists, such as

Aristotle... since the slightest difference in a line, literally a ‘hair-breadth,’ changes the meaning of a face”(47). But in identifying precise principles and methodologies on which to base the new “science” proved difficult for a process that seemed to incorporate as much of art as it did science. Shookman points out Lavater’s belief that “physiognomy was science, albeit an unmathematical one impaired by imprecision...”(4); he then goes on to demonstrate how this blending of artistic and scientific sensibilities and procedures was a self-conscious one on Lavater’s part: “Indeed, he exclaimed, ‘where is the science where everything can be calculated— nothing left to taste, feeling, and genius?-- Woe to science, if such a one were to exist’”(5). Lavater’s aesthetic approach to physiognomy was also marked by what Graham calls “a tendency to be all things to all men” (which, as Shookman suggests, would be called an “interdisciplinary” technique today {5}: “The ‘scientific’ flavor may not have satisfied the increased interest in biology, zoology, anatomy, physiology, and anthropology, but it at least acknowledged these fields and made some pretence at employing their information and methodology”(45). While some members of the scientific establishment scoffed at what they considered a questionable contribution, a number of highly reputable scientists and thinkers would later be in his debt: “scientists like Franz Joseph Gall with his phrenology, Carl Gustav Carus with his craniology, and Alexander von Humboldt with his physical anthropology owed a great deal to Lavater, as did Goethe, too, who openly acknowledged the importance of physiognomy for his own notions of osteology and morphology”(Shookman 5). And in great part due to Lavater’s influence, physiognomy remains a popular pseudo-science today, with commercial books such as Terry Landau’s *About Faces* (1989) and Lailan

Young's *The Naked Face* (1993) continuing to entertain physiognomical notions and possibilities.

Whatever the actual scientific merit of physiognomy, it certainly figures prominently in most interpretations of the practice of flanerie, regardless of the critical disagreement as to the flaneur's own origins. As stated earlier, Walter Benjamin argues for the flaneur's rise in popularity in Paris of the mid-1830s. Dana Brand, in *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, disagrees, maintaining that

the figure that Benjamin discovered in the feuilletons of the 1830s was not a new form of consciousness that had sprung into being in conjunction with the development of enclosed shopping spaces that facilitated strolling. He was the culmination of a long tradition.... By the early nineteenth century, this process was far more advanced, as well as far more geographically widespread than Benjamin represents. The manners and strategies Benjamin associates with the flaneur may be found throughout the literature of Europe long before the late 1830s.... [T]he flaneur is as English a phenomenon as he is a French one, and it was primarily from England that he was imported to America. (13)

Brand finds the roots of the flaneur "in the culture of spectacle that developed in London during its first period of extraordinary growth, in the sixteenth century"(14). He notes the coalescence of economic and political trends that helped to fashion London into a metropolis with the seeds of an "English consumer society" and an emphasis on spectacle. At the same time, various literary genres with the explicit purpose of

representing the city of London came into popularity. The first were the “survey” or “urban panorama” books, which shared “an encyclopedic intention, a bourgeois urbanism that celebrates the city’s magnificence and vitality, and a tendency to divide the city into separate spaces so as to give the reader the sense of looking at a coherent map or model of the metropolis”(17). These rather static representations of the city were answered by another genre: the “coney-catching” books, designed to describe and classify “the various forms of deception and fraud that could be encountered in London,” functioning both as cautionary tales and, more importantly, as entertainment for “wealthy young men residing in the metropolis before the assumption of adult responsibilities (18-19). While these texts deal with the seamier and more randomly experienced side of London life than the survey books address, both genres offer a system of classification that “makes sense” of the city through observation of its inhabitants and environments.

Another genre popular in seventeenth-century England was the Theophrastian character book, in which Brand finds “the origins of the flaneur’s conception of the urban crowd, if not the origins of the flaneur himself”(21). One of the followers of both Plato and Aristotle, and a member of the Peripatetic school of philosophy, Theophrastus wrote his *Characters* (third century B.C.) as an attempt to categorize the various types and character traits of the human personality. He proceeded by positing first a definition of a moral quality, and then listing the actions in a human being that would indicate the presence of that quality. As Brand illustrates, the English version, popularized by writers such as Sir Thomas Overbury, represents “a dream of social control and legibility through the reduction of human diversity to a system of signs structured like a language”(22-23);

although the city contains an imposing and confusing mass of humanity, it can be deciphered, sanitized and negotiated by “reading” the crowd via physignomical features, and classifying them into types.

For Brand, this fantasized ability of an urban observer to taxonomize and thereby encompass the experiences of the metropolis is called into question by the “carnavalesque urban spectators” popular in the closing decades of the seventeenth century. Fostered and influenced by the rise in periodical publication, these “panoramic tours of London, presented in installments by a detached wanderer... offered an episodic presentation of the city”(27).³ More reminiscent of the “coney-catching” books than the surveys in subject matter, these stories were “so filthy, bizarre, and offensive or outlandish to the tastes of later periods that few have ever been reprinted”(28). The depiction of London that emerges from the writers of series like *The English Lucian* is that of a metropolis “where the most bizarre, unruly, and uncontained provinces of human experience may be encountered and observed.... where the uncanny may be encountered, and where random, discontinuous, passing people and forms may assume a fleeting symbolic significance, interacting unexpectedly with the unconscious”(31).

It is to these disturbing representations of urban life that Brand finds eighteenth-century writers of periodical essays, especially Addison and Steele, responding. Brand acknowledges that these two writers “were not the first to present the city through the eyes of a detached Cynic or naive philosopher who, while walking and wandering, claims to be writing down whatever he encounters.” However, he maintains they combined aspects of previous methods of viewing the city and “established, more than anyone else,

the ethos and style of urban spectatorship that Benjamin was to discover in the French *feuilletons* in the 1830s”(31). Brand argues persuasively that Addison and Steele mediated the propagandistic survey books and the carnivalistic tours of London’s nether regions, creating a representation of the city that emphasizes its random and chaotic nature, but controls it by presenting it through the eyes of “a spectator who is able to impose order, continuity, and coherence *in the act of watching* what appears to be chaotic”(33). This observer of the city has a “powerful gaze” that endows him with “a panoramic equanimity available on the spot, obviating the need to present the city itself as fixed and frozen”; he “enjoys diversity without grossness, randomness without danger, amusing bustle of mild interest rather than terrifying chaos of profound fascination”(33). In order to maintain this equanimity, this spectator must be free of “social, economic, and familial obligations,” making him able to wander at will, beholden to none; he must also have a highly perceptive gaze, and “special powers of interpretation,” similar to those found in the physiognomist (33-34). Brand also links the spectator of Addison and Steele to the flaneur’s “consumption” of the city: “by suggesting the intrinsic sufficiency of novelty and spectacle, by suggesting that everything that is encountered in a rapidly changing commercial city can be read, appreciated, or otherwise rendered clean and harmless, the flaneur may have contributed to the process by means of which ‘a successful bourgeois society’ established itself in England”(38).

Like Brand, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson asserts that the flaneur appears in society earlier than Benjamin’s location of him in the 1830s. However, in her essay “The flaneur on and off the streets of Paris,” she does not date him nearly as far back as Brand does,

asserting that “the flaneur sets foot in Paris almost with the century, far earlier than is usually allowed, and his fortunes rise and fall in particular historical circumstances” (23-24). It is this historical and cultural particularity of the flaneur that Ferguson would emphasize, rather than his roots in English literature and culture, or his relevance for modernity: “if the flaneur now walks abroad in many guises and in many texts, he took his first steps in the streets of Paris early in the nineteenth century”(22). While Brand argues for the flaneur’s development through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, Ferguson’s goal is “[t]o place the flaneur and flânerie in the changing Parisian landscape” and thus “to recapture a sense of the powerful tensions that govern that context and to mark the writer’s ambiguous and ambivalent relationship to that context”(23).

According to Ferguson, “the bourgeois flaneur makes his first public appearance in an anonymous pamphlet that seems to have escaped the notice of literary historians and lexicographers alike[:] The 32-page pamphlet of 1806, *Le Flaneur au salon ou M. Bon-Homme: examen joyeux des tableaux, mêlé de vaudevilles*”(26). There are significant disparities between M. Bon-Homme and his later manifestations: he “little resembles his successors, from either a sartorial or a characterological point of view...[and] exhibits neither elegance nor intensity. In contrast to the flaneurs of the 1830s, who celebrate the joys of the unexpected and resolutely refuse to make any plans, M. Bon-Homme makes the same rounds day in and day out”(26). Many of the most essential elements of the flaneur are present, though: “the detachment from the ordinary social world, the attachment to Paris, and the real if indirect association to art”(26). M. Bon-Homme has

the flaneur's "essential egotism," and "walks through the city at random and alone... suspended from social obligation, disengaged, disinterested, dispassionate"(26). The flaneur's status as an outsider is also emphasized in an early definition of "un grand flaneur" from an 1808 dictionary of popular usage, which describes him as "a lazybones, a loafer, a man of insufferable idleness, who doesn't know where to carry his trouble and his boredom"(24). Though such "loafing" is at times treated as social deviance, it can also be identified as a mark of social standing, associated with the leisure of aristocracy. Ferguson distinguishes M. Bon-Homme as flaneur from acknowledged "predecessors," including Addison and Steele's Mr. Spectator, in that the former is "observed while observing" and "is himself an integral part of the urban spectacle"(27).

Ferguson also points to other French texts that address the flaneur, at length or in passing, such as Balzac's *Physiologie du Mariage* (1826), the anonymous "Le Flaneur a Paris" in *Le Livre des cent-et-un* (1831) and Louis Huart's 1841 *Physiologie du Flaneur* (28-29). The depiction of the flaneur that emerges from these works is by now recognizable: an urban observer, almost exclusively male, who moves alone through the city and its crowds, maintaining his aloofness from social as well as economic interaction. While in his earlier manifestations, the flaneur may characterize himself as simply an on-looker, by the time of Huart's *Physiologie* the flaneur emphatically "does not look"; rather, "he observes, he studies, he analyses"(28-29). This active and analytical gaze is crucial to the flaneur's association with creativity, and it is Balzac (according to Ferguson) who first makes the explicit connection between flaneur and artist. This artist-flaneur "belongs to a privileged elite, the expression and manifestation

of the higher, because intellectual, flanerie. Others-- the vast majority-- will at best be ordinary flaneurs... given to random speculations and 'silly conjectures''; they are "dazzled and bewildered and confused... passive readers of the urban text, taken up, and taken in, by the surface agitation"(29). The artist-flaneur, on the other hand, is both a "living guidebook" who knows the city inside and out, and the detached controller and domesticator of the urban environment, "entertained, not distressed, by the ever changing urban spectacle," who "reads the city as he would read a text-- from a distance"(31), and then reproduces the city in a text, allowing the reader to experience and "consume" the city as he does: "at one remove"(28). Ferguson argues that with the second half of the century, we witness the decline of the flaneur, as he becomes dispossessed by the city's increasingly inhospitable architectural structure and absorbed by the commercial lure of the shopping malls. In the end, "flanerie is presented as a sign of failed creativity" and "becomes more or less what it remains today... a pleasurable suspension of social claims, a temporary state of irresponsibility"(32).

Although Ferguson charts the gradual dissolution of the flaneur as a creative force in the second half of the nineteenth century, as late as the 1860s Charles Baudelaire argued for the validity of the flaneur's artistic function. In his 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life," he lays the foundation for this argument by means of his definition of beauty:

Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its

morals, its emotions. Without this second element, which might be described as the amusing, enticing, appetizing icing on the divine cake, the first element would be beyond our powers of digestion or appreciation, neither adapted nor suitable to human nature. (3)

To accept this bi-part definition of beauty is to recognize that what were previously perceived as “passing” or “ephemeral” events, objects or ideas could be worthy of artistic representation.⁴ It is also to suggest that their very “ephemerality” could have important effects upon the artistic process used to capture them:

For the sketch of manners, the depiction of bourgeois life and the pageant of fashion, the technical means that is the most expeditious and the least costly will obviously be the best. The more beauty that the artist can put into it, the more valuable will be his work; but in trivial life, in the daily metamorphosis of external things, there is a rapidity of movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist. (4)

It is this “daily metamorphosis of external things” that Baudelaire defines as “modernity,” by which he means

the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.... This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty, like that of the first woman before the fall of man. (13)

The ability to perceive and depict this “half of art” is what “the painter of modern

life” has, and what the “painter of the eternal” has not. In distinguishing between the two, Baudelaire associates the former explicitly with the flaneur.

Observer, philosopher, *flaneur*-- call him what you will; but whatever words you use in trying to define this kind of artist, you will certainly be led to bestow upon him some adjective which you could not apply to the painter of the eternal, or at least more lasting things, of heroic or religious subjects. Sometimes he is a poet; more often he comes closer to the novelist or the moralist; he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains. (4-5)

In linking this figure with the flaneur, though, Baudelaire is careful to differentiate the artist from the dilettante, by very much the same process as Ferguson has noted in earlier flaneuristic texts. In describing Monsieur G. (Baudelaire’s transparent pseudonym for Constantin Guys, whom he regarded as the prototypical “painter of the passing moment”), Baudelaire maintains that

this solitary, gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert... has an aim loftier than that of a *mere flaneur* [emphasis mine], an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of a circumstance.... He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory. (12)

The “mere flaneur” belongs to the “vast majority” Ferguson calls the “ordinary flaneurs... given to random speculations and ‘silly conjectures,’” the “gapers” or *badauds*; he is not the artist who functions as an alembic, generating a precipitate of “poetry” from the mass

of “history,” eternal truth from fugitive fashion. For the true flaneur, “the external world is reborn upon his paper, natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator. The phantasmagoria has been distilled from nature”(12). The flaneuristic process of valuing, observing and analyzing this “phantasmagoria” of modern life is the methodology by which one achieves insight into this “half of beauty.” And Baudelaire associates this methodology explicitly with fundamental physiognomical principles, stating that “the perpetual correlation between what is called the ‘soul’ and what is called the ‘body’ explains quite clearly how everything that is ‘material’, or in other words an emanation of the ‘spiritual’, mirrors, and will always mirror, the spiritual reality from which it derives”(14).

Besides his fundamentally artistic nature and function, Baudelaire’s “true” flaneur is also one who relishes the city, perhaps not so much for its own intrinsic character as for its condensed experience of life, “crowded” in terms of space and population, but more generally of external stimuli.

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds and water of the fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world-- such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those

independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.... Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive. (9-10)

As the "passionate spectator," the "perfect flaneur" observes, responds to, interprets and artistically reproduces "the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life." It is the density of the urban experience which allows him this perspective on human existence, the crowning glory and chief interest for "the lover of universal life."

Here,

he goes out and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty. He marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city-- landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun. He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed-- in a word, he delights in universal life. (11)

However, while Baudelaire's "perfect flaneur" devours the pageant of life, he seems at first to do so with ambivalence and reserve. As both a spectator and a "prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito," he desires "to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world." Whether this represents an attempt to disappear, to lose his subjective persona or "ego," or in fact to become part of the spectacle (a visible flaneur to be "read" along with all the other elements of life on a city street) or both, one recognizes the ambivalence and social aloofness familiar in the flaneur. The temptation here is to associate the flaneur with the dandy; indeed, Baudelaire indicates that while he "was reluctant to describe him [Guys] as an artist pure and simple... [he] might perhaps call him a dandy, and... should have several good reasons for that"(8). Yet it is precisely this emotional detachment, Baudelaire argues, that distinguishes the dandy from the genuine "painter of modern life": "the dandy aspires to insensitivity, and it is in this that Monsieur G., dominated as he is by an insatiable passion-- for seeing and feeling-- parts company decisively with dandyism.... The dandy is *blasé*, or pretends to be so, for reasons of policy and caste. Monsieur G. has a horror of *blasé* people..."(8-9).

In fact, Baudelaire associates the flaneur with the dandy not because of any affinity in emotional detachment, but because of a similarity in their aesthetic and intellectual stances. For Baudelaire, "the word 'dandy' implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of the entire moral mechanism of this world"(8). Dandies derive their perceived aloofness from a belief in an aristocracy that is not only social but artistic:

Whether these men are nicknamed *exquisites*, *incroyables*, *beaux*, *lions* or *dandies*, they all spring from the same womb; they all partake of the same characteristic quality of opposition and revolt; they are all representatives of what is finest in human pride, of that compelling need, alas only too rare today, of combating and destroying triviality. It is from this that the dandies obtain that haughty exclusiveness, provocative in its very coldness. (28)

This coldness to Baudelaire indicates not a lack of passion, but a willed and deliberate refusal to express what in reality amounts to an almost supernatural passion. It is a coldness “which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; you might call it a latent fire which hints at itself, and which could, but chooses not to burst into flame”(28-29). Clearly, Baudelaire reveals here his own elitism. But more importantly for this study, he associates both the dandy and the flaneur with the self-conscious (if only fleeting) preservation of artistic values (with)in the ephemerality of mass culture and against the “rising tide” of democracy “which invades and levels everything... daily overwhelming these last representatives of human pride and pouring floods of oblivion upon the footprints of these stupendous warriors”(29). Baudelaire’s flaneur is emphatically tragic, and his dandyism “is the last spark of heroism amid decadence,” “a sunset; like the declining daystar, it is glorious, without heat and full of melancholy”(28-29).

The paean Baudelaire raises to the aristocrat-artist-flaneur partakes of the same tone with which he praises Poe, linking him to the flaneur even as he bemoans the fate of “the most powerful pen of our age” in American capitalist society. In “The Painter of

Modern Life,” Baudelaire implicitly links the narrator of Poe’s tale “The Man of the Crowd” to the flaneur by noting their mutual characteristics of keen curiosity, preternatural perception, and seemingly paradoxical control of, and intoxication in, their environment. Baudelaire identifies this narrator as a convalescent, “lately returned from the valley of the shadow of death... rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life; as he has been on the brink of total oblivion, he remembers, and fervently desires to remember, everything.... Curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible passion!”(7).

Baudelaire then draws parallels between the convalescent and the child, each of whom is capable of “keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial,” each of whom “sees everything in a state of newness”(7-8). Each is then described as “always *drunk*,” and this drunkenness likened to “inspiration,” most closely approximating for Baudelaire “the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour.” This “inspiration” is further associated to “convulsion”; “every sublime thought is accompanied by a more or less violent nervous shock which has its repercussion in the very core of the brain”(8). The narrator of Poe’s story, as an example of the “painter of the passing moment,” shares with the child, the convalescent and the drunk, qualities of sensitivity and openness to external sensations. The “man of genius” must therefore be a “man of nerves,” with an important caveat: “the man of genius has sound nerves, while those of the child are weak. With the one, Reason has taken up a considerable position; with the other, Sensibility is almost the whole being. But genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood recovered* at will...”(8). This dialectic between Reason and Sensibility, between intellectual mastery and sensory intoxication, will be a crucial element in the

discussion of Poe as flaneur in later chapters, as will Baudelaire's delineation of the flaneur as artist, as an "ego a-thirst for the non-ego," as distiller of the eternal from the ephemeral.

Baudelaire's version of the flaneur played an important role in the development of Walter Benjamin's ideas, as articulated in his essay "The Flaneur," its revised version "On some motifs in Baudelaire," and his précis for the "arcades" project, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century." Benjamin ends another essay, called "The Boheme," by connecting Baudelaire's flaneur to journalism and the literary marketplace: "Baudelaire knew what the true situation of the man of letters was: he goes to the marketplace as a flaneur, supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer"(35). In the beginning of "The Flaneur," he expands upon this connection: "Once a writer had entered the marketplace, he looked around as in a diorama. A special literary genre has preserved his first attempts at orienting himself. It is a panorama literature"(36). Benjamin notes the flaneuristic purpose of these "modest-looking, paperbound, pocket-size volumes called 'physiologies'": they "investigated types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the marketplace"(36). While these early physiologies have a "leisurely quality" that "fits the style of the flaneur who goes botanizing on asphalt," Benjamin asserts that they constituted "a basically petty-bourgeois genre," and that "nowhere did these physiologies break through the most limited horizon"(36). He considers them "socially dubious" because they were uniformly "harmless and of perfect bonhomie," although they "helped fashion the phantasmagoria of Parisian life in their own way"(36). Their function as a form of social control was comforting, but "their method could not get

them very far”(37). In their approach,

they went back to the physiognomists of the eighteenth century, although they had little to do with the more solid endeavors of the latter. In Lavater or in Gall there was, next to the speculative and visionary, genuine empiricism. The physiologies lived on the credit of this empiricism without adding anything of their own. They assured people that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by. (39)

The physiologies waned in popularity, reflecting perhaps increasing doubts as to man’s ability to control the metropolis and the masses in the nineteenth century. Benjamin certainly implies as much when he analyzes an important shift in the flaneur’s method and purpose, as “the flaneur is... turned into an unwilling detective”:

[T]he soothing little remedies which the physiologists offered for sale were soon *passé*. On the other hand, the literature which concerned itself with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life was to have a great future. This literature, too, dealt with the masses, but its method was different from that of the physiologies. It cared little about the definition of types; rather, it investigated the functions which are peculiar to masses in a big city.... Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is at the origin of the detective story. (40)

Benjamin argues that “the original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd”(43). In other words, the density of the urban population afforded social deviants (and the bourgeoisie) the possibility of eluding scrutiny and/or capture by “blending in” with the crowd.⁵ The flaneur’s newfound employment in combating this anonymity had mixed effects on him. On one hand, the transformation of flaneur to detective “does him a lot of good socially, for it accredits his idleness. He only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city”(40-41). And there seems to be no end of material with which he may work: “no matter what trail the flaneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime”(41). However, Benjamin suggests that the ascent of the detective also signals the demise of the flaneur in his “pure” state. The productive place in society now enjoyed by the flaneur-turned-detective represents a much greater degree of assimilation into a utilitarian society that he had formerly resisted, at least in part. If Baudelaire’s flaneur was “a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito,” the rise of the detective’s popularity reflects society’s uneasiness regarding such a figure, and the impact of societal pressures to mitigate this elusiveness: “the detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person’s incognito had been accomplished. Since then the end of efforts to capture a man in his speech and actions has not been in sight”(48).

Such broad-scale societal attempts to “conquer the incognito” reflect the

continuing tension between public and private in the social contract. And for Benjamin, the forces of commodification and capitalism play a substantial part in sustaining this tension. The fragmentation of the worker's psyche to which Marx pointed, brought on by the laborer's alienation from his own labor, is mirrored in the spatial split between "public" places of business and "private" interiors that become shrines to the art of collection.

For the private person, living space becomes, for the first time, antithetical to the place of work. The former is constituted by the interior; the office is its complement. The private person who squares his accounts with reality in his office demands that the interior be maintained in his illusions. This need is all the more pressing since he has no intention of extending his commercial considerations into social ones. In shaping his private environment he represses both. From this spring the phantasmagorias of the interior. For the private individual the private environment represents the universe. In it he gathers remote places and the past. His drawing room is a box in the world theater. ("Paris" 154).

But if the private collector in his interior hopes to transcend the commodification of the marketplace, or to escape "the efforts to capture a man in his speech and actions," Benjamin indicates such hopes are delusory. The collector, whose role is that of "obliterating the commodity-like character of things through his ownership of them... merely confers connoisseur value on them, instead of intrinsic value"(155). Likewise, in adorning his private interior with his collection, he establishes a trail by which he may be

traced, by none other than the public sphere's latest recruit: the flaneur-turned-detective, who now performs a "physiognomy of the interior":

The interior is not only the universe but also the etui of the private person. To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into being. His "philosophy of furniture," along with his detective novellas, shows Poe to be the first physiognomist of the interior. The criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie. (155-156)

For Benjamin, it is no accident that the height of bourgeois collection, with its hollow emphasis on private property, coincides with the rise of a literary genre concerned with the interior and the clues it provides about its inhabitants' criminal tendencies. In the following excerpt from "One Way Street," Benjamin suggests the appropriateness, even the inevitability of murder, among the "soulless" trappings of the nineteenth century apartment. His weaving of merchandise and murder is fascinating, and worth reproducing in full:

MANORIALY FURNISHED TEN-ROOM APARTMENT

The furniture style of the second half of the nineteenth century has received its only adequate description, and analysis, in a certain type of detective novel at the

dynamic center of which stands the horror of apartments. The arrangement of the furniture is at the same time the site plan of deadly traps, and the suite of rooms prescribes the fleeing victim's path. That this kind of detective novel begins with Poe-- at a time when such accommodations hardly yet existed-- is no counterargument. For without exception the great writers perform their combinations in a world that comes after them.... The bourgeois interior of the 1860's to the 1890's, with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where palms stand, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames, fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxuriance of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body. Far more interesting than the Oriental landscapes in detective novels is that rank Orient inhabiting their interiors: the Persian carpet and the ottoman, the hanging lamp and the genuine Caucasian dagger. Behind the heavy, gathered Khilim tapestries the master of the house has orgies with his share certificates, feels himself the Eastern merchant, the indolent pasha in the caravanserai of otiose enchantment, until that dagger in its silver sling above the divan puts an end, one fine afternoon, to his siesta and himself. This character of the bourgeois apartment, tremulously awaiting the nameless murderer like a lascivious old lady her gallant, has been penetrated by a number of authors who, as writers of "detective stories"-- and perhaps also because in their works part of the bourgeois pandemonium is exhibited-- have been denied the reputation they deserve. (64-5)

While the rise in popularity of the detective signaled his appropriation by forces of rationalization and “official” society, to Benjamin’s thinking, it did not spell the immediate demise of the flaneur proper. Benjamin continues to discuss the Parisian flaneur, especially in terms of his commodified environment, as a marginal figure, “still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has engulfed him; in neither is he at home”(“Paris” 156). Benjamin’s version of the flaneur differs from those of other theorists in this explicit and emphatic association of the flaneur with commodification in the nineteenth century. The flaneurs that Dana Brand depicts, attempting to categorize and sanitize urban experience in the panoramic surveys and Theophrastian character books, or to entertain while warning the reader of “coney-catchers,” or to subvert the fantasy of social control in the urban carnevalesques, do not deal specifically with forces of commodification per se. Baudelaire’s flaneur does concern himself with fashion and the ephemeral, and by extension the packaged, marketable product accessible to being viewed by the crowd; one can see how Benjamin finds in Baudelaire the version of the flaneur most adaptable to his own purposes. But in Benjamin’s analysis, the flaneur comes to be defined in terms of the commodity. Benjamin argues in “The Flaneur” that “the intoxication to which the flaneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers”(55).⁶ The flaneur immerses himself in the crowd from a deep-seated yearning for the crowd, a desire to become one with it, an “ego a-thirst for the non-ego,” as Baudelaire would have it.

The flaneur’s position at the margins of the city and the bourgeoisie, fully

assimilated by neither, places him at an important historical moment in the development of the forces of production and of class struggle, according to Benjamin. At this moment, the flaneur notes the “approaching desolation of city life” but his mode of life still surrounds the city “with a propitiatory luster.” Associated with the privileged classes, with ties to the socio-economic leisure of the aristocracy, the flaneur empathizes aesthetically with the crowd, but has attempted to remain socially and economically “outside” it. However, he cannot help but recognize that his relationship to the market, to the city, and to society is destined to become one of complicity. Likewise, he foresees both the impending destruction inherent in the urban capitalist mechanism, as well as the dissolution of his own class. This class “could not spurn empathizing with commodities. It had to enjoy this identification with all the pleasure and the uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its own destiny as a class. Finally, it had to approach this destiny with a sensitivity that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods”(59). The flaneur allows himself to be deceived, at least in part, by enjoying the phantasmagoria of the crowd:

In the attitude of someone with this kind of enjoyment he let the spectacle of the crowd act upon him. The deepest fascination of this spectacle lay in the fact that as it intoxicated him it did not blind him to the horrible social reality. He remained conscious of it, though only in the way in which intoxicated people are ‘still’ aware of reality.... For the flaneur there is a veil over this picture. This veil is the mass; it billows in ‘the twisting folds of the old metropolises.’ Because of it, horrors have an enchanting effect upon him. Only when this veil tears and

reveals to the flaneur 'one of the populous squares... which are empty during street fighting' does he, too, get an unobstructed view of the big city. (59-60) ⁷

While scholars offer different interpretations of the flaneur and of Benjamin's construction of him, most agree that the demise of the figure (and his artistic usefulness) is precipitated when he can no longer maintain his liminality, and remain both "inside" and "outside" the city and society. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson sees the flaneur's fall in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a result of his transformation from independent observer to passive consumer.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Paris becomes ever more profoundly the site of commodification.... [C]ommodification looms larger than ever before and... flanerie is unalterably unproductive. The flaneur's disregard of the commercial has itself become utopian. This disdain puts him outside the bourgeois pale, a deviant within the larger utilitarian model of society. Not even the artist-- especially not the artist-- can keep the commercial at a safe distance. (33-34)

If the flaneur cannot remain objective and therefore productive, he must inevitably become a consumer, a "shopper" who has been absorbed by his commodity culture. But, as Ferguson points out, shopping

severely undermines the posture of independence that affords the flaneur his occupation and his *raison d'être*. The intense engagement of the shopper in the urban scene, the integration into the market and the consequent inability to maintain the requisite distance, preclude the neutrality and objectivity that the

flaneur cultivates so assiduously. The buyer and the seller, the female shopper and the man of business, are equally unfit for flanerier, and by extension, equally unfit for art.... Urban stories, it is clear, can only be told by those immune to the stress and the seductions of the city, who can turn those seductions to good account, that is, into a text that will exercise its own seductions. (27-28)

By the 1880s, Ferguson argues, the flaneur had been reduced to the consumer, a reconstruction that “effectively ends the flaneur’s connection with creativity. For, however ambiguous the position of Baudelaire’s flaneur, caught between creativity and commodification, he remains, by definition and impediments notwithstanding, an artist, in other words, a producer. Not so the Parisian flaneur...”(35).

The flaneur’s most pressing task in maintaining a socially or artistically “productive” role is to remain within the consumer society and yet unassimilated by it. In “Fancy footwork: Walter Benjamin’s notes on flanerier,” Rob Shields traces the difficulties of being both empathetic and objective during the process of flaneuristic perception:

Benjamin draws a close link between flanerier, imagination, and dreaming. This process takes place first via a reconstruction of the situation from collecting the evidence or ‘traces’ of social relations in commodities. However, a more ambiguous process of consumption and self-implication is also involved. An interpretive attempt to grasp the totality of social relations through a *verstehen*-like experiencing of the ‘aura’ of the scene of commodity consumption in the arcades requires the flaneur to become part of the process of commodity exchange

as a 'participant observer.' In doing so, the flaneur, like the prostitute, risks being swallowed up by the goods in the stores and becoming little more than a commodity or mannequin.... The flaneur's guardedness responds to the problem of the danger new understandings carry for the monadic subject who risks being changed by them. How to gain knowledge yet remain unchanged; how to witness, yet remain unmoved? (75-76)

As I shall demonstrate throughout this study, Shields's pointed questions articulate one of the primary concerns in Poe's flaneuristic readings of individual, crowd, city and cosmos.

But while the flaneur faced extraordinary challenges to his artistic and analytic perspective, the passing away of that perspective was not nearly as inevitable as some theorists make it out to be. For example, Keith Tester underscores Benjamin's apparent pessimism as regards the flaneur's ability to survive. He offers an interpretation of Benjamin's flaneur that particularly emphasizes the latter's self-delusion, dislocatedness, and the inevitability of his downfall:

Benjamin proposes that the hollowness of the commodity form and, indeed, the hollowness of egoistic individuals of capitalism is reflected in the flaneur. Flanerie is a desperate attempt to fill the emptiness even though it is actually a final resignation to it.... The flaneur becomes little more than a seeker after mystery from banality. The flaneur is a passive spectator who is as duped by the spectacle of the public as the consumer who is duped by the glittering promises of consumerism. The flanerie which features in the work of Benjamin is soul-less and truly empty, just like the commodity forms it represents. It is perhaps not

surprising that actually Benjamin's comments on flânerie are not without a sneer.

(13-14)

Benjamin might indeed have denied any lasting value to the earlier flâneur (who attempted to taxonomize character types via the physiologies) and the flâneur in decline (the consumer and shopper no longer detached from his commodified culture). The flâneur in these first and last stages accomplished little in the development of class struggle and the rise of the proletariat, and it is according to these achievements (or lack thereof) that Benjamin (de)values the flâneur to a great extent. However, to say that Benjamin "sneered" at the idea of the flâneur per se is to ignore the fact that the flâneur helped determine Benjamin's own practice of "reading" the traces of social relations in the material reality of the nineteenth century. If so, this would suggest that despite the limited utility of the flâneur in Marxist historical analysis, Benjamin perceived (perhaps to a greater degree than he himself knew) the hidden value of the flâneur's physiognomic approach to interpreting his surroundings.

I am by no means the first to make this assertion. David Frisby, in his essay "The flâneur in social theory," argues that Benjamin and the flâneur exerted a reciprocal influence on each other:

The fundamental ambiguity of the figure of the flâneur, sometimes verging on that of the mere stroller, at other times elevated to that of the detective, to the decipherer of urban and visual texts, indeed to the figure of Benjamin himself, was amplified by Benjamin's own analysis....[T]he flâneur functions, for Benjamin, not merely as a historical figure in the urban context, but rather also as

illumination of his methodology. In this sense, the flaneur/detective is a central, often metaphorical figure that Benjamin employs to illuminate his own activity and method in the Arcades Project.... (82)

If, as suggested by Benjamin, the mutation of the flaneur into the detective constitutes one potentially “productive” direction for his seemingly indolent energies, another form of his productivity lies in his production of texts:

Flanerie, in other words, can be associated with a form of looking, observing (of people, social types, social contexts and constellations), a form of reading the city and its population (its spatial images, its architecture, its human configurations), and a form of reading written texts (in Benjamin’s case both of the city and the nineteenth century...). The flaneur, and the activity of flanerie, is also associated in Benjamin’s work not merely with observation and reading but also with production-- the production of distinctive kinds of texts. The flaneur may therefore not merely be an observer or even a decipherer, the flaneur can also be a producer, a producer of literary texts.... (Frisby 82-83)

The truth of this statement is born out by even a brief examination of Benjamin’s own work. For instance, “One-Way Street,” written with Asja Lascis, takes as its primary structural and metaphorical device the idea of an observer wandering the streets, reading signs and notices, remarking in passing their significance. And in “A Berlin Chronicle,” he explicitly acknowledges both the thematic and biographical significance of flanerie in his life and works:

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires

ignorance-- nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city-- as one loses oneself in a forest-- that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, sign-boards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center. Paris taught me this art of straying.... The city, as it disclosed itself to me... was a maze not only of paths but also of tunnels. I cannot think of the underworld of the Metro and the North-South line opening their hundreds of shafts all over the city, without recalling my endless flanerics. (8-9)

And it is to his early wanderings through Berlin with his mother, that Benjamin traces both his ability to lose himself in the city, and the detached flaneuristic gaze with which he “consumes” the city at one remove. He experiences first a “period of impotence before the city,” due to “a very poor sense of direction,” and “the dreamy recalcitrance” he develops in resistance to his mother’s practicality; “but,” he writes, “to this resistance in turn is due who knows how much that underlies my present intercourse with the city’s streets. Above all, a gaze that appears to see not a third of what it takes in”(3-4).

Throughout his travel writing, Benjamin turns this gaze on major metropolises such as Berlin, Moscow, Naples, and Marseilles. Not content simply to describe the scene before him, Benjamin’s aim is to provide a “descriptive analysis,” as he does in this striking passage from “Moscow”:

... Moscow shops are inviting; they have something of the tavern about them.

The shop signs point at right angles into the street, as otherwise only old inn signs

do, or golden barbers' basins, or a top hat before a hatter's. Also, the last charming, unspoiled motifs that remain are most likely to be found here. Shoes falling out of a basket; a Pomeranian running away with a sandal in his mouth. Pendants before the entrance of a Turkish kitchen: gentlemen, each with a fez adorning his head and each at his own little table. Catering to a primitive taste, advertising is still tied to narrative, example, or anecdote. In contrast, the Western advertisement convinces first and foremost by the expense of which it shows the firm capable. Here almost every ad also specifies the commodity in question. The grand, showy device is alien to commerce. The city, so inventive in abbreviations of all kinds, does not yet possess the simplest-- brand names. Often Moscow's evening sky glows in frightening blue: one has unwittingly looked at it through one of the gigantic pairs of blue spectacles that project from opticians' shops like signposts. From the gateways, on the frames of front doors, in black, blue, yellow, and red letters of varying sizes-- as an arrow, a picture of boots, or freshly-ironed washing, a worn step or a solid staircase-- a silently determined, contentious life accosts the passer-by. One must ride through the streets on a streetcar to perceive how this struggle is continued upward through the various stories, finally to reach its decisive phase on the roof. That height only the strongest, youngest slogans and signs attain. Only from an airplane does one have a view of the industrial elite of the city, the film and automobile industries. Mostly, however, the roofs of Moscow are a lifeless wasteland, having neither the dazzling electric signs of Berlin, nor the forest of chimneys of Paris, nor the sunny

solitude of the rooftops of great cities in the South. (121-2)

Benjamin enacts here a flânerie of the city that attempts to read not beauty or individual character, but the presence of sociological and economic forces in urban ephemera, in details so familiar as to become barely noticeable, in architectural structures taken for granted. In so doing, he is performing the flâneur's primary activity: physiognomical interpretation, only applied not to human faces, but to the "face" of the metropolis.⁸

In a similar vein, Benjamin examines the way social class determines the form and function of urban architecture in "Marseilles":

Walls. Admirable, the discipline to which they are subject in this city. The better ones, in the center, wear livery and are in the pay of the ruling class. They are covered with gaudy patterns and have sold their whole length many hundreds of times to the latest brand of aperitif, to department stores, to the "Chocolat Menier," of Dolores del Rio. In the poorer quarters they are politically mobilized and post their spacious red letters as the forerunners of the red guards in front of the dockyards and arsenals. (135)

And in "Moscow" he detects the influence of Bolshevism in the nature of the Muscovian apartment's interior:

Bolshevism has abolished private life. The bureaucracy, political activity, the press are so powerful that no time remains for interests that do not converge with them. Nor any space. Apartments that earlier accommodated single families in their five to eight rooms now often lodge eight.... Even in the lobby one can encounter beds. Indoors one only camps, and usually the scanty inventory is only

a residue of petit-bourgeois possessions that have a far more depressing effect because the room is so sparsely furnished. An essential feature of the petit-bourgeois interior, however, was completeness: pictures must cover the walls, cushions the sofa, covers the cushions, ornaments fill the mantelpiece, colored glass the windows. (Such petit-bourgeois rooms are battlefields over which the attack of commodity capital has advanced victoriously; nothing human can flourish there again.) Of all that, only a part here or there has been indiscriminately preserved. Weekly the furniture in the bare rooms is rearranged-- that is the only luxury indulged in with them, and at the same time a radical means of expelling "coziness," along with the melancholy with which it is paid for, from the house. People can bear to exist in it because they are estranged from it by their way of life. Their dwelling place is the office, the club, the street. (108-109)

Clearly, Benjamin has appropriated the flaneur's physiognomic strategies for the purpose of discerning the "hidden" and yet visible traces of commodification and its effects in the cultural artefacts of his own time, as he did with those of the nineteenth century in "Paris." And if David Frisby is correct in arguing that "the flaneur as author/producer also applies to Benjamin himself," then one must also agree that "such an interpretation thereby challenges the largely negative interpretation of the flaneur which confines this figure to that of seeing, observing, and, in general, being confined to a mere spectator"(91).

Dana Brand, the only scholar to have addressed Poe's connection to the flaneur in detail, offers such an interpretation of this figure, and suggests that for Poe, the flaneur

had limited usefulness. Brand argues that the presence of the illegible face of the wanderer in “The Man of the Crowd” represents Poe’s “critique of the interpretive strategies of the flaneur”(89), that “ultimately, ‘The Man of the Crowd’ suggests that the urban crowd cannot be reduced to comfortable transparency”(88). For Brand, Poe’s tale “implies that an urban observer is needed who can read and in some sense master what the flaneur cannot”(89). Brand maintains that in Poe’s detective Dupin, the author created that “urban interpreter... who could provide a more credible and complex assurance of urban legibility than could be found in the literature of the flaneur”(90). The implication here is that the detective represents a figure distinctly different from the flaneur, and therefore more capable to observe and interpret modern urban phenomena. But Brand’s arguments are not wholly convincing, for a number of reasons. For one thing, Brand’s thesis does not give fair consideration to the fact that the wanderer’s is *one* face amidst a sea of faces that the narrator *has already* read physiognomically. And in fact, the narrator is able to read various characteristics in that face, though only partially. To suggest that by presenting one illegible face Poe offers ignores this highly successful flanerie.

Through much of his argument, Brand emphasizes the differences between the detective and the flaneur; I feel that in Poe’s formulation the two are closely aligned in characteristics and methodology. For instance, Poe’s Dupin shares the flaneur’s association with wealth and aristocracy: “This young gentleman was of an excellent—indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to

bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes”(400). This association allows Dupin time and resources to observe the city and its inhabitants at his leisure, despite the fact that his is an aristocracy in decline; his indolence as regards “productive” and “socially valuable” labor is also evident.⁹ Dupin also exhibits the flaneur’s traditional isolation and detachment from society, though he consents to the narrator’s accompaniment:

I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.... Our seclusion was perfect. We admitted no visitors.... We existed within ourselves alone. (400-1)

Finally, Dupin and the narrator engage in the flaneur’s traditional behavior of sauntering, after the “advent of true Darkness,” when they “sallied forth into the streets, arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford”(401). Indeed, Dupin admits, “observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity”(403), and he boasts to the narrator of his flaneuristic skills, saying that “most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms”(402).

For these reasons, Brand’s argument for Poe’s “new urban interpreter” is not entirely convincing. In fact, it is contradictory: after forging an argument to distinguish the detective from the flaneur, Brand states that Dupin “shares... many of the objectives

and functions of his predecessor. He makes it possible, first of all, to consume the city as a spectacle.... [H]e is therefore, like the flaneur, a reassuring figure”(102). In the end, Brand comes full circle, arguing that “in spite of their differences, the detective is not a contradiction of the flaneur so much as a dialectical adaptation of him,” an adaptation better suited to “the changing intellectual and aesthetic expectations of his audience”(105). It is in Brand’s discussion of the *affinities* between the flaneur and the detective that is more compelling, though it undermines his original argument. The narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” and Dupin are of one spirit, in that both attempt to read “traces” and interpret the physiognomy of human faces, behavior and living spaces. Dupin’s capabilities as a “metareader” of interpretations of reality represent a logical extension of the physiognomic abilities of the flaneur.

Brand also maintains (again, with limited effectiveness) that Poe himself did not subscribe to the principles and methodology espoused by Dupin. He argues that “Poe understood the method of the detective story to be a hoax, an ‘air of method,’ just as the flaneurs who wrote for magazines presumably did not believe that they could actually read a person’s entire history at a glance”(104). Brand supports this point by quoting a letter from Poe to Philip Pendleton Cooke, in which Poe asserts that readers overestimate the tales of ratiocination and “think them more ingenious than they are”; Poe asks, “where is the ingenuity of unraveling a web which you yourself (the author) have woven for the express purpose of unravelling?”(qtd. in Brand 104). Brand confuses the ingenuity of the *detective’s* method and the ingenuity of the *writer’s* artistic *representation* of that method. If the readers think Poe ingenious in “solving” his own

mystery through Dupin, they are indeed fatuous; however, this does not mean Poe found Dupin's actual flaneuristic method to be a hoax.

In fact, Brand dismisses a quote from another Poe letter, to the editor of the *Boston Notion*, in which Poe clearly suggests his hope that Dupin's approach will be emulated in actual investigations: "My main object [in writing "Marie Roget"]... as you will readily understand, is an analysis of the true principles which should direct inquiry in similar cases"(qtd. in Brand 103-104). Brand writes, "The fact that Poe made these claims in order to sell his story should not, of course, be taken as evidence that he believed them. It seems extremely unlikely that an author who was so consistently suspicious of all systematic penetrations of the impenetrable would have been likely to have seriously believed in the 'method' of Auguste Dupin"(104). Certainly, the critical reader of Poe's work must always be aware that he was continually "selling" himself, and made "no apologies about producing 'excitement' by means of 'gross and violent stimulants'"(Brand 93). But while Poe was consistently suspicious of such systems of "penetration," he was also constantly searching for them, and attempting to get his readers to imagine the possibility of such intuitive insight. It can even be argued that in negotiating the literary marketplace in this equivocal way, Poe was in fact anticipating Benjamin's delineation of the prototypical flaneur: the "man of letters" who "goes to the marketplace as a flaneur, supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer." Poe's liminal relation to that "marketplace," the periodical publishing industry of his day and its literary commodities is the subject of the following chapter.

Clearly, the flaneur, like so many of Poe's own fictional creations, has refused to

die or stay buried, despite so many doubts regarding his viability. The flaneur's insistent recurrence in our intellectual topography is perhaps the best intuitive indication of his continuing validity and usefulness for understanding the cultural products of modernity. And yet, as Anke Gleber suggests at the beginning of her study of the flaneur in the literature and film of the Weimar Republic, "the phenomenon of flanerie has long been overlooked in the history of modern perception offered by the chroniclers of literary and cultural history. It therefore remains to be seen how the various impulses of flanerie, as a privileged mode of perceiving modernity and its many realities, have always been present in various forms..."(4). This study is dedicated to precisely that project, demonstrating how the flaneur's particular perspective helped inform Poe's interaction with the nineteenth-century magazine publishing milieu as well as his fictional and philosophical concerns, even before it was addressed by Baudelaire and Benjamin.

Chapter Two: Neither In Nor Out of the Market

In his essay “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” Walter Benjamin asserts that

[e]very expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language.... It is possible to talk about a language of music and of sculpture, about a language of justice that has nothing directly to do with those in which German or English legal judgements are couched, about a language of technology that is not the specialized language of technicians. Language in such a context means the tendency inherent in the subjects concerned— technology, art, justice, or religion— toward the communication of mental meanings. To sum up: all communication of mental meanings is language, communication in words being only a particular case of human language and of the justice, poetry, or whatever underlying it or founded on it.... There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings. (314)

Such language, according to Benjamin, need not be verbal; it can just as easily be visual. In “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Benjamin emphasizes the particularly visual nature of Paris at the time, the ascendancy of spectacle as an orienting perspective on the world. He cites Balzac’s observation that “the great poem of display chants its many-colored strophes from the Madeleine to the Porte-Saint-Denis” (qtd. in Benjamin

146). In “The Flaneur,” Benjamin finds support for this idea in Eduard Fuchs’ discussion of “the colossal parade of bourgeois life which... began in France.... Everything passed in review.... Days of celebration and days of mourning, work and play, conjugal customs and bachelors’ practices, the family, the home, children, school, society, the theatre, types, professions”(qtd. in Benjamin 36).

Benjamin finds this impulse to display integrally linked to the production of commodities in a capitalist economy, and notes manifestations of this tendency in diverse aspects of nineteenth-century Parisian culture. He points to developments in architectural technology (specifically, in the use of glass and iron) in the *magasins de nouveauté* and in the arcades as complicit in the display and “enthronement of merchandise” (“Paris” 152). “The arcades,” he points out, “are a center of trade in luxury goods. In their fittings art is brought in to the service of commerce” (146). Likewise, “[a]s architecture begins to outgrow art in the use of iron construction, so does painting in the panoramas”(149). These displays, intended to create an easily-consumed and “deceptively lifelike” visual image of a landscape, are mirrored by the *feuilletons* and *physiologies*, forms of a “panoramic literature” that attempts to transform people and sights of the urban marketplace into neatly-packaged “types.” Furthermore, the world exhibitions, he argues, “are the sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish. ‘Europe is on the move to look at merchandise,’ said Taine in 1855” (151). These exhibitions “glorify the exchange value of commodities. They create a framework in which commodities’ intrinsic value is eclipsed”(152). This value does not disappear once the commodity’s seduction is consummated in a purchase; the commodity takes on “connoisseur value” when displayed

in the owner's private interior, which becomes for Benjamin "the retreat of art"(155). Thus the arcades, the panoramas, the *magasins*, the world exhibitions, the urban crowd and the private interior were all intimately connected to the commodity. They also provided the external conditions that empowered the existence and methodology of the flaneur. The flaneur's task is to perceive and interpret the "languages" that are being "spoken" by the disparate elements surrounding him-- architecture, urban design, faces in the crowd, interior decoration, etc.

If the nineteenth century marked capitalism's coming-of-age for Benjamin, it was also the time when periodical publication established a market of its own in America. According to Frank Luther Mott,

[i]n the years immediately following 1825 there was an extraordinary outburst of magazine activity which paralleled the expansion in many other lines of development; this was particularly noticeable among the weekly literary papers. "This is the golden age of periodicals!" exclaimed one magazine in 1831; and though some later periods were to be far more golden, these years did bring forth a flowering of periodical publications which seemed stupendous at the time and is still notable.... As the years went on there was no diminution in this publishing exuberance, and toward the end of the period we find C.F. Briggs saying in his *Broadway Journal* that "the whole tendency of the age is magazineward".... (340-341).

The relationship between flanerie and periodical publication is an intimate one. Whether one locates the flaneur's origins in the "panoramic" physiologies of France in the 1830s,

as Benjamin does, or in the work of Addison and Steele (and before) as Dana Brand has argued, the literary flaneur has almost always found his voice in periodicals. In fact, it is my contention that as a magazinist, Poe was working within a medium that itself is inherently flaneuristic in its approach to perceiving reality, and in the ways it presents that reality-- and itself as an object-- to a reader.

In this chapter, I shall examine how magazines functioned as both commodities and art-products in this “culture of display,” how they “spoke” their own “language,” and what it was they “said.” The physical nature of commodities in general will be discussed, followed by a consideration of nineteenth-century periodicals, first in their material form and then in their content. This will preface a discussion of Poe as a magazine writer attempting to negotiate the gravitational pull of economic forces in publishing during the nineteenth century, working within this system and yet repulsed by it, the prototypical flaneur on the threshold, “neither in nor out” of the literary market economy.

Margaret Beetham’s suggestions for developing a theory of the periodical help to elucidate how the magazine performs negotiations similar to those of the flaneur, and like the flaneur thus remains liminal vis a vis traditional aesthetic codes and the literary marketplace. In an article titled “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre,” Beetham proposes that the magazine form’s “characteristic mode” is a “balance of closure against openness”(30). The periodical is “open” and resists formal closure in that it is a serial entity, coming out over time; its boundaries are fluid, with various articles or items referring to or continuing earlier ones; it contains a mixture of genres and authorial voices; it encourages readers to construct their own personal readings, rather

than demanding to be read “cover to cover”; it feeds reader response back into the periodical, allowing readers (i.e., consumers) to determine the nature of the commodity. On the other hand, the periodical is “closed” insofar as it has a deep structure that is connected with other time-regulating structures (the Sunday paper and the designated “day of rest”); each periodical also maintains a particular consistency in tone, form, and construction; each individual number of that periodical is self-contained and includes numerous articles that are in themselves “closed”; and each periodical encourages the reader to produce a recognizable and consistent “self” for both its readers and writers (Beetham 26-30).

The “open” features Beetham points out are usually those to which magazine writing’s “ephemeral” status has been attributed; only in the twentieth century has “openness” become generally accepted as a valid artistic approach. (Perhaps the difficulties many scholars experience in theorizing about periodical literature is caused in great part by a residual presence of this reluctance.) Because the periodical comes out over time, and attempts to be timely and topical, it is assumed that old issues have limited value. Because it is composed of a variety of shorter works in different voices and genres, it is relegated to the status of “miscellany” as opposed to the presumably more “finished” and “larger,” more formally unified piece of “sustained” writing. Because it factors into the equation reader response and attitudes, it smacks of “giving the people what they want,” of deliberate marketing and commodification. However, the “closed” aspects that Beetham cites carry with them connotations of more “eternal” and traditional aesthetic attributes. The periodical in connection to deep social structures of time is something to

be read on a regular basis, to return to. The consistency of its editorial stance, its mix of articles, and its constructed reader approximate the unified viewpoint of an author that has crafted a specific work for a clearly delineated reader. And traditional aesthetic demands for formal closure are satisfied on a local level by individual pieces within the magazine, rather than by the magazine as a whole.

Such parallels make clear the striking affinities between the nineteenth-century magazinist and the flaneur depicted by Baudelaire as the “painter of the passing moment,” the artist who finds eternal values of truth and beauty in the ephemeral forms of the present moment. The magazinist is in many respects a flaneur figure, and the magazine is a particularly flaneuristic medium. Michael Wolff’s assertion that “journalism is the verbal equivalent of urbanization” (qtd. in Hughes 120) helps to dramatize how the density and variety of the magazine’s topography mimics the crowding and intensity of experience in a major metropolis. Who but the flaneur, strolling casually and randomly through the *magasin* or “storehouse of ideas,” could effectively negotiate such a literary cityscape? The magazinist observes the display of the world around him in a random and disengaged way, attempting to perceive in its superficial qualities intimations of deeper truth; he then presents the reader with an art-product that attempts to provide the same experience. As these magazine articles jostle each other, clamoring for the reader’s attention, they become in their turn a universe unto themselves, and objects to be observed; the magazine editor likewise serves as a meta-flaneur, an artist/critic who scrutinizes the “physiognomies” provided by other flaneurs. Thus the magazine is both as an object of the flaneur’s gaze and as an advertisement for a flaneuristic perceptivity.

However, this philosophical consideration of the magazine form is incomplete without acknowledging the fundamental effects of capitalism on that form. Beetham argues forcefully for a theorization of the periodical that addresses its role in the marketplace:

Periodicals are commodities or ‘products’. Like other products (shoes, for example), they are produced and marketed by a specialist sector of the economy. Their production depends on developments in technology and on the work of producers both of hand and brain: printers, photographers and artists, writers, editors and publishers as well as advertisers, distributors and so on. The industry needs investors to provide capital in the expectation of profits. In short, the periodical press as we know it developed within capitalism and is impossible to understand unless it is situated within the economic system. (21)

The magazine’s survival depends upon readership and circulation, and nineteenth-century magazines were forced to gauge public tastes and craft a commodity specifically designed to cater to such tastes, often to the detriment of the art-product itself. As Michael Gilmore notes, by the Jacksonian era, “[p]ublishing had become an industry, and the writer a producer of commodities for the literary marketplace”(3-4); more than ever, the American literary artist was forced “to market his ‘spiritual commodities’... to court the common reader to the detriment of his art... to sacrifice one audience, the few (and with it the hope of enduring fame), to the other, the many”(56). Before we consider the nature of the magazine as a commodity, though, it may be helpful to examine the nature of commodities in general, keeping in mind Beetham’s suggestion that “the best way to

begin this process of theorising is to remember that we are dealing with material objects”(22).

The creation of a “product” or “commodity,” the generation of saleable goods to be distributed and sold on a mass scale, carries with it mixed messages regarding not only the product itself but also the values of the society in which it is produced. The more positive implications usually have reference to ideals of utility: the commodity is easy to consume, and packaged specifically with an eye towards this ease of use. It is made readily available through wide distribution and an affordable price. Above all, the commodity must “speak for itself,” in its packaging; it must represent itself to its best advantage by displaying its desirable attributes effectively. The commodity must be an advertisement for itself and facilitate its own sale, with an explicit and persuasive presentation of its own contents and the convenient, versatile and effective use of the product. Nor does the process end here. Inherent in commodity are issues of durability and disposability: how long will it last, and what do I do with it when it’s no longer useful? Often the consumer is willing to tolerate limited durability if a product’s disposability enhances its ease-of-use; for instance, although cloth diapers seem the ecologically sound choice and are clearly of a higher quality, disposable diapers make life much easier. And because manufacturers and our entire economy subsists not on isolated or one-time sales but on repeated sales, the producer must facilitate the renewal of the cycle, the return of the consumer to purchase a new product to replace that which has been discarded.

Equally compelling, though, are the negative implications of the commodity, from

points of view ranging from the naturalist to the Marxist. For many the emphasis on packaging the product signals a diminished sense of the item's value in nature: witness the derogatory use of the term "pre-fabricated," the contrast between press-board or particle-board and "genuine oak" furniture, the "frozen" quality of TV dinners. There may be a sense that while the producers of such a commodity have included all the necessary ingredients, they lack the artistic ability to combine them so as to generate an aesthetically pleasing whole (canned soup vs. "home cooking"). Overall, the consumer may get the impression that the producers have concentrated too much on economic questions, such as cost-effectiveness or marketing strategies, and have lost sight of the original and "best" intention in creating the commodity: the true benefit of the consumer. If this is the case, the display is seen as a transparent ruse, an attempt to entice the consumer with "bells and whistles." The producers may be viewed as greedy and following the dictates of self-interest at the expense of the consumer, manufacturing and distributing for sale an inferior product that either does not satisfy aesthetic demands or is so shoddy that ease-of-use is eclipsed by the need to replace the item frequently.

The complexity hidden within the apparent simplicity of the commodity form is, of course, not a new idea; Marx himself, in *Capital*, illustrates the deceptiveness in the commodity's apparent accessibility:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its

properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than “table-turning” ever was. (81-82).

Marx’s association of the commodity with the grotesque has important resonances, for Benjamin in his discussion of Grandville’s artwork, and for Poe, as shall be demonstrated later in this chapter. To understand the significance of the connection, though, we need to examine the effects of economic forces in the creation of a specific commodity, the periodical, in America during the nineteenth century.

The magazine in nineteenth century America was in the process of transforming from a denser and more ponderous publication devoted almost exclusively to an audience with a greater share of “cultural capital” (to borrow a phrase from Catherine Quoyeser) to a more streamlined and commodified version that could appeal to broader mass markets as well. Mott provides the following excerpt as evidence that magazinists were highly conscious of this trend, as well as its dangers:

“The quarterly reviews have never been popular,” observed Briggs in the

Broadway Journal. He continued: “Not only are they too stilted... but they make a point of discussing only topics which are caviare to the many.... Their subjects get cold before being served up... [they are] out of keeping with the rush of the age.... On the other hand, the lightness of the artillery must not degenerate into popgunnery”(366-367).

In an attempt to keep up with the “rush of the age,” Mott writes, “[t]he magazines of the period ... gave much attention to manners, customs, fads, popular manias, and trends of thinking and feeling among the people”(472). Some magazines were able to maintain their quality while devoting themselves to strictly topical (and largely ephemeral) events; the New York *Mirror*, for instance, in the hands of Nathaniel Parker Willis, was highly successful at offering “comment on the passing interests of the day-- the fads and foibles, the enthusiasms of the people, the great popular interests”(Mott 324). Along with this shift in subject matter came a greater emphasis on the “miscellaneous” format and variety. Willis’s *New Mirror* advertised itself as “Containing Original Papers, Tales of Romance, Sketches of Society, manners, and Everyday Life; Domestic and Foreign Correspondence; Wit and Humor; Fashion and Gossip; the Fine Arts, and Literary, Musical, and Dramatic Criticism; Extracts from New Works; Poetry, Original and Selected; the Spirit of the Public Journals, etc., etc.”(Mott 327).

However, the risks of “popgunnery” were unfortunately all too real. In exchange for greater topicality and accessibility for mass audiences, periodicals often sacrificed the high standards of literary quality demanded by the quarterly reviews, and paid greater

attention to “packaging” and “marketing” rather than “content.” Mott maintains that the editors of the *Family Magazine* in 1835 were essentially correct in lamenting the multitude of

cheap publications under the names of “Libraries,” “Galleries,” and many other equally comprehensive titles.... In the zeal of competition... many stale and useless works were imprudently admitted into some of the publications, and the smallness of the type and bad quality of the paper rendered many of them unsatisfactory and almost worthless. Many of the cheap magazines, also, became satisfied with making up their pages with fragments of ephemeral news, rather than with substantial Knowledge, alleviating their dullness by introducing here and there a worthless tale, and only taking care to impose the trash upon the world with the catch-penny glare of engravings. (365)

Such a shift implies as well a reciprocal relationship between the magazine format and the reading habits of its audience. As Catherine Quoyeser illustrates,

Newspaper and periodical publishing also entailed specific methods and relations of literary consumption. In a variety of ways, the discourse of journalism accommodated the limited cultural capital of less educated readerships. Miscellaneous formats combined utilitarian features (e.g., commercial and political news) with accessible samples of the genteel (e.g., poetry, fiction, and engravings), encouraging “extensive” or distracted reading and a taste for variety and novelty. Unlike those who purchased books, newspaper and periodical

consumers paid not for a particular text or even the work of a particular author, but for the editor's services in assembling a particular configuration of discourses.

(4-5)

Furthermore, Quoyeser argues, in nineteenth-century America, reading began to be perceived as a means of gaining access to "cultural capital": "[i]n the pursuit of such capital, Americans may have adopted a new style of reading.... With the rise of mass production, the fashionable and the flimsy... replaced the homespun and the sturdy... apparently transforming the perception of art" (38-39).

Godey's Lady's Book was a case in point. One of the most dramatic publishing successes in its day, *Godey's* at one time could boast literary contributions from the likes of Emerson and Poe. However, "not all of the *Lady's Book* was written by Emerson and Poe and their like; a very large proportion of it was thick with sentimentality, pathos, and banality"(Mott 351), or what another writer termed the "craniological maggotry"(420) of its sentimental tales. Although Sarah Josepha Hale's able editorship greatly contributed to the magazine's success, Louis Godey's shrewd marketing and his attention to the magazine's "packaging" were what really powered the sales of his periodical, and in the process influenced others to do likewise. Its engravings and fashion plates truly "formed the great feature of *Godey's*-- the embellishments. Do not call them illustrations. They did not illustrate the text; the text illustrated them. The editor was wont to refer to some story or sketch as 'the illustration of the plate.' The plate was the thing, and especially the fashion plate"(591). As greater attention was paid to the "embellishments," literary concerns could be, and often were, relegated to secondary status; indeed, the fashion

plates were often cut out and hung with pride on the walls in less affluent homes, while the remainder of the magazine was discarded. And Godey's formula worked: "[i]f it be questioned whether the large outlays for illustration were profitable, the answer may be found in the fact that all the really prosperous magazines printed many plates"(520).

With substantially greater attention devoted to the magazine's external and visual appearance, its "packaging," the periodical form began to exhibit its own share of "theological whims," as Benjamin calls them, and enter into the culture of display Benjamin describes. Displayed on racks that make at least the headline (and often most of the cover) visible, the periodical advertised itself and its contents to the strolling observer.¹⁰ In the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the development of printing and engraving technology, considerable attention was given to magazine cover design for the first time. Influential magazines such as *Godey's* and *Graham's* featured covers crafted with a conscious eye towards catching the browser's eye, as well as suggesting something about the magazine's mission and editorial philosophy. As Benjamin points out, this was also the time when advertising as we know it began to develop ("Paris" 152), though it would be some time before it would be as successfully integrated into the product's image as it is today. Even at this early stage, however, periodical publishers were testing the waters, thinking about ways that magazines could function as advertisements for themselves. If magazines did not proclaim their contents on the cover, they did so on a table of contents within the first few pages of the periodical.

The increasing commodification of periodicals may be read in other aspects of the form as well. Ease-of-use was enhanced, as was evident from the physical nature of the

magazine: it had a soft cover and was thinner and more flexible than a book; it could be rolled up and stuffed in a pocket, or folded back upon itself at the binding or even mid-page, so that it could be held in one hand. Decisions regarding print size and type, the disposal of the text in columns or all the way across the page, use of assorted “wing-dings” as ornamentation, the width of the margins, how the magazine was stitched, were informed by the consumer’s sense of the product’s convenience and its usability.

Disposability was often accentuated in the periodical form, to different degrees. Beetham points out that

with certain notable exceptions, the materials of which periodicals are made have been designed for speed of production and cheapness rather than durability....

Where particular periodicals have departed from this, it has always been a matter worthy of note or even...a central part of their definition. Indeed, the material characteristics of the periodical (quality of paper, size of the pages and lack of hard cover) have consistently been central to its meaning. (22-23)

The newspaper, particularly the daily, was devoted to addressing topics of the day; once the day had past, the paper’s perceived usefulness was severely diminished. Magazines, although often less emphatic regarding the topicality of their contents, were still regarded as having less permanence than books. Here we may see a happy wedding of purpose and form: the magazine was designed physically to last only about as long as its contents had relevance for a mass readership, after which it was discarded. And there were no regrets in so doing, because the materials used in producing this commodity were inexpensive, and the consumer therefore bore only a minimal cost burden. Thus the periodical’s focus

on current events and its low-cost construction reinforced its disposability, and in fact encouraged the reader to treat the physical product accordingly.

The cumulative effect of the miscellaneous format, the “packaging” of ideas into a portable product, the emphasis on timeliness and topicality at the expense of detailed and careful thought, and the apparent “disposability” of magazines and their articles, was to create a radical distance between the author and his or her work. According to Marx, the commodity takes on an autonomy with respect to its original producer, the human being. Marx called this effect the “fetishism” of commodity production, and explains it thus:

A commodity is... a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.... There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. (83)

In his essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” George Lukacs develops this idea, asserting that this schism between human producers and the products of their labor has dramatic and far-reaching effects:

What is of central importance here is that because of this situation a man's own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man. There is both an objective and a subjective side to this phenomenon. *Objectively* a world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market). The laws governing these objects are indeed gradually discovered by man, but even so they confront him as invisible forces that generate their own power. The individual can use his knowledge of these laws to his own advantage, but he is not able to modify the process by his own activity. *Subjectively*-- where the market economy has been fully developed-- a man's activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article. (86-7)

The alienation of producer from the product of labor that Marx and Lukacs point to in the creation of commodities seems to have been precisely what magazinists in nineteenth-century America were experiencing. As Mott illustrates,

[r]ights of the author himself in the product of his pen were little recognized, when once he had turned his manuscript over to the editor. The practice of anonymity was still very general, especially in the more dignified magazines. The reviews seldom broke over into what they deemed vulgar signing of articles... Inevitably connected with the persistent practice of anonymity was the reign of

editorial tyranny over authors. (503)

Even as the practice of anonymity declined, and authors, editors and publishers saw opportunities to market literary commodities through name recognition, writers often found their work published with substantial unauthorized changes. Furthermore, in the absence of international copyright law, “[t]hese were great times for pirates” (358); periodicals such as the *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* billed themselves as “mammoth sheets,” and offered “clipped” versions of successful European works without paying royalties. And such publications unabashedly flaunted the fact that they sold literature in bulk, much as one might sell any other commodity, from carpets to office space. The “mammoth” *Boston Notion*, for instance, gleefully offered “104 square feet of reading matter”(Mott 361). Writers increasingly found themselves producing commodities that were then subjected to the vicissitudes of public opinion, and the mechanisms of the magazine publishing industry that attempted to gauge and anticipate that opinion.

For Lukacs, such a split between producer and product in a market economy is mirrored by a larger fracture, engendered through the specialization of fields and professions to more effectively produce and market commodities. It is a fracture not only between the producer and the object created, but also of social relations, of the individual’s view of the world and of him/herself. Fittingly enough, Lukacs finds the apex of such fragmentation in the journalist:

The specialised ‘virtuoso’, the vendor of his objectified and reified faculties does not just become the [passive] observer of society; he also lapses into a

contemplative attitude vis-a-vis the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties.... This phenomenon can be seen at its most grotesque in journalism. Here it is precisely subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament and powers of expression that are reduced to an abstract mechanism functioning autonomously and divorced from both the personality of their 'owner' and from the material and concrete nature of the subject matter in hand. The journalist's 'lack of convictions', the prostitution of his experiences and beliefs is comprehensible only as the apogee of capitalist reification. (100)

Another pernicious effect of this "reification," according to Lukacs, is the damage it causes to a unified and holistic approach to human life and the world around us. It is also significant for our study (especially the following chapter) that Lukacs points to the specialization occurring in another rapidly transforming field— science— in asserting the disastrous influence of capitalism and professionalization:

The specialisation of skills leads to the destruction of every image of the whole. And as, despite this, the need to grasp the whole-- at least cognitively-- cannot die out, we find that science, which is likewise based on specialisation and thus caught up in the same immediacy, is criticised for having torn the real world into shreds and having lost its vision of the whole. (104)

As a "vendor of his objectified and reified faculties," the magazine writer also experienced a dissociation from his art-product and from his own identity, in that he was expected to market himself as a literary persona, literally a "name brand," even as he

exerted relatively little control over his work. Catherine Quoyeser explains the rationale behind this process as follows:

As critics and reviewers codified oeuvres and established reputations, they created literary brand names or trademarks and “personalities.” These promotional efforts brought a measure of predictability and continuity to an emerging mass market for home literature, while forging new links between art and life. Where associated with a celebrity image, the author’s name lent an unmistakable mystique to his or her work that tended to boost sales. The institution of journalism, in other words, helped underwrite the proprietary and evaluative classification of literary texts, strengthening what Michel Foucault has termed the “author-function.” (54)

In order to capitalize on the market value of their “name,” writers had to overcome the practice of anonymous publication which many periodicals (especially the reviews) perpetuated. Yet, as Quoyeser states,

the infrastructure of Jacksonian periodicals reinforced the convention of anonymity. At a time when circulations were small and profits elusive, publishers could not afford to pay for many contributions.... If part of the special appeal of periodicals lay in their miscellaneous formats-- in their capacity to represent the field of native authors-- publishers and editors may have insisted on anonymity in order to conceal adulterations of those formats. (79-81) ¹¹

Connected to this creation of literary personae was the practice of “puffing,” which as Mott points out, “after yielding to a certain discipline, came in later years under the head of advertising.... ‘The art of puffing is the art of all arts at the present day,’ claimed C.F.

Briggs in Holden's. 'Nothing will sell which has not first been puffed into notice.' Later he remarked, 'The literature of advertising is getting to be an important branch of the *belles-lettres*'"(478). Forced to market himself by creating literary commodities over which he must relinquish control, the nineteenth-century American magazinist became a sort of literary "sandwichman," an advertisement for himself. ¹²

As a magazine reader, writer and editor, Poe was highly conscious of this trend towards commodification in periodical publication, and was of necessity implicated in the process himself. That Poe was eminently concerned with his audience's tastes and the saleability of his written "product" is evident from his letters. Early in his career, he noted the exploding popularity of the magazines, and the increasing emphasis on short, neatly "packaged" and easily-digestible articles. Poe repeatedly called attention to the "signs of the times" and the "tendency of the age in this direction. The brief, the terse, the condensed, and the easily circulated will take the place of the diffuse, the ponderous, and the inaccessible"(Ostrom 162). In an 1835 letter to Thomas W. White, the proprietor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe defended his tale "Berenice," in which the narrator becomes obsessed with his cataleptic sister's teeth, and thinking her dead, removes them during one of her fits. Poe acknowledged that "[t]he subject is by far too horrible" and yet "the history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature*" (Ostrom 57). In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David S. Reynolds demonstrates forcefully Poe's ambivalent attitude toward this "sensational" writing, so popular in his day, maintaining that Poe's works were "to a large degree, rhetorical responses to popular sensationalism.

Intimately aware of every type of popular sensational literature, Poe repeatedly commented on such literature in his criticism and borrowed from it liberally in his tales and poems”(226).¹³ Indeed, Poe argued, “whether the articles of which I speak are, or are not in bad taste is little to the purpose. To be appreciated you must be *read*, and these things are invariably sought after with avidity”(Ostrom 57). Later, Poe would exult to his friend F.W. Thomas in 1844 that “The Raven” and “The Gold-Bug” (his two biggest “hits”) had each “had a great ‘run’” and were in fact written “for the express purpose of running”(Ostrom 287). Poe was also more than willing to engage in self-advertisement, often publishing pieces that quoted extensively from his earlier works. And witness the self-promotion evident in this early letter to Thomas W. White in 1835:

Herewith I send you a Baltimore *Visiter* of October 12th 1833. It contains a highly complimentary letter from Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Latrobe, and Dr. Miller of Baltimore in relation to myself... If you could in any manner contrive to have this letter copied into any of the Richmond Papers it would greatly advance a particular object which I have in view. If you could find an excuse for printing it in the Messenger it would be still better.... One fact I would wish particularly noticed. The *Visiter* offered two Premiums-- one for the best Tale & one for the best Poem-- *both* of which were awarded to me. (Ostrom 66)

As concerned as Poe seems to have been with producing a viable literary commodity, his writing also reveals a conflicted writer, one who was profoundly ambivalent in his attitude towards both the general audience and his own participation in

the literary marketplace. He complained of the inhuman commodification process in a letter to F. W. Thomas dated 4 July 1841, writing that “to coin one’s brain into silver, at the nod of a master, is to my thinking, the hardest task in the world....”(Ostrom 172). John T. Irwin begins his chapter on Poe in *American Hieroglyphics* with a quote from Poe’s “Literati of New York City” that illustrates his awareness of the alienation of “product” from producer in capitalism: “The supposition that the book of an author is a thing apart from the author’s self, is, I think, ill-founded”(43). Similarly, in “Poe’s Other Double,” Jonathan Auerbach asserts “Poe’s early intuition that writing is a self-sustaining form of discourse which acquires currency apart from the person or authority of the writer, who threatens to fade into obscurity as soon as his work enters the public domain. Once the author expresses himself in public, his written identity becomes common property, subject to ceaseless duplication and appropriation”(343).¹⁴ And in “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.”(1844), Poe satirizes the periodical publication industry as a whole, and in the process points to the negative effects of commodification on the magazine writer. The tale’s main character, a literary “lion” who offers his biography as example to the novice, identifies his first literary inspiration as a poem penned by a magazine editor extolling the virtues of a barber’s product, the “Only Genuine Oil-of-Bob”(766). This explicit link between literature and commodity is sufficiently ludicrous, especially since the poem achieves critical acclaim. The narrator, however, finds the emulation of such “greatness” too daunting. For his own first literary effort, he patches together random selections from classics such as Dante’s *Inferno* and Homer’s *Illiad*, and submits them as his own, the result of “one of those exquisitely

original ideas which now and then *will* permeate the brain of a man of genius”(767-8). Comically, the editors of various periodicals dismiss the submission, not because it is a blatant case of plagiarism, but because they find the writing deficient in literary merit. Thus the taste of the literary establishment, as well as its familiarity with “great” literature, and its toleration of plagiarism, are all indicted in one swoop. On the other hand, the narrator’s second effort, an absurdly simple and superficial couplet (“To pen an Ode upon the ‘Oil-of-Bob’/ Is all sorts of a job./ {Signed,} SNOB”) is met with great praise.¹⁵

The praise the narrator receives for his couplet is increasingly at the expense of the original poem the narrator held so highly; hearkening to critical opinion, the narrator himself begins to despise the poem and its creator, and is persuaded to play “Tommy Hawk” in a review of the original “Oil-of-Bob.” The biographical connection to Poe himself is no doubt evident; the narrator becomes highly successful in “‘playing tomahawk’ ... [by] scalping, brow-beating and otherwise using-up the herd of poor-devil authors”(781). In the end, the narrator has performed a complete “*bouleversement*,”¹⁶ distancing himself from his original opinion of “great literature”; he also exhibits similar “*topsiturviness*” in his attitude towards rival publications, which he reviles until they publish favorable reviews of his works (785). By refusing to maintain any stable commitment to aesthetic values, but rather catering to public and critical taste, the narrator is ultimately able to purchase and combine the various publications that had so stridently maintained their opposition to each other. Commercial success is clearly depicted as antagonistic to critical acumen or aesthetic value here.

Poe's conflicted attitude about writing for a mass audience is evident also in his letters. He wrote to Philip Pendleton Cooke, "As for the mob-- let them talk on. I should be grieved if I thought they comprehended me..."(Ostrom 118). Likewise, he advised F.W. Thomas to "send the public opinion to the devil, forgetting that a public existed"(148). Later, Poe would resign from two of the most successful magazines of the times, *Graham's* and *Godey's Lady's Book*, renouncing their blatant capitulation to public tastes. The same "pictures, fashion-plates, music and love tales" that made *Graham's* such a success Poe finds "contemptible" and elicit his "disgust with the namby-pamby character" of the magazine (197). And Poe conceived of an elite magazinist coalition in direct opposition to Godey's highly lucrative and popular publication, writing, "If we do *not* defend ourselves by some such coalition, we shall be devoured, without mercy, by the Godeys... et id genus omne"(247).

Poe's plans for this ideal magazine, which he first named the "Penn" and later the "Stylus," offer some further insight into the ways he attempted to work within the periodical format and marketplace while simultaneously offering resistance to the economic forces that determined it. He sought to offer top-quality literary work from the best writers within a physical product that was itself artistic, an object to be saved and collected, though the physical accouterments were never to outshine the magazine's intellectual value. In a letter to J.E. Snodgrass in 1841, Poe outlines some of the magazine's aesthetic parameters, both literary and physical:

In regard to my plans &c the Prospectus will inform you in some measure. I am resolved upon a good outward appearance-- clear type, fine paper &c-- double

columns, I think, & brevier, with the poetry running across the page in a single column. No steel engravings; but now & then a superior wood-cut in illustration of the text. Thick covers. In the literary way, I shall endeavour, gradually, if I cannot effect the purpose at once to give the Magazine a reputation for the having *no articles but from the best pens....* (Ostrom 152)

Clearly, as Poe expresses it in a letter to Washington Irving¹⁷ in the same year, he is attempting to mediate aesthetic and commercial concerns, hoping to create a journal that could “offer pecuniary inducement to the highest talent, ...[and] would be, in all respects, a fitting vehicle for its thoughts”(152):

The work will be an octavo of 96 pages. The paper will be of excellent quality-- very far superior to that of the N.A. Review. The type will be new (always new) clear and bold, with distinct face. The matter will be disposed in a single column. The printing will be done upon a hand press, in the best manner. There will be a broad margin. We shall have no engravings, except occasional wood-cuts (by Adams) when demanded in obvious illustration of the text; and, when so required, they will be worked in with the type-- not upon separate pages, as in “Arcturus.” The stitching will be done in the French style, permitting the book to be fully open. Upon the cover, and throughout, the endeavour will be to preserve the greatest purity of taste, consistent with decision and force. The price will be \$5. (162-3)

As is evident from the quote above, Poe devoted considerable attention to the

physical product itself. He wrote to F. W. Thomas in 1843, “We *shall* make the most magnificent Magazine as regards externals, ever seen. The finest paper, bold type, in single column, and superb wood-engravings (in the manner of the French illustrated edition of “Gil Blas” by Gigoux, or “Robinson Crusoe” by Grandville”(224). Likewise, he informed James Russell Lowell the same year, “A part of my design is to illustrate, whatever is fairly susceptible of illustration, with finely executed wood-engravings-- after the fashion of Gigoux’s “Gil Blas” or “Grandville’s Gulliver”... Instead of the “full-length portraits” promised in the Prospectus... we shall have medallions, about 3 inches in diameter. (232). The following year, he would assert to Lowell that the periodical should “be illustrated, not merely embellished, by spirited wood designs in the style of Grandville”(247).¹⁸ Poe’s attitudes regarding the “illustrations” become clear by implication: the fashion plates featured in a magazine like Godey’s were “mere embellishments,” even though they assumed greater importance and more attention than the periodical’s literary contents; the engravings that Poe would offer would be explicitly supportive of the texts (not vice versa), and yet would be more integral to the effect of the magazine as a whole, illustrating “whatever is fairly susceptible of illustration,” and would be “worked in with the type-- not upon separate pages,” so as to minimize the tendency to cut them out and dispose of the rest. In all, as Poe informed Lowell in 1844, he was seeking to create a magazine that would have “sufficient ability, circulation, and character, to control and so give tone to, our Letters” in terms of content, and one that would be “externally, a specimen of high, but not too refined Taste.... Such a Magazine might be made to exercise a prodigious influence, and would be a source of vast wealth to

its proprietors”(247).

Poe’s ambivalence regarding the periodical literature of his time can also be read in his satires and “grotesques” on literary commodities. One of the forms Poe satirized but also used for his own purposes was the “tale of sensation” often found in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. According to Michael Allen, this kind of tale was “usually structured around a protagonist isolated in some strange, horrific, or morbid situation which is progressively exploited for effect”(31). The narrator of such a tale, having recently (perhaps very recently) experienced such a situation, relates the story to an audience presumably interested because these occurrences lie outside the realm of normal human life, and verge on the paranormal. While Poe published a number of “sensational” stories (including “MS. Found in a Bottle,” “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “A Descent into the Maelstrom,” and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*), he also mocked it mercilessly in comic tales such as “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and “Loss of Breath: A Tale Neither In nor Out of ‘Blackwood.’” Stuart Levine and Susan F. Levine explain Poe’s seemingly contradictory attitude as follows:

Though Poe knew and admired *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, he also knew that the “intensities,” the special stories of sensation that it had pioneered, had often fallen into the hands of less gifted writers than Blackwood’s best and that formulas were easy to copy badly. “Mr. Blackwood’s” advice to the Signora Psyche Zenobia is filled with errors and misattributions, but it is not impossibly bad advice—Poe, after all, followed it himself in some of his best work. It’s just that Poe, unlike Zenobia, had the skill to make literary art of the formulaic

materials.... High art often results when genius comes to commercial entertainment.... (131)

In “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” a pretentious and preposterous narrator, Psyche Zenobia, lambasts the newspapers of the time for being “whipped syllabub” and “low,” with no “investigation of first causes, first principles.... There was not attention paid to that great point the ‘fitness of things’.... No profundity, no reading, no metaphysics– nothing which the learned call spirituality, and which the unlearned choose to stigmatize as cant”(279). Zenobia and her friends resolve to “introduce a better style of thinking and writing,” one that is modeled on that of *Blackwood’s*, since she has been informed “that the finest writing, upon every subject, is to be discovered in the pages of that justly celebrated Magazine”(279). And to her thinking, “it’s not so very difficult a matter to compose an article of the genuine Blackwood stamp, if one only goes properly about it”(279). She asserts, for example, that the “political articles” are composed by taking a pair of “tailor’s-shears” and clipping and interspersing fragments of other newspapers and “Gulley’s New Compendium of Slang-Whang.”

This blind reliance upon a technical “process” or “method” of “composition” becomes even more absurd in Zenobia’s discussion of those articles in which lie the “chief merit of the Magazine,” its “*bizzareries*” or “*intensities*,” as the sensation tales were called (280). To discover the proper science of composing the “intensity,” she seeks out Mr. Blackwood himself for advice. But attempting to approach the paranormal and “outré” in a “methodical” and prefabricated way causes all sorts of distortions are

wrought upon the form. For instance, a “genuine” narrative of this stamp, if scribbled in the heat of the moment, would naturally be scrawled and difficult to read, rather than clear and legible. However, Blackwood’s instructions to Zenobia are to transform what was a logical result of the experience into a prerequisite for the creation of a commodified sensation tale. He tells her that “your writer of intensities must have very black ink, and a very big pen, with a very blunt nib. And, mark me... that pen— must— never be mended! Herein, madam, lies the secret, the soul, of intensity.... You may take it for granted, that when manuscript can be read it is never worth reading”(280).

A similar reversal takes place regarding the experience itself. Blackwood asserts that “the first thing requisite is to get yourself into such a scrape as no one ever got into before”(281). The absurdity of deliberately seeking out such an experience, however, seems not too great an extension of the logically thin premise on which many such narratives rely. Blackwood cites “The Man in the Bell,” in which a narrator is driven mad by the tolling of a huge bell under which he is trapped; “accordingly, pulling out his tablets, he gives a record of his sensations. Sensations are the great thing after all. Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations— they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet”(281). He provides Zenobia with various examples (“The Dead Alive,” “Confessions of an Opium-eater,” “The Involuntary Experimentalist,” and “The Man in the Bell”) of such “scrapes.” In his praise for these pieces, though, Blackwood blurs the line between what seem valid literary attributes (“taste, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition... glorious imagination— deep philosophy— acute speculation”) and aesthetically worthless but marketable qualities

(“plenty of fire and fury, and a good spicing of the decidedly unintelligible.... a nice bit of flummery [that] went down the throats of the people delightfully,” and the merits of “good rant, and indifferent Greek— both of them taking things with the public”). Poe suggests that in such tales, meaning has been sacrificed in favor of a mere facsimile of learned speculation, one that appeals to a broad readership because they take it for the genuine article.

Having shown the genre to be capable of extreme contrivance in these ways, Poe then points to the arbitrary and even unintelligible use of specific “tones”: “the tone didactic, the tone enthusiastic, the tone natural... the tone laconic.. The tone elevated, diffusive, and interjectional... the tone metaphysical... the tone transcendental and the tone heterogeneous”(282-3). Rather than an integral part of a tale, stemming organically from the content matter, tone here is depicted as something external, pre-packaged, that can be “applied” to subject matter for different effects. The “tone laconic,” which “has lately come into use... consists in short sentences. Somehow thus. Can’t be too brief. Can’t be too snappish. Always a full stop. And never a paragraph”(282). In the “tone elevated, diffusive, and interjectional,” [t]he words must be all in a whirl, like a humming-top, and make a noise very similar, which answers remarkably well instead of meaning. This is the best of all possible styles where the writer is in too great a hurry to think”(282). The “tone metaphysical” relies on big words and footnotes referencing Kant so as to “look erudite and... frank”; the “tone transcendental” utilizes small words, written upside down, and innuendo— “Hint every thing— assert nothing”(283). Obviously, meaning is not as important here as the creation of a particular effect, that of feigned

emotion or intellect. Such tones seem to function as a recognizable cue to the reader, a gesture that replaces genuine affect or philosophical speculation. Readers, feeling sufficiently insecure to critique what (to Poe) is obviously blather, and preferring to see themselves as members of the *cognoscenti*, pretend to understand it. Thus the audience willingly enters into an unspoken compact, in which the writer pretends to produce a commodity with use-value, and the consumer pretends to “use” these words and ideas, when in reality all that has been exchanged is the price of the magazine and the different pretensions of the would-be intellectual audience and writer.

Blackwood next proceeds to the last important “ingredient” in the commodity: the “filling up.” “It is not to be supposed that a lady or gentleman either has been leading the life of a bookworm. And yet above all things it is necessary that your article have an air of erudition, or at least afford evidence of extensive general reading”(283). Such evidence is obtained by randomly selecting “little scraps of either learning or *bel-espritism*, which are the very thing for the spicing of a Blackwood article”(283-4). Blackwood divides these laughably obscure references conveniently into two easy-to-use categories: “Piquant Facts for the Manufacture of Similes” and “Piquant Expressions to be introduced as occasion may require”(284). The art here is in the writer’s use of his or her “ingenuity to make it fit into your article,” or in making sure the tidbit is “properly dressed and dished up”(284). Again, the important thing is not to have the learning, but to have the appearance of it. This is difficult in Latin (“it’s getting so common”) but in Greek “the very letters have an air of profundity about them”(286). Having demonstrated the proper “technique” of producing such a commodity, Blackwood makes her an offer:

fifty guineas a sheet, an extravagant price which she nevertheless refuses with disdain; she knows she can do better. (This is a particularly sardonic touch on Poe's part, resonating with his bitterness at the low wages of the magazinist). However, out she sallies, focused on generating the commodity, "seeking for desperate adventures— adventures adequate to the intensity of my feelings, and adapted to the vast character of the article I intended to write"(287).

All these contortions caused by the writer's emphasis on what will sell are exemplified in the sketch which follows, "A Predicament." Here, Poe demonstrates how the "technical" letter of such aesthetic "laws" may be followed without an appreciation for the deep purpose or the true meaning of the form. (This, in fact, is one of the very "tidbits" that Blackwood supplies to Zenobia, the logical error of "ignoratio elenchi," understanding the words but not the meaning {286}.) There is an immediate and outright contradiction in her premeditated use of description: "It was a quiet and still afternoon when I strolled forth in the goodly city of Edina. The confusion and bustle in the streets were terrible"(288). We also see a comical parody of the telegraphic "tone laconic"-- "Men were talking. Women were screaming. Children were choking. Pigs were whistling. Carts they rattled. Bulls they bellowed. Cows they lowed. Horses they neighed. Cats they caterwauled. Dogs they danced"(288). The "tone elevated" also makes an appearance, in a passage that seems to defy interpretation:

What a host of gloomy recollections will ever and anon be awakened in the mind of genius and imaginative contemplation, especially of a genius doomed to the everlasting, and eternal, and continual, and, as one might say, the— *continued*— yes,

the *continued and continuous*, bitter, harassing, disturbing, and, if I may be allowed the expression, the *very* disturbing influence of the serene, and godlike, and heavenly, and exalting, and elevated, and purifying effect of what may be rightly termed the most enviable, the most *truly* enviable— nay! the most benignly beautiful, the most deliciously ethereal, and, as it were, the most *pretty* (if I may use so bold an expression) *thing* (pardon me, gentle reader!) in the world— but I am led away by my feelings. (288)

The misprisions and misuses to which Zenobia puts the “piquant facts and expressions” are too numerous to list here. Suffice it to say, meaning is lost in the effort to put words together in a way that will create a sellable “package” of words, rather than a truly communicative use of language. Such “tidbits” and references to classical literature have as their sole purpose the display of learning, without its substance. Poe is taking to task periodical writers who create products that on their face seem to have meaning, but to the discerning critical eye (the “true” flaneur and observer of commodities in the market) appear as so much jabber.

Zenobia’s aesthetic failure (but commercial success) as a magazinist is intimately connected to her failure to play competently the role of the flaneur. She sets out deliberately on her “solitary walk through the city” accompanied by “two humble but faithful companions,” thus violating laws of logic as well as the flaneur’s cherished isolation and independence. During her perambulations she spies a church steeple, and is “seized with an uncontrollable desire to ascend the giddy pinnacle, and thence survey the immense extent of the city”(288-9); she does so, and, standing on her servant Pompey’s

shoulders, notes that “the prospect was sublime,” and gives herself up “with great zest and enthusiasm to the enjoyment of the scene which so obligingly spread itself out before [her] eyes”(292). Rather than provide the reader with details of this panorama, though, she states, “Upon this subject, however, I shall forbear to dilate. I will not describe the city of Edinburgh”(292). Instead, she says, “Having, in some measure, satisfied my curiosity in regard to the extent, situation, and general appearance of the city, I had leisure to survey the church in which I was, and the delicate architecture of the steeple”(292). Her subjective preoccupation with the landscape has caused her to forsake the flaneur’s objectivity, and therefore fail to provide a text for the reader. It also causes her to neglect an appraisal of the “foreground,” her immediate surroundings, with unfortunate results: she discovers that she has poked her head through a hole in the face of the clock in the steeple, and finds herself pinned by the descending minute hand.

At this point, Zenobia’s butchery of the literary form is paralleled by violations of her body that are increasingly outrageous, both in their physical violence and in their literary implausibility. Eventually, her neck is severed, though not before her eyes pop out of her head from the “pressure.” In the meantime, she attempts to catalogue her sensations, from the horror of initial realization, to senses that grow “indistinct and confused,” to bizarre hallucinations in which the figures on the clock-face dance the Mazurka, to amusement at the ticking of the clock and “sensations [that] bordered upon perfect happiness,” to a “sense of exquisite pain” at which point she cannot resist mangling a quote from Cervantes. The humor of this passage lies in the utter disconnectedness of such sensations from the actual events of the story. As her eyes start

out of their sockets, and eventually pop out of her skull, Poe dramatizes the effects of such grotesquely comical yet nightmarish disfigurements not only on the body of Zenobia, as well as her chosen literary form, but also upon her authorial sense of self. She experiences a moment of radical dissociation in her sense of identity, as first one eye leaves her body, then the other. The first eye postures and puts on “airs”-- “Such a winking and blinking were never before seen”-- and, due to the “sympathy which always exists between two eyes of the same head,” she is forced “to wink and to blink, whether I would or not, in exact concert with the scoundrelly thing that lay just under my nose”(295). This sense of divided self is heightened when her head becomes fully severed, and drops to the street below: “My senses were here and there at one and the same moment. With my head I imagined, at one time, that I the head, was the read Signora Psyche Zenobia-- at another I felt convinced that myself, the body, was the proper identity”(295).

Poe’s satiric jabs at this genre and its conventions also involve a grotesque mutilation of the human body for comic effect, one that mirrors the methodical yet nonsensical “process” of concocting an “article of the Blackwood stamp.” The chopped-up human body becomes a figure for the chopped-up and patchwork literary corpus in the magazine marketplace, with implications that are both humorous and unsettling. The preposterous nature of this narrative, with its pretensions to authenticity, constitutes Poe’s “inside joke” with his reader regarding the excesses of the tale of sensation. However, on another level, the tale may also be read as a parable about the situation of the genuine artist (not the dilettante), forced to make a living by packaging literary work in this way.

For such a writer indeed experiences a serious division of self, as the commodified products of his “head” become severed from the rest of his “self”; such a schism approximates the limited perception for which Dupin criticizes the intelligence of the Prefect of Police, whose wisdom is “all head, and no body”(“Rue Morgue” 431).

Poe depicts similar atrocities committed upon the literary and corporal body as commodity in an earlier tale, one he intended to include in a collection he called “The Folio Club.” This tale, titled “Loss of Breath: A Tale Neither In nor Out of ‘Blackwood’” relates a series of incidents by which the narrator, one Mr. Lackobreath, in the midst of berating his wife, finds that he has literally “lost his breath,” and is unable to speak. He attempts a search for the breath, as though it were a physical object. Poe’s description of his methodical search prefigures both the physical disassembly he enacts in “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” and the Prefect’s painstaking (yet short-sighted) search of the suspect’s premises in “The Purloined Letter”:

Carefully locking the door on the inside, I commenced a vigorous search. It was possible, I thought, that, concealed in some obscure corner, or lurking in some closet or drawer, might be found the lost object of my inquiry.... Long and earnestly did I continue the investigation: but the contemptible reward of my industry and perserverence proved to be only a set of false teeth, two pair of hips, an eye, and a bundle of billets-doux from Mr. Windenough to my wife.... Closet after closet– drawer after drawer– corner after corner– were scrutinized to no purpose. (153)

Poe’s chopping up of the human body (which constitutes the theme of a later story, “The

Man That Was Used Up,” not to mention numerous other tales) comes to the fore as the narrator attempts to get out of town to cover up his lamentable condition. His crowded coach stops to pick up additional passengers, “of colossal dimensions,” who in taking their seats inadvertently crush the narrator’s body, dislocating his limbs and twisting his neck, he having no voice with which to protest. At the next stop he is discovered by his fellow travelers, who think him dead, “giving [him] a thump on the right eye, by way of demonstrating the truth of [the] suggestion”(155). He is thrown off the coach “without meeting any farther accident than the breaking of both my arms under the left hind wheel of the vehicle,” and his trunk is thrown after him, which, he says, “unfortunately falling on my head, fractured my skull in a manner at once interesting and extraordinary”(155).

The narrator’s mangled body then becomes a commodity on the open market, as it is sold to a local surgeon by the landlord of an inn, who “delivered me to his care with a bill and receipt for ten dollars”(155). This purchase being made, the “purchaser” subjects the narrator’s body to medical procedures to determine whether or not he is actually alive, cutting off his ears, applying the galvanic battery, and removing several of his organs (just in case he should prove to be alive). Left alone, he falls prey to the hunger of some neighborhood cats, who make a meal of his nose. Escaping through the window, he is mistaken for a local criminal and hung in his place; yet he does not die, having no breath to lose, and the jolt of the fall merely straightening out his twisted neck. Believing him dead, though, the crowd deposits him in the crypt, where out of boredom, he begins to disinter some of his fellow corpses. One of these turns out to be his rival, Windenough, who apparently had “caught” Lackobreath’s missing “expiration.” The narrator now

treats this breath explicitly as a commodity, something transferable and exchangeable; he exercises prudence in negotiating for it, since “[m]any persons... are prone to estimate commodities in their possession-- however valueless to the then proprietor-- however troublesome or distressing-- in direct ratio with the advantages to be derived by others from their attainment, or by themselves from their abandonment”(161). Through a “third-party” corpse, the “exchange” of breath is made, complete with “preliminaries”; after the “delivery” of the “respiration,” the narrator provides Windenough with a receipt (162).

The same flaws that Poe would later lampoon in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” appear here, though without the prefatory explanation by Mr. Blackwood. The tale takes as its epigram a fragment of a quote from Moore’s *Melodies*– “O breathe not, &c.”-- suggesting a relationship between the two works, when the connection is utterly superficial. The opening passage is replete with ridiculously obscure and ostensibly “learned” references to ancient figures such as Salmazer, Sardanapalus, and Psammiticus, as examples of persistence and vigilance.

Throughout the tale, there are innumerable misappropriations of quotes from other works. For instance, in searching for his breath as something tangible, the narrator cites William Godwin as saying, “that ‘invisible things are the only realities’”(153); he is bound when the cats nibble his nose, “but, as the loss of his ears proved the means of elevating to the throne of Cyrus, the Magian or Mige-Gush of Persia, and as the cutting off his nose gave Zopyrus possession of Babylon, so the loss of a few ounces of my countenance proved the salvation of my body”(157).

Like Zenobia, the narrator of “Loss of Breath” is also associated with the flaneur, though in an emphatically simplistic and ineffectual way. When Lackobreath is entombed, he conducts his own version of the “search,” apparently out of boredom. And in opening the various coffins, he discovers corpses of various body types and physiognomies. He proceeds to read these bodies and faces for clues as to the kind of life they led: a “carcass, puffy, bloated, and rotund” must be evidence of a man who “was short of breath,” and who therefore “thought it extravagant to play upon wind instruments. He was the inventor of self-moving fans, wind-sails, and ventilators” (159). On the other hand, a “gaunt, tall, and peculiar-looking form” was “the originator of tall monuments– shot-towers– lightning-rods– lombardy-poplars. His treatise upon ‘Shades and Shadows’ has immortalized him.... He went early to college and studied pneumatics. He then came home, talked eternally, and played upon the French-horn”(160). Such flanerism is over-simplified, and limited to the narrator’s own concern with his “loss of breath.” There are also some significant omissions by this “flaneur of sensations” at key points of the narrative: Lackobreath writes “I forbear to depict my sensations upon the gallows; although here, undoubtedly, I could speak to the point, and it is a topic upon which nothing has been well said. In fact, to write upon such a theme it is necessary to have been hanged. Thus Mark Anthony composed a treatise upon getting drunk”(158). The climactic “exchange” of breath is also neglected; Lackobreath acknowledges that “by many I shall be held to blame for speaking, in a manner so cursory, of a transaction so impalpable. It will be thought that I should have entered more minutely into the details of an occurrence by which– and this is very true– much new light might be thrown upon a

highly interesting branch of physical philosophy”(162). Yet the narrator begs off, fearing the “sulphurous resentment” of the “third party” corpse.

In these two “grotesques,” Poe dramatizes the extent to which commodification removed nineteenth-century periodical literature from any intellectually useful application. This commodified version of the sensation tale had all the superficial characteristics of deep metaphysical meaning that would seem “required”-- the seemingly learned references, the appropriate tone, the situation “suited to the type of article” and the “filling up”-- but had no genuine meaning, made no real contribution to understanding the dark and undiscovered places of the world and the human psyche. Instead, such literary commodities fostered a solipsistic and self-perpetuating microcosm of inept and pretentious magazine writers, with readers of the same ilk. Fittingly, at the conclusion of “Loss of Breath,” the attempts by Windenough and Lackobreath to get help from the tomb incite not immediate action, but a journalistic debate: “Scissors, the Whig Editor, republished a treatise upon ‘the nature and origin of subterranean noises.’ A reply-- rejoinder-- confutation-- and justification-- followed in the columns of a Democratic Gazette”(162). Of course, these events also generate another literary “product”: Lackobreath’s own “tale of sensation.” In the end, inferior literary products are generated that serve only to line the pockets of undeserving hacks, and to sustain an ongoing journalistic debate that is utterly out of touch with reality, though no one has the courage to acknowledge the literary monstrosities that result.

In fact, in many of Poe’s early comic tales, this grotesque distortion of both human and literary form is frequently connected to literary conventions associated with

the flaneur, suggesting that Poe was familiar with this tradition and manipulated it, yet felt considerable ambivalence regarding the production of such literary commodities. Ironically, it is precisely in this ambivalence towards the creation of literary commodities that Poe seems prototypically flaneuristic, in the same sense that Benjamin suggests when he says the flaneur “is still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed him; in neither is he at home”(“Paris” 156). Dana Brand has established Poe’s familiarity with the literary flaneur tradition in Europe and America, through the works of Dickens, Addison and Steele, Lamb and Irving; Brand also correctly points out that Poe himself tried his hand at the “urban sketch” more than once, even though he had considerable reservations regarding the work of Nathaniel Parker Willis, who according to Brand was “the most prominent American flaneur of the 1830s”(79-81). But Poe manipulates the devices of the flaneur “formula” in a number of comic “grotesques” which predate the tales that Brand identifies as Poe’s responses to (and revisions of) the flaneur, “The Man of the Crowd” and the Dupin detective tales.

One of these connections lies in Poe’s use of physiognomy. That Poe had serious reservations regarding the simplistic and self-evident reading of character through facial features may be inferred from his tales. In “‘Es lässt sich nicht schreiben’: Plagiarism and ‘The Man of the Crowd,’” Stephen Rachman points out the blatant physiognomic “misreading” of faces and names of Mr. Pennifeather and Charley Goodfellow in “Thou Art the Man” (57). Even more clearly, in “Lionizing,” Poe mocks both a facile physiognomy and the practice in his day of anointing (and manufacturing) literary “lions” on the most spurious of bases.¹⁹ The pompous narrator of the tale announces that

The first action of my life was the taking hold of my nose with both hands. My mother saw this and called me a genius:-- my father wept for joy and presented me with a treatise on Nosology. This I mastered before I was breeched. I now began to feel my way in the science, and soon came to understand that, provided a man had a nose sufficiently conspicuous, he might, by merely following it, arrive at a Lionship. (212)

The narrator sees the study of Nosology as “the chief end of my existence”(217), but finds himself outmatched and out of favor when he challenges another “lion” of the town of “Fum-Fudge” to a duel, and shoots *his* nose off. As the narrator’s father advises him, “I grant you that in Fum-Fudge the greatness of a lion is in proportion to the size of his proboscis-- but, good heavens! there is no competing with a lion who has no proboscis at all”(217). Behind the slapstick humor lurks Poe’s critique of this kind of facile physiognomy, and of the empty accolades from a literary establishment robbed by commerce of all sound values.

Poe’s use of physiognomy in his “grotesque” tales also often partakes strongly of caricature.²⁰ This is a highly simplistic and readily understandable form of physiognomy, in which specific physical features of characters are exaggerated in order that the reader may quickly identify and understand personalities, usually toward a comic end. And Poe acknowledges the effect of external appearances on the observer, even as he pokes fun at it; for example, the narrator of “Bon-Bon”(1832), in describing the title character, asserts that “[a] distinguished exterior will, I am constrained to say, have its weight even with a beast; and I am willing to allow much in the outward man of the *restauranteur* calculated

to impress the imagination of the quadruped”(167). Pierre Bon-Bon is “barely three feet in height” and his head is “diminutively small,” but still it is “impossible to behold the rotundity of his stomach without a sense of magnificence nearly bordering upon the sublime”(167). The reader is intended to take these physical characteristics as transparent indicators of Bon-Bon’s lack of real intellectual stature and capacity, along with abundant evidence of his gluttony.

However, Poe once again seems to question the simplistic use of physiognomy, by problematizing the concept of a strict correlation between physical characteristics and intellectual or aesthetic ones. Bon-Bon’s own confusion regarding scope of intellect and corporeal breadth is projected onto those who observe his physical self, as “[i]n its size both dogs and men must have seen a type of his acquirements— in its immensity a fitting habitation for his immortal soul”(167). Similarly, his dress is described as so ostentatious and flamboyantly colorful that “it was difficult to say whether Pierre Bon-Bon was indeed a bird of Paradise, or the rather a very Paradise of perfection”(168), though the reader is clearly intended to infer that Bon-Bon is more a “strange bird” from the following description:

I might here— if it so pleased me— dilate upon the matter of habiliment, and other mere circumstances of the external metaphysician. I might hint that the hair of our hero was worn short, combed smoothly over his forehead, and surmounted by a conical-shaped white flannel cap and tassels— that his pea-green jerkin was not after the fashion of those worn by the common class of *restauranteurs* at that day— that the sleeves were something fuller than the reigning costume permitted— that

the cuffs were turned up, not as usual in that barbarous period, with cloth of the same quality and color as the garment, but faced in a more fanciful manner with the particolored velvet of Genoa— that his slippers were of a bright purple, curiously filagreed, and might have been manufactured in Japan, but for the exquisite pointing of the toes, and the brilliant tints of the binding and embroidery— that his breeches were of the yellow satin-like material called aimable— that his sky-blue cloak, resembling in form a dressing-wrapper, and richly bestudded all over with crimson devices, floated cavalierly upon his shoulders like a mist of the morning... (167-8)

In another early comic grotesque, “King Pest” (1835), Poe employs the same technique of physiognomic caricature to describe the two main characters, Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, who flee a tavern without paying for their drinks, only to be chased by the owners through the streets of plague-ridden London:

The one who appeared to be the elder, and whom his companion addressed by the characteristic appellation of “Legs,” was at the same time much the taller of the two. He might have measured six feet and a half, and an habitual stoop in the shoulders seemed to have been the necessary consequence of an altitude so enormous.-- Superfluities in height were, however, more than accounted for by deficiencies in other respects. He was exceedingly thin; and might, as his associates asserted, have answered, when drunk, for a pennant at the mast-head, or, when sober, have served for a jib-boom. But these jests, and others of a

similar nature, had evidently produced, at no time, any effect upon the cachinnatory muscles of the tar. With high cheek-bones, a large hawk-nose, retreating chin, fallen under-jaw, and huge protruding white eyes, the expression of his countenance, although tinged with a species of dogged indifference to matters and things in general, was not the less utterly solemn and serious beyond all attempts at imitation or description.

The younger seaman was, in all outward appearance, the converse of his companion. His stature could not have exceeded four feet. A pair of stumpy bow-legs supported his squat, unwieldy figure, while his unusually short and thick arms, with no ordinary fists at their extremities, swung off dangling from his sides like the flippers of a sea-turtle. Small eyes, of no particular color, twinkled far back in his head. His nose remained buried in the mass of flesh which enveloped his round, full, and purple face; and his thick upper-lip rested upon the still thicker one beneath with an air of complacent self-satisfaction, much heightened by the owner's habit of licking them at intervals. (240-1)

Here Poe's description focuses more on comic effect than on revealing personality traits of these characters. Certainly, Legs's dead-pan expression reflects a gaping seriousness that is also evident in his reaction to finding a strange company gathered in the undertaker's shop ("leaning against the wall near which he happened to be standing, [he] dropped his lower jaw still lower than usual, and spread open his eyes to their fullest extent" {247}). Likewise, Hugh's "twinkling" eyes foreshadow his very different reaction (he "burst into a long, loud, and obstreperous roar of very ill-timed and

immoderate laughter”{247}), while his “no ordinary fists” indicate the pugnacity, blasphemous humor and “gameness” he later demonstrates in volunteering to drink a gallon of “Black Strap.” But more important here is the physical distortion of these characters for humorous visual effects— the “odd couple” pairing of extremely tall and thin with extremely short and wide, one face thin and protruding hawkishly at the nose while the other nose “buried in the mass of flesh which enveloped his round, full, and purple face.”

Such physical distortion, in fact, comprises an important aspect of Poe’s “grotesque” tales. In “King Pest,” each member of the bizarre party that congregates in the undertaker’s shop seems to have “one feature...[that] was sufficiently distinguished to need a separate characterization”; “each individual person of the party... seemed to possess a monopoly of some particular portion of physiognomy” (245). Thus, one member of the party has an exceptionally elongated nose, another extraordinarily bulbous eyes, another a hideously broad and high forehead, etc. To enhance the distortion further, each character is also depicted as suffering from the ravages of some illness or disease: “King Pest” himself has not only an exaggerated forehead, but also a face “as yellow as saffron” and is “emaciated”; a woman “evidently in the last stage of a dropsy” has a body that “resembled nearly that of the huge puncheon of October beer” and also a mouth that “swept with a terrific chasm” across her face; a “diminutive young lady” shows “evident indications of a galloping consumption,” but also sports a nose that, “extremely long, thin, sinuous, flexible and pimped, hung down far below her under lip,” and so on (244-6).

These grotesque disfigurements would seem to signal to the reader that there is an identifiable meaning being assigned to each character, that each character in his/her specific deformity represents something, as in an allegory. And indeed, Poe encourages this reading in his sub-title for the story, "A Tale Containing an Allegory." However, the reader has difficulty "reading" the significance of the exaggerated physiognomic details, as well as their connection to various illnesses.²¹ The allegory may have to do with the tale's epigram, from Buckhurst's *Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex* ("The gods do bear and well allow in kings/ The things which they abhor in rascal routes"), referring to the assumption of the title "King Pest" by "Tim Hurlygurly, the stage-player"(251). But the simple double-standard implied in such a moral seems insufficient to account for the multi-layered chaos that reigns in this tale, brought on not only by inversion of social hierarchy, but also by plague, civil unrest and intemperance. Rather than a clearly defined allegory with an overt moral, Poe provides a comic-grotesque allegory of chaos itself, in which meaning is obscured but the allegory's bodily exaggerations are retained, lending the tale a decidedly nightmarish tinge. This is an early indication that while Poe felt simplistic physiognomy was most suited to broad comedy, he saw it could also contribute to the creation of unsettling and often bizarre effects.

Another way in which Poe utilizes physiognomy in his grotesque tales is to help the reader identify a specific archetypal character, although that character may only later (or never) be explicitly named in the tale. The character most often identified in this manner is the devil. Poe introduces the devil into four tales: "The Duc de L'Omelette," "Bon-Bon" (both 1832), "The Devil in the Belfry" (1839) and "Never Bet the Devil Your

Head” (1841). When Satan appears in these tales, the reader is expected to “read” and identify him through familiar physiognomic details, though the depiction is complicated at times by Poe’s humorous and ironic deviations, and by a token veiling of the devil’s most familiar features. In the following passage, Pierre Bon-Bon (as well as the reader) employs physiognomic analysis to identify the devil, even as he notes the deceptive nature of physical appearances and the potentially outrageous misreadings to which they can lead:

The philosopher’s amazement did not prevent a narrow scrutiny of the stranger’s dress and appearance. The outlines of a figure, exceedingly lean, but much above the common height, were rendered minutely distinct by means of a faded suit of black cloth which fitted tight to the skin, but was otherwise cut very much in the style of a century ago. These garments had evidently been intended for a much shorter person than their present owner. His ankles and wrists were left naked for several inches. In his shoes, however, a pair of very brilliant buckles gave the lie to the extreme poverty implied by the other portions of his dress. His head was bare, and entirely bald, with the exception of the hinder part, from which depended a *queue* of considerable length. A pair of green spectacles, with side glasses, protected his eyes from the influence of the light, and at the same time prevented our hero from ascertaining either their color or their conformation. About the entire person there was no evidence of a shirt; but a white cravat, of filthy appearance, was tied with extreme precision around the throat, and the ends, hanging down formally side by side, gave (although I dare say unintentionally) the

idea of an ecclesiastic. Indeed, many other points both in his appearance and demeanour might have very well sustained a conception of that nature. Over his left ear, he carried, after the fashion of a modern clerk, an instrument resembling the *stylus* of the ancients. In a breast-pocket of his coat appeared conspicuously a small black volume fastened with clasps of steel. This book, whether accidentally or not, was so turned outwardly from the person as to discover the words "*Rituel Catholique*" in white letters upon the back. His entire physiognomy was interestingly saturnine— even cadaverously pale. The forehead was lofty, and deeply furrowed with the ridges of contemplation. The corners of the mouth were drawn down into an expression of the most submissive humility. There was also a clasping of the hands, as he stepped towards our hero— a deep sigh— and altogether a look of such utter sanctity as could not have failed to be unequivocally prepossessing....

[However,] Pierre Bon-Bon, from what I have been able to understand of his disposition, was of all men the least likely to be imposed upon by any speciousness of exterior deportment. It was impossible that so accurate an observer of men and things should have failed to discover, upon the moment, the real character of the personage who had thus intruded upon his hospitality. To say no more, the conformation of the visitor's feet was sufficiently remarkable— he maintained lightly upon his head an inordinately tall hat— there was a tremulous swelling about the hinder part of his breeches— and the vibration of his coat tail was a palpable fact. (170-1)

Clearly, the reader is meant to suspect the devil's identity based on his leanness and his dark attire. If there is any doubt in the reader's mind as to this stranger's character, it is removed by the closing physical details, the hooves and tail. However, this initial "reading" is complicated by Poe's comic touches: the devil's ill-fitting clothes and "filthy appearance" suggest that he suffers from "extreme poverty," and his striking resemblance to an "ecclesiastic" adds layers of humorous irony. As Poe calls into question our ability to interpret a character accurately, he also suggests entertaining paradoxes regarding traditional representations of this figure.

Another comically grotesque description of the devil appears in "The Devil in the Belfry":

... the droll object in question was perceived to be a very diminutive foreign-looking young man. He descended the hills at a great rate, so that every body had soon a good look at him. He was really the most finnick little personage that had ever been seen in Vondervotteimitiss. His countenance was of a dark snuff colour, and he had a long hooked nose, pea eyes, a wide mouth, and an excellent set of teeth, which latter he seemed anxious of displaying, as he was grinning from ear to ear. What with mustachios and whiskers there was none of the rest of his face to be seen. His head was uncovered, and his hair neatly done up in *papillotes*. His dress was a tight-fitting swallow-tailed black coat (from one of whose pockets dangled a vast length of white handkerchief,) black kerseymere knee-breeches, black stockings, and stumpy-looking pumps, with huge bunches of black satin ribbon for bows. Under one arm he carried a huge *chapeau-de-bras*,

and under the other a fiddle nearly five times as big as himself. In his left hand was a gold snuff-box, from which, as he capered down the hill, he took snuff incessantly with an air of the greatest possible self-satisfaction.... But what mainly occasioned a righteous indignation was, that the scoundrelly popinjay, while he cut a fandango here, and a whirligig there, did not seem to have the remotest idea in the world of such a thing as *keeping time* in his steps. (302-3)

Once again, Poe combines traditional identifying features of the devil (his darkness, the blackness of his clothes, his fiddle) with comical physical exaggerations that enhance the character's oddness and funniness. These exaggerations contribute additional layers of "personality" as they foreshadow the plot of the tale: the devil's grin signifies a diabolical tricksterism, and his refusal to "keep time" anticipates the chaos he wreaks when he tampers with the town's steeple-clock).

But the devil is not only significant in Poe's tales in that the reader identifies him flaneuristically, by means of his physiognomy. His presence also suggests Poe's awareness of literary conventions associated with early literary flaneurs and their depiction of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cities. Dana Brand has pointed out that "in England and America... the most commonly invoked literary example of privileged and panoramic urban spectatorship" included the use of a devil figure, an "Asmodeus" who reveals the private lives and characters of the city's inhabitants to a narrator with limited vision (26-7). Nowhere in Poe's tales does such an episode appear explicitly; however, Poe does provide some fascinating references to, and provocative inversions of this formula. For instance, in "Bon-Bon," when Pierre notes the fact that the devil has no

eyes behind his green spectacles, his companion replies:

“Eyes, Pierre Bon-Bon, are very well in their proper place— *that*, you would say, is the head?— right— the head of a worm. To *you* likewise these optics are indispensable— yet I will convince you that my vision is more penetrating than your own. There is a cat, I see in the corner— a pretty cat!-- look at her!-- observe her well! Now, Bon-Bon, do you behold the thoughts— the thoughts, I say— the ideas— the reflections— which are being engendered in her pericranium? There it is now!-- you do not. She is thinking we admire the length of her tail and the profundity of her mind. She has just concluded that I am the most distinguished of all ecclesiastics, and that you are the most superfluous of metaphysicians. Thus you see I am not altogether blind: but to one of my profession the eyes you speak of would be merely an incumbrance, liable at any time to be put out by a toasting iron or a pitchfork. To you, I allow, these optical affairs are indispensable.

Endeavor, Bon-Bon, to use them well;— *my* vision is the soul.” (173-4)

In this passage, the devil evinces precisely the same ability to see into the hidden recesses of the human soul that Brand connects with the all-seeing “Asmodeus” flaneur figure. In fact, all three characters here employ physiognomy, with varying degrees of effectiveness: the devil, though he has no eyes, can perceive what mortal beings cannot; for Pierre Bon-bon, who has already been identified with the flaneur (see above), “these optical affairs are indispensable,” but (and perhaps because) his perceptual abilities are limited; even the cat performs her own physiognomic analysis (mistaken in identifying the devil as “ecclesiastic,” as Pierre almost does, but presumably correct in detecting that Bon-bon is

“the most superfluous of metaphysicians).

It is even possible to construe the devil’s overview of the various Roman philosophers he has “relished” through the ages as a typically disengaged and flaneuristic panorama: “There was the soul of Cratinus— passable: Aristophanes— racy: Plato— exquisite— not your Plato, but Plato the comic poet; your Plato would have turned the stomach of Cerberus— laugh! Then let me see! there were Noevius, and Andronicus, and Plautus, and Terentius. Then there were Lucilius, and Catullus, and Naso, and Quintius Flaccus,— dear Quinty! as I called him...”(176). It is also worth noting that in this tale, as in “The Duc De L’Omelette”(1832) and “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” (1841), the devil is attempting to engage in a “transaction” whereby he acquires another character’s soul (or in the latter, his head). The soul or the head or the human life is treated as a commodity to be bought, sold, or won in a wager or a battle of wits, while the character’s body is relegated to the status of “package.” The devil is also associated in this way with the confidence man, an urban figure to whom (as Brand points out) many earlier “panorama” books were devoted. By linking of the “asmodeus” convention with the urban confidence man seeking to “commodify” and purloin the soul, Poe creates a fable (and, as the title promises, a “moral”) about the reader’s own critical soul, of which he can be (in fact, has just been) defrauded by such laughably transparent flaneuristic devices.

Another humorous manipulation of the devil-flaneur’s panoramic spectatorship may be read in “The Devil in the Belfry.” If, as Brand has suggested, the devil flaneur typically exerted privileged spectatorial powers in order to provide the reader with a sense

of control over urban realities that seemed increasingly hostile and overpowering, this tale provides a perfect “negative” image. The setting is a Dutch town, Vondervotteimittiss (“wonder what time it is?”), that is ordered and regimented to an extreme degree, clearly intended to satirize a perceived over-reliance in the Dutch people upon tradition and organization, even mechanization. The village is situated “in a perfectly circular valley... and entirely surrounded by gentle hills, over whose summit the people have never yet ventured to pass. For this they assign the very good reason that they do not believe there is anything at all on the other side”(299). The same limited imagination and vision is readily visible in the nature of the town’s architecture and structural layout:

Round the skirts of the valley, (which is quite level, and paved throughout with flat tiles,) extends a continuous row of sixty little houses. These, having their backs on the hills, must look, of course, to the centre of the plain, which is just sixty yards from the front door of each dwelling. Every house has a small garden before it, with a circular path, a sun-dial, and twenty-four cabbages. The buildings themselves are so precisely alike, that one can in no manner be distinguished from the other.... The dwellings are as much alike inside as out, and the furniture is all upon one plan. (299-300)

The reader is encouraged to make the obvious analogy between the town’s architecture and a “Germanic” tendency to rely on the clock to orient oneself and provide order in life, even if it is at the expense of knowing what lies “beyond the hills.” This is a village that needs no flaneur to impose order upon it; the emphasis here is on urban regularity, indeed clock-like precision and uniformity, rather than chaos and discontinuity. There is one

location that would provide an ideally panoramic view of the orderly community: the steeple and “the pride and wonder of the village– the great clock”(301). However, this steeple is not employed for flanerie, for looking outward; instead, the town’s orientation is unnaturally inverted, returning unto itself. All attention periodically and inevitably returns inward to this central point of the town, as each resident corroborates the striking of the clock with his or her own watch. They are in the process of confirming this temporal (and social) consensus at noon when the devil pays a visit from over the hills. Here the devil effects not order but disorder, as he capers irreverently and irrhythmically into town, and plunges it into chaos by making the clock strike thirteen, “creating altogether the most abominable din and confusion which it is possible for a reasonable person to conceive”(305). Poe seems to be asserting the limitations of the town’s “in-grown” focus on this beacon of order and synchronization, as well as the necessity of using it to look outward metaphorically, to see beyond the constricting hills that surround the town.

It is clear by this point that Poe used many of his “grotesque” tales and *jeu d’esprits* to articulate his ambivalence regarding the production of literary commodities, including the flaneur’s own particular “brand” or “product.” Ironically, the variance between Poe’s approach in these grotesque offerings and in his more “arabesque” tales also indicates the extraordinary efforts he made to remain marketable, to capitalize on various literary sensibilities of the time. In fact, as Catherine Quoyeser points out, this represented a fundamental problem for the American magazinist in the nineteenth century (140). In the first half of the nineteenth century, an American author could not

considered himself established, in terms of finances or reputation, until he had published in book form; however, the literary qualities that were valued in the more “closed” form of the book (to refer once again to Margaret Beetham’s theories) – especially unity and continuity– seemed antithetical to those required to survive as a magazinist– variety and novelty. Quoyeser feels that as a magazinist, Poe was forced to create “piece-work” as occasion (and editor) demanded. This, she argues, was one of the reasons Poe had substantial difficulty in finding a publisher willing to take on his first collection of stories, a project he called “Tales of the Folio Club.”²² Quoyeser argues that in writing for magazines, “Poe had amassed a large oeuvre for which he could find no unifying pretext...[h]aving long published under the flattening pressure of miscellaneous formats”(140).

While Poe certainly generated magazine pieces on a wide span of topics, I believe there *is* a fundamental unity underlying his best-known tales and genres that suggests Poe’s tales collectively represent more than his attempt to make “capital of his piecework”(140). This unity lies in his unique application of flanerie. In satirizing the generic flaneur’s literary commodities, Poe is in fact registering the flaneur’s ambivalence towards the market in which he himself is already participating, having come “to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer” (Benjamin, “Boheme” 35). And just as the flaneur provides the key to understanding Poe’s ambivalent relation to his magazine publishing milieu, the flaneur’s physiognomy is also the cornerstone of Poe’s metaphysical theories, as articulated in *Eureka: A Prose Poem* and evinced in countless tales and poems. Poe uses the flaneur’s methodology– in his liminal viewpoint, he

emphasis on observation and intuition, and his attention to surface detail— as the basis for an experiential form of logic that would become one of his major contributions to the history of ideas. This logic is the centerpiece of his bid for an imaginative approach to science (as will be discussed in the next chapter), and is repeatedly written as story in Poe's tales of detection, horror and sensation.

Chapter Three: The Sacred Fury of the Cosmic Flaneur

The first half of the nineteenth century was not only the era in which the American periodical press came into its own; it was also, according to George Daniel's *American Science in the Age of Jackson*, "the time when American science got its start"(7). Prior to this, there was a general indifference towards scientific research among Americans, which Daniels attributes to the lack of a traditional patronage system and the absence of effective communications media to overcome the considerable distances between American cities and scientists. With no monarch to provide financial support, the question of how American science could survive was a pressing one for the still-young republic, and would be debated for most of Poe's lifetime. But what was really being debated was the nature of science itself, who could (and should) participate in science, and how. These issues were especially problematic given two opposing trends: a prevailing democratic sensibility in which the average citizen felt competent to assess the relative merits of systems of knowledge, and the increasingly complex and specialized nature of the sciences, fueled by an extraordinary infusion of data from around the globe. The newly expanding magazine industry would play a central role, providing both an arena in which the discussion could take place, and a vehicle by which scientific intelligence could be transmitted to the general public.

In *American Science in the Age of Jackson*, Daniels investigates the development of American science in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argues that America's

relatively slow progress has been mistakenly associated with a supposed absence of specialization, and the great number of scientific amateurs whose “real” professions were non-scientific. In fact, he suggests, “as the gentleman amateur had been the prototype of the man of science in the eighteenth century, by the mid-nineteenth century the trained specialist-- the professional whose sole source of support was his scientific employment-- had come to be the new type”(34). The ever-increasing wealth of information caused the gradual fragmentation of the holistic “natural philosophy” into various scientific disciplines; it also “made it increasingly unrealistic to urge the public to understand the work of the scientist in his own terms”(36). “Outsiders” felt disgruntled that new theoretical constructs were too complicated for the layperson to decipher, while “insiders” with specialized training chafed at criticism from the less learned masses. Despite efforts to keep the “many” involved in scientific progress, the disparity widened between the initiated and the uninitiated, in terms of the subject matter discussed and the level of discourse. In the end, “popularizers” such as Edward Hitchcock could only present scientific “wonders” in hopes of fostering the public’s curiosity, “a sure indication of the inability to communicate on other terms,” according to Daniels (40). Though the debate over democratic participation in science was particularly sharp in the land of the Jacksonian “common man,” these new directions in science were not confined to America. They were part of a phenomena taking shape all over the world, particularly in England: “the creation in the early nineteenth century of an esoteric body of knowledge called ‘science’”(38).

Daniels focuses on the actual state of nineteenth-century scientific inquiry, and

his argument is thorough and persuasive. However, Poe was writing when these matters were the subject of lively discussion and contention, and not the accomplished historical “fact” they seem to be from a twentieth-century perspective. What science actually was, or was becoming, is of less interest for my purposes than the ways in which science was depicted, contested, and appropriated in contemporary journals and magazines. With the development of an established periodical press in America during this period, the debate about science, and scientific information itself, could be broadcast in ways that were impossible before. This not only encouraged the public’s perception that it could and should remain an active force in scientific progress; it also empowered critics, reviewers and editors of general interest periodicals to see (and portray) themselves as intellectual conduits, liaisons between their broad readership and scientific “professionals.” Their discussion of scientific material in these periodicals sheds light on the extent to which non-scientists (among them magazinists) could, or desired to, participate in science.

In this chapter I will examine some representations of science in general periodicals between 1800 and 1850 as the context in which Poe makes a bid for his own brand of non-professional scientific participation. Poe mediates the opposing forces of democratic diffusion and professional specialization by offering his own version of science based on perception, reason and imagination. His scientific methodology is based on the same kind of intuitive physiognomical analysis employed by the flaneur; as such, it is “liberated” from the control of the “few” specialists in possession of “esoteric” knowledge. However, Poe does not place science wholly in the hands of the masses; rather, by asserting that scientific values should be (and in fact are) intimately aligned

with creative perception and an aesthetic approach to the universe, he establishes an alternative hierarchy, with a coterie of “truly imaginative” scientific flaneurs (including himself) at the helm.

A brief survey of the general interest periodicals of the time reveals that if, as Daniels argues, it was “increasingly unrealistic to urge the public to understand the work of the scientist in his own terms,” the public was nevertheless continually exhorted to do so. According to Frank Luther Mott’s *History of American Magazines*, “there were many articles of scientific interest in the general magazines of the period. The entire group of periodicals devoted to the wholesale distribution of information after the example of the *Penny Magazine* supplied their readers with series of articles on the various sciences. The reviews [also] printed some authoritative discussions by scholars”(446). As an example, he cites the public “mania” for geology in the 1830s, fueled by the publication in England of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830-33). In his Introduction to the *Principles*, Martin J.S. Rudwick points out that

the readers whom Lyell and his publisher hoped the work would attract covered the same wide range as, for example, those of the *Quarterly Review*. The work was in no way designed just for an audience of ‘professional scientists’-- that term is in any case anachronistic for the 1830s-- but for the intellectual reading public generally. Lyell’s elegant style... made the work widely accessible to a public that found geology an exciting science. (xi-ii)

As a result, “[t]he *Principles* enjoyed an immediate success with the reading public, and new editions followed in quick succession throughout the decade” (xiv-v). Furthermore,

a lively discussion on this and related topics was carried on in the *North American Review*, the *New England Magazine*, and the *Knickerbocker*, among other general magazines. But Mott gives scant attention to discussions of science in general interest periodicals, focusing instead on the growing number of specialized science publications. An examination of just one of the successful reviews of the time, the *North American*, demonstrates the degree to which its editors counted on a broad public interest in scientific innovation, and how the forms and rationales of this interest shifted as the century progressed.

The *North American Review* was one of the most successful and longest-lived of the periodicals which sprouted in what Mott calls the “Period of Nationalism,” between 1794 and 1825; begun in 1815, it was to enjoy a lifespan of half a century, while many other periodicals from the same time went under within a few years (128-29). Like most American quarterlies, it followed the pattern of established English periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*. In *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter*, Gillian Beer describes the influence of these models in English periodicals of the Victorian era:

The wonderful inclusiveness of generalist journals at that time, from the *Literary Gazette* and *Journal of Belles Lettres, Science and Art*, to the *Contemporary Review* and the *Nineteenth Century*, meant that philosophers, lawyers, evolutionary theorists, politicians, astronomers, physicists, novelists, theologians, poets, and language theorists all appeared alongside each other, more often with the effect of bricolage than synthesis, true enough. But their lying alongside on

the page encouraged the reader to infer connections between their activities by the simple scan of the eye and by the simultaneous availability of diverse ideas. (202-3)

Thus, as discussed in Chapter 2, readers were encouraged by the magazine format to act as literary flaneurs, reading episodic and disparate contents collected together in an intellectual *magasin*, or storehouse. However, the roots of this influence can be seen much earlier, though; in honor of its twentieth volume (1825), the editors of the *North American* issued a “brief outline of the contents of the work from the beginning” that illustrates the “miscellaneous” nature of the review’s contents and implicitly, the variegated interests of its readers:

It will be seen that it embraces a vast compass of knowledge on almost every subject of general interest, particularly relating to the history, government, politics, education, literature and literary institutions, science, the arts, internal improvements, national progress and character, legislation, law, jurisprudence, statistics and political economy, agriculture, manufactures, commerce, and the future prospects and prosperity of this country. (460)

In the *North American*’s early years, questions of scientific nature are frequently broached, and reviews of scientific publications are couched within discussions of science’s function in American society. For instance, an examination of Parker Cleaveland’s *Elementary Treatise on Mineralogy and Geology* (1817) addresses the dilemma of sustaining science in a country that as yet had no governmental funding

mechanism in place. Of paramount importance for this reviewer is the stimulation of widespread public interest in mineralogy, a science with a limited number of devotees:

The author of an elaborate, elementary treatise on mineralogy in this country is no common adventurer; a few only among us, have learned to love stones, to find inexhaustible variety, and exquisite beauty in productions, far removed from the vulgar, and commonly to be found by those only who can enjoy them. Such an author has to contend with the reflection, that he must make readers for his book.... [T]here is perhaps as much indifference towards his favourite science, as there is ignorance of it. (439-40)

The opposition of “the vulgar” to “those who can enjoy” the “exquisite beauty” in minerals implies a schism between the “few” and the “many,” predicated not so much on scientific or intellectual ability as on an appreciation of the aesthetic values and faculties employed in scientific investigation. A nineteenth-century American mineralogist might find some support in a select group of people with similar affinities;

an author in this country, however, must not calculate on many readers of this class, who are no less than the extraordinary productions of a society and science a good deal advanced. It is composed of men of ardent, enthusiastick minds, who have accidentally been led to collect minerals, and who would have been devotees to any opinions or pursuits, which chance might have indicated. (440)

It is not the science of mineralogy per se which has won the admiration of these superior beings, these “men of ardent, enthusiastick minds”; more important is their rare capacity for cognitive thought and aesthetic appreciation. The emphasis here is on the power of a

mind with superior mental and imaginative capacities, rather than scientific training and education.

Given the disparity between this “enlightened” perspective and that of the indifferent masses, the reviewer argues for a revision of the concept of “success” in scientific writing: “an author must look for success, not so much to the actual state of the learning of a country, as to its influences; and if it be his fate to write in an age, or in a country, in which these influences have neither made science an object of fashion nor taste, the success of the work must depend very much on its own powers to produce these effects”(412). The scientific community could use the social elite’s influence on general tastes to bridge the gap between those who valued the beauty of science and the “vulgar” who could not.

Another source of temporary failure to our mineralogical authorship is, that mineralogy still wants here the high sanctions of taste and fashion. Our leaders of fashion and taste, would have been utterly confounded, had they a few years ago been suddenly conveyed to the Royal Institution, in Albermarle street, London; for they would have found there, not venerable philosophers gravely listening to theories of the earth, or watching with deep interest the progress of experiment; but fair ladies, and fashionable gentlemen, now taking notes, now passing about rude masses of granite, basalt, &c. or audibly applauding the lecturer for his nice tact at oryotognosy, his profound researches in geognosy, or above all for his astonishing achievements in chemistry. (410-1).

In other countries, science was indeed the height of fashion, so why not in America?

This reviewer argues for the “trickle-down” theory of diffusing scientific interest and ability. It is necessary to “market” science towards the social aristocracy in order to elicit a “sure patronage,” the kind of financial support that science requires and that only the aristocracy might provide (“What will not men of fortune pay for their luxuries? and what luxury more commendable than science?(411})). And while science acquires an audience with social *éclat*, fashion gains intellectual solidity; the discoveries in the Royal Institution “give it the highest tone of character, and claim of philosophers a tribute, that fashion, taste, or luxury, have perhaps never before urged”(411). Inevitably, the reviewer argues, “where knowledge has such sanctions, it must necessarily become popular”(411); supported with interest and money from the wealthy, science will be perceived as fashionable by the masses, who will then constitute a viable market for generalized works on science. And “when the publick and private utility, as well as abstract value of the science is more generally understood, the author cannot fail of his reward”(412-3).

In this model, the roles of scientific discoverer and scientific popularizer are conflated; the lecturer at the Royal Institution, Sir Humphrey Davy, is pronounced “of all others we have ever met with, the best calculated, either to create taste for science, or to lead science itself”(411). Davy served as an idealized example of the intellectual scientific adventurer who could infuse others with his enthusiasm, even if lecturing to the leisured class perhaps involved some simplification and visual aids:

with all his science, Mr. now Sir Humphrey Davy was so little encumbered, that he found opportunity to store his mind with a great variety of general information and anecdote, which gave a peculiar interest to his lectures. He illustrated

geology by excellent coloured drawings of strata, mountains, &c. and did not think it beneath the dignity of the place or the occasion, when discoursing on volcanoes, to gratify his audience by an actual eruption from a miniature of Vesuvius, which lay on the table before him. (411)

However, this model for science's survival in the new republic had serious problems. From a nineteenth-century populist point of view, such a reliance on the social aristocracy smacked of elitism, which was increasingly out of touch with the burgeoning democratic sentiments in America going into the era of Jackson. On the other hand, in analyzing the "creation of a taste for science" in America, an important question arises: To what extent did scientists have to (or feel they had to) simplify scientific concepts for general consumption? Science's dependence on public support became problematic given the public's uncertain ability to participate in or even understand it. And early on, periodical writers were aware of the growing schism between professionals and non-professionals that Daniels illustrates. For instance, an analysis in the *North American* of John Gorham's *Elements of Chemical Science* (1819) begins with the statement that "the rapid improvements which have been made in the science of chemistry during the present century, have rendered it almost impossible for any one to keep pace with it in its discoveries and revolutions, except those who have made it a particular object of attention"(113). However, the process of popularization had already taken a firm hold in this area, for "chemistry has been the most popular science of the age," according to this writer, who proceeds to point out that "the novelty and splendour of some of its

discoveries, the almost magical effect with which it explains so many of the ordinary phenomena of nature, have served to attract and charm minds but little disposed to relish its deeper investigations”(113).

Accordingly, this review emphasizes that “there are two classes of persons who pursue the study of chemistry— and indeed the same is true of every other science— those who wish merely to acquire such a knowledge of its principles and operations, as will enable them to understand the constitution and relations of the objects around them... and those who follow it professionally” (115-6). And it is in producing a text for the first of these groups that Gorham is satisfying an apparent need: “We have been much in want of a book... which should afford a general, but at the same time, accurate and scientific view of the subject, without entering into those minuter details of practice, which are dry and revolting to all but the professional student”(114). But the nature of this non-professional readership’s collaboration in scientific advance seems unclear. The reviewer’s emphasis on this audience’s fascination with chemistry’s “novelty and splendour,” its “almost magical effect” that can “attract and charm” them, suggests a public that can only superficially partake of science. On the other hand, the call for “a general, but at the same time, accurate and scientific view of the subject” implies a more serious (and more capable) reader.

This is the question that M. Susan Lindee takes up in her discussion of a nineteenth-century British chemistry book, Jane Marcet’s *Conversations on Chemistry* (1806), a work that “in the United States... became the most successful elementary chemistry text of the first half of the nineteenth century” (Lindee 45). It went through

twenty-three American editions between 1807 and 1850, and was widely used in early women's schools, mechanic's institutes and medical instruction (40). Lindee argues that the success of Marcet's *Conversations* questions the assumption that science was valued primarily for its practical applications or for its "spiritual lessons" for women, especially (41); in fact, the texts which emphasized these aspects sold fewer copies and were less widely used than Marcet's. Her *Conversations* provided not a compilation of chemistry's "domestic applications," but "an introduction to the most important chemical theories of her day" (45), suggesting that she and the institutions that used her text saw the public as capable of understanding and using these advanced concepts. And in the history of Marcet's book we may see a model of the popularization process described in the review of Cleaveland's *Mineralogy*: Marcet, born into a "prosperous" family with "social connections," was inspired to write the book after attending a lecture by Humphrey Davy, which she desired to understand better; in turn, the *Conversations* has been credited with "converting" a young Michael Faraday, then a bookbinder, to "a life of science"(40-3), and influencing the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

But Marcet's text was criticized by her American editors, who "expressed concern about the promotion of questionable theories to beginning students"-- at best, she had "followed Davy where his contemporaries 'have not yet dared to follow him'"; at worst, she was "incompetent," offering "supposition piled upon supposition" instead of "known and allowed facts" (Lindee 47). The text was also disparaged by educators, among them Amos Eaton, whose *Chemical Instructor* (1822) stressed practical applications (and, as Lindee points out, was not widely used by the women's academies {51}). Two years

earlier, Eaton had published his *Index to the Geology of the Northern States* (1820), a work with similarly practical emphasis. In its examination of this book, the *North American* issues a similar warning about scientific theorizing by non-professionals, but at the same time allows for public participation in inductive fact-gathering:

The labour of many is yet wanted in the examination of particular tracts of country, and in the collection of unquestionable evidence respecting the nature, properties, relative position, &c. of the formations throughout the United States. The leading features of our geology have been ably traced by Mr. M'Clure, but he has done little more than to sketch an outline, to be filled up by others. Let theory be laid aside, and the actual phenomena be first well described and faithfully recorded; conclusions may then be drawn with safety, and hypotheses indulged in. But he who previously adopts a theory will inevitably distort facts and give but imperfect and partial statements. (229)

While such participation has as its underlying goal the advancement of American science, Eaton's reviewer also sounds a different note regarding public participation in science: self-improvement. Among the "many inducements to the study of geology," he writes, is the fact that "when pursued through all its branches, and with more exalted views, it conduces to habits of accurate and minute examination, it calls into operation all the powers of the mind to trace the causes of the great revolutions which have taken place in the solid mass of our planet"(228). (Later in this chapter, we will see how Poe likewise perceived the integral relationship between scientific thought and the powers of

the mind, although he was not so concerned with the overall project of improving the “common man.”) The social aristocracy, too, can better themselves through science:

To the man of leisure, to the general scholar, and accomplished gentleman, some knowledge of it is daily becoming more necessary, without which scarce a volume of travels or topography, a review, or a journal, can be read with all the interest it demands.... To men of wealth and leisure, natural history in general presents itself as a source of the purest happiness, and a relief from the ennui of idleness. (228-9)

But the intellectual, almost metaphysical, heights to which the common man may be elevated through science seems to dwarf the benefits (enhanced reading, freedom from ennui) reaped by the upper class. In a review of John Webster’s *Manual of Chemistry* (1826), the “trickle-down” theory of popularization is once again articulated, but it is evident that there is a distinction being made as to the involvement of science’s various participants:

It is given to but a few great minds to make brilliant discoveries, and comparatively few persons in Europe, and still fewer in this country, have the means or facilities of prosecuting any branch of experimental science to the extent they may desire. This remark applies with force to the science of chemistry, as in the extensive researches which it requires, a great expenditure of time and money must be provided for. It becomes important, therefore, that those who have abundant means, should contract a taste for such arts and sciences, as are most conducive to the morality and wellbeing of the people. Chemistry and mechanical philosophy, when made objects of pursuit and interest to the less informed classes

of mankind, cannot but powerfully conduce to benefit the morals, and to enlighten and strengthen the understanding. In their elementary principles, and still more in their advanced state, aided by the countenance and influence of the wealthy, the physical sciences must always help in extending and improving the mental energies of the people, and be made a source of amusement, happiness, and profitable exertion. (350)

Here, the true scientific innovators “make brilliant discoveries”; the privileged classes “contract a taste” for science (and practical application of science in the “arts”), but only for the purposes of improving the “morality and wellbeing of the people.” The “less informed” masses partake in scientific knowledge not so they may contribute to science, but so they may improve themselves.

The growing emphasis on self-improvement through science was an important strategy in the overall attempt by scientists to shape public perceptions of science. Daniels offers a useful summary of the various strategies nineteenth-century scientists employed to garner public and (belated) governmental support in a democratic society, while increasingly leaving the average person out of the scientific process per se. They frequently sought to depict scientific innovations and discoveries as useful and having immediate practical benefits. Scientists presented their field(s) as “the highest kind of ‘rational amusement’” in “a society that could not afford ‘mere entertainment’-- when the dominant literary criticism, for example, frowned darkly upon all kinds of fiction”(Daniels 48). Science was offered as a quieting influence in a time of growing political factionism and unrest; it was also, as indicated above, seen as an educational tool for

teaching moral values. It was represented as “handmaiden of theology”(53), aligned with religious interests (via “natural theology”) in the crucial role of providing indisputable proof of the Almighty's presence, as the famous Bridgewater Treatises did in England. Science appealed to cultural patriotism in the nation's attempt to earn European respect (in the *Edinburgh Review*, Sidney Smith had galled Americans by asking, "What does the world yet owe to American Physicians or Surgeons?"{43}). In short,

the government was told that national honor demanded that science be given support and the public in general was told of the vast practical benefits that science had to offer. The conservative fear of social disorder was effectively exploited by pointing out the quietistic function of science (as well as that of education in general), and the more liberal were offered the prospect of bringing social "elegancies" within the reach of all classes. Once this rather comprehensive argument was developed it is not surprising that the possibilities of science so quickly captured the imagination of Americans, and the verbal-- if not yet the pecuniary -- support of most public officials (50).

In the latter part of this chapter, Poe's involvement in science will be shown to have little in common with these standard rationalizations, particularly with the “practical,” “moral” and “patriotic” arguments; and while Poe's scientific approach is metaphysical in its ultimate intent, it can hardly be said to be “religious” in the sense of belonging to traditional organized denominations.

Nevertheless, all of these tactics can be found in writings about science in the general interest periodicals of the time, and all seem to limit the public's participation to

generalized “support” based on individual and nationalistic self-interest. Yet the demand for intelligent and intelligible scientific material to be made available to the public was sustained. One of the clearest statements of the philosophy behind a democratic “diffusion of knowledge” can be found in the *North American Review* of April 1830. In a review of the *Library of Useful Knowledge* and the *Library of Entertaining Knowledge*, the former is praised for being “sufficiently learned,” and having “enough of scientific classification,” but is criticized for not being “intelligible to the mass of readers”(293-4). In an attempt to compensate, the publishers created the second work, which suffers from the opposite flaws: it amounts to “a collection of children’s stories about Menageries and Forests, descriptions that look like a traveller’s memoranda of trees and plants; rambling anecdotes about dogs, cats, and jackals; and all this, with scarcely any pretension to philosophical classification or instructive inference”(294). What is needed, argues the reviewer, is a work “with enough of scientific classification and detail on the one hand, and yet, on the other, intelligible, interesting, exciting and satisfying inquiry, gratifying the natural curiosity of the human mind, directing it to the practical applications of science, and exalting it to that devotion which is its great end. It might indeed be a work, and one of the noblest works, of united learning, genius, taste, and piety”(295).

Having tasked these Libraries with failing at “the purpose for which they are avowedly written,” being “wholly unfit for the diffusion of knowledge among the mass of the people, or among the mass of general readers”(293), the author proceeds to analyze the feasibility and propriety of that project. The clarion call of Jacksonian democratic values is readily apparent from early on:

It is indeed one of the peculiar and great undertakings of the age, to communicate scientific knowledge to the whole intelligent portion of the mass of society.... The noble project of bringing down high philosophy and holy science to the mass of the people, has been reserved for this age. It is a novel enterprise among mankind. It is an unwritten page in the history of the world. It is a project, we do not think it too much to say, which never before entered into the conceptions of men; for it is an attempt to pluck from the sun, 'in the highest heaven of philosophy,' the Promethean fire, to burn on the common hearth-stone in the humblest abodes of mortals. (296)

The separation of science from daily life and from its usefulness for the masses is attributed to elitism and attempts by the aristocracy to maintain political and intellectual power: "The error of past ages has been, to accumulate power, wealth, learning, and even religious responsibilities and trusts, in a few hands.... Science, as well as religion, has said to the mass of mankind, 'Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou.'" As a result of this "selfish estimation" among the intelligentsia, the wonders and benefits of scientific discovery have been kept from the general public, "because they have been considered as too good for the mass of mankind, or because it has been imagined that they would be soiled by common use"(296-7).

But with the advent of the Jacksonian era, the reviewer notes, it had become the strong tendency of all liberal thought and feeling, at this day, to bring every human acquisition to a practical account ; to make men in politics their own

rulers, in religion their own guides; to spread wealth, by abolishing the laws of entail and primogeniture, into general competence and comfort; and... to call down knowledge, from its proud and inaccessible heights, to be the companion and cheerer of the lowliest toil and of the humblest fireside. Diffusion is the watchword of the age.... (297)

The reviewer then proceeds to examine and refute the arguments against this philosophy of diffusion. A major rationale is offered in the suggestion that all men can and should know scientific truths because “the objects of this kind of study are God’s works, works which were expressly designed to be studied and admired by all his rational creatures”(298). The emphasis here is on divine display, and human interpretation: “it is evident that the world was made to display to its inhabitants the wisdom, as the goodness of its Creator. It is reasonable, therefore, that they should study it.... The objects to be examined are all around them”(298). Scientific investigation, piety and an Adamic dominance over nature are blended later as the writer waxes ecstatic:

To stand amidst the works of the wonderful Architect, as their admiring interpreter; to look around, not with the dull, unconscious gaze of mere animal sensations, but to comprehend, in their qualities and uses, the things that we behold, the air, the sunshine, the storm, the lightning; to see all things rising in their order, and moving in their harmony; to stand, as did the first man, and ‘call by their names’ all things that ‘pass before us,’ is to take one of the noblest and happiest positions on earth; and fittest, too, for the lord of this lower creation.
(307)

Central to this argument is the assertion that every human has at his or her immediate disposal the essential tools required for scientific knowledge and discovery: “the subjects of study are the very elements with which they are every moment conversant; the instruments are their senses; to see, to hear, is to know.... [T]he foundation of science is observation.... Diagrams are essential in the mathematics; and apparatus is a needful auxiliary to scientific observation. But observation need not wait for them. The inquirer may begin his researches without stirring from the spot where he stands”(298-9). Amateur scientists need not be concerned about devoting an inordinate amount of time in these pursuits, either, perhaps to the detriment of their primary occupation, or at the cost of embracing science itself as a profession: “[T]he times for study are all times that are not necessarily engrossed with other pursuits; when they take a walk, when they look around them upon the works of nature, especially when they are at leisure”(298).

What is downplayed in this publicly accessible version of scientific expertise is abstract thinking and theorization; this coincides with the Jacksonian era’s emphasis on Baconian induction and fact-gathering, as well as the accent on practicality and the need for science to be explained in clearly understandable language. “The business of philosophy is not to construct theories,” the reviewer states,

but to state facts; not to deal with mysteries in mysterious language, but to deal with plain matters in intelligible language. Science, instead of being a high and abstruse mystery, is a clearer up of the mysteries that lie in our daily path. We have no doubt, that the casual observations of many practical and plain men, if

they had been properly and philosophically noted down in their own minds, would have laid the foundation for much useful philosophy. (299)

In the same way, the instructor of young scholars should not seek to impress them with an abundance of technical terms that might alienate the would-be scientists, but rather attempt briefly to convey important principles in plain language: “Perfect clearness of ideas, no matter in how few words, provided they be intelligible, is the first qualification of the lecturer”(301). Other general periodicals had similar praise for avoidance of complicated scientific jargon. *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* is particularly noteworthy in this respect. In a review of the *American Gentleman's Medical Pocket Book and Health Adviser* (1837), the reviewer states that “every possible variety of ill ‘that flesh is heir to’ is noticed in popular language, free from the distracting technicalities of science, or tiresome display of professional skill”(I, 75). W.S.W. Ruschenberger is praised for not indulging “in the vulgar use of technicalities, for the purpose of exhibiting a superficial knowledge in matters uninteresting to his readers” in his 1837 publication *Voyage Round the World* (II, 287). Reynall Coates’ *Popular Medicine or Family Adviser* (1837) contains “‘the plain why and because’ of the science of body-healing,” and is recommended because it is “written in popular language”(II, 356).

This premium on linguistic accessibility in scientific material and other familiar “inducements” to the study of science are also found in a review of George Hayward’s *Physiology of Man* (1834) from the *North American Review*. Although physiology is “curious and interesting,” “fruitful... of the most useful results... [for] the general inquirer after knowledge, no less than for him to whom the study is of immediate practical

necessity,” to the reviewer’s surprise and dismay, “there are few persons among us, with the exception of medical men, whose curiosity is excited to study them”(395). The writer attributes this disinterest to the widespread misconception that “the subject is involved in phraseology so technical, as to forbid the researches of those who do not make it the business of their lives to pursue it”(395). Not so, he claims:

the general knowledge of physiology, of which we are speaking, demands no such intimate acquaintance with details. In point of fact, most of the physiological works published in modern times, although written for the profession without any especial care to avoid technical phraseology, may be read with facility by any man of ordinary intelligence; and require less use of a glossary than the speculations of phrenology, which have at times excited so much popular curiosity. (396)

Once again, the familiar rationale of practicality for the “diffusion of information” is sounded: “the chief ground of confidence of the usefulness of this little book is the great principle, that all knowledge is useful”(400). In the case of physiology, practical applications include convincing arguments against the binding of young women’s chest and ribs with “immovable casements of whalebone,” and the “discouragement and diminution of quackery”(399-400). Last, the article stresses the precedence of factual knowledge over theoretical ruminations: “It becomes peculiarly important, therefore, in a work of this sort, that a careful discrimination be made between what is known, and that which rests upon theoretical speculation merely.... In a practical point of view... the facts which we know, are of incomparably more importance, than the explanation of those facts, which still remains hidden”(400-1).

The emphasis on democratic access to useful scientific applications was played out not only in the reviews, but also in other, more broadly popular periodicals as the century progressed. Between 1837 and 1840, *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* offered selections on health and medicine, geography, natural history, even a recurring feature called "A Chapter on Science and Art," with short notices on ballooning, engraving techniques, the potential discovery of a new planet, steam and pneumatic engines, various informal experiments, etc.²³ Likewise, the *Southern Literary Messenger* contained numerous articles and editorials devoted to science between 1834 and 1836, the time Poe was first employed there: Peter A. Browne's "Mineral Wealth of Virginia" (November 1834) and "Hints to Students of Geology" (December 1834), "The Age of Reptiles" (July 1835); and Miss E. Draper's "Halley's Comet" (December 1835).²⁴ Even *Godey's Lady's Book*, in catering to its "delicate" readers, offered pieces in its second volume (1831) on "The Wonders of Physics" (198), "Practical Science" (230), "The History of Insects" and "Observations on the Teeth" (299), "The Effects of Sound" (300). The fourth volume (1832) contained "The Human Structure" (17), "The Ornithologist" (149), "Planetary Atmospheres" (208) and "The Distances between the Planets" (354). Admittedly, these were often rhapsodic or pious paeans to the "wonders" and "marvels" of modern science, or on the practicality of such discoveries (or on the marvels of their practicality). They were accompanied frequently by romanticized tales about famous scientific figures,²⁵ or fictional accounts of charming physicians. However, their inclusion at all in such a fashionable periodical suggests a widespread, if not technical, interest on the part of female readers.

These, then, were the overall trends regarding the participation in science by non-professionals during the first half of the nineteenth century: a growing emphasis on the value of widespread scientific knowledge for the betterment of the individual, as opposed to the advance of science per se; an increasingly strident call to wrest science from the hands of the “few” and return it to the “rightful” possession of the common man; a concurrent shift away from theory and toward practical utility; and a desire that scientific knowledge be made available and accessible in “plain, ordinary language.” However, not all scientific writers followed these trends. Perhaps the most important exceptions for our purposes concern the value and nature of scientific theorizing. For instance, while Lyell targeted a broad audience with understandable and engaging prose, he was also thoroughly engaged in crucial theoretical questions regarding the origins of the earth and what determined the nature of its surface. In so doing, he was partaking of the old debate between Werner and Hutton, and their “Vulcanist” and “Neptunist” theories of the earth’s beginnings. But, as Martin J.S. Rudwick points out, Lyell was walking a tightrope. On the one hand, in attempting to convince fellow scientists of a vastly expanded time scale for earth history, “Lyell recognized that it was their scientific imagination that needed transforming,” that “[g]eologists must make ‘an effort both of the reason and the imagination’” to overcome religious and perceptual habits of mind that kept geology from progressing (xviii-xix). Yet in addressing the question of the earth’s origins, Rudwick notes,

Lyell lays himself open to the charge of leading geology back to the bad old days— as in Lyell’s time they were considered to have been— of the speculative ‘theories

of the earth' of the previous century and earlier.... He therefore tries to forestall the criticism that his own system too is merely speculative, by emphasizing that geology must not be confused with 'cosmogony.' In other words, geology must exclude speculations about the origin of the earth, and must confine itself to an analysis of the subsequent changes that the earth has undergone. (xv-xvi)

Another scientist who pointed to the importance of imaginative theorization, one who is central to an understanding of Poe and especially *Eureka*, was Alexander von Humboldt. In fact, in many ways *Eureka* is a direct response to ideas Humboldt broached in *Cosmos* (vol. 1, 1845; vol. 2, 1847). One of the most noteworthy characteristics of Humboldt's approach is its emphasis on a holistic and generalized, rather than a specialized science. Initially, Humboldt rationalizes this strategy in familiar practical (and superficial) terms: "general considerations... are not only in themselves more attractive than special studies, but they also afford superior advantages to those who are unable to devote much time to occupations of this nature. The different branches of the study of natural history are only accessible in certain positions of social life, and do not, at every season and in every climate, present like enjoyments"(41-2).

But more importantly, Humboldt's holism is a logical outgrowth of his belief in the underlying interconnectedness of all life systems and forces throughout the universe, an idea Poe would also stress: "[t]he principle impulse by which I was directed," Humboldt writes, "was the earnest endeavor to comprehend the phenomena of physical objects in their general connection, and to represent nature as one great whole, moved and

animated by internal forces”(7). Later in the same chapter, he writes, “Nature considered rationally, that is to say, submitted to the process of thought, is a unity in diversity of phenomena; a harmony, blending together all created things, however dissimilar in form and attributes”(24). This interweaving of organic and inorganic material reality suggested to him that an over-reliance on scientific specialization could be too constrictive. The study of botany, for instance, inevitably leads the traveling observer to questions regarding the geographical distribution of plants, which in turn leads to questions of climate, temperature and meteorology; “and it is thus that the observer who earnestly pursues the path of knowledge is led from one class of phenomena to another, by means of the mutual dependence and connection existing between them”(8). What was needed, he felt, was a scientific rubric that would provide a context for these different areas of scientific inquiry: his term for it would be “physical cosmography.” According to Michael Dettelbach, for Humboldt, “[t]he separate disciplines were self-governing ‘provinces,’ making their own decisions about language and research, but each also relied on the concept of an overarching discipline, physical cosmography, to escape the arbitrariness and impermanence of mere accumulations of facts or distorting systems”(xxiv).

Humboldt emphasized that while these scientific “provinces” should retain their individuality, there were connections among them that could not be ignored. The Humboldtian scientist was first and foremost an observer, but one who could both accurately note specific facts and events and remove himself from that immediacy, perceiving links with larger natural systems: “he who comprehends nature at a single glance, and knows how to abstract his mind from local phenomena”(96). This is a

conscious and deliberate abstraction, akin to a willed emulation of Emerson's "transparent eyeball," and a crucial one to seeing "the big picture" of the cosmos:

When the human mind first attempts to subject to its control the world of physical phenomena, and strives by meditative contemplation to penetrate the rich luxuriance of living nature, and the mingled web of free and restricted natural forces, man feels himself raised to a height from whence, as he embraces the vast horizon, individual things blend together in varied groups, and appear as if shrouded in a vapory veil. (79)

Given the unity within the diversity of the cosmos, and the need to utilize abstraction to grasp this unity, Humboldt argues (as Darwin would later) for the appropriateness, indeed the primacy, of an intuitive response to the cosmos based on sensory perception. Humboldt claims that among the different forms of human engagement with and enjoyment of nature,

the first place must be assigned to a sensation, which is wholly independent of an intimate acquaintance with the physical phenomena presented to our view.... [E]very where, the mind is penetrated by the same sense of the grandeur and the vast expanse of nature, revealing to the soul, by a mysterious inspiration, the existence of laws that regulate the forces of the universe.... The earnest and solemn thoughts awakened by a communion with nature intuitively arise from a presentiment of the order and harmony pervading the whole universe.... (25)

This intuitive "presentiment" of orderliness is corroborated by more traditionally

“methodical” scientific inquiry, according to Humboldt; “[t]hus do the spontaneous impressions of the untutored mind lead, like the laborious deductions of the cultivated intellect, to the same intimate persuasion, that one sole and indissoluble chain binds together all nature”(27).

In a sense, this original “presentiment” is also an archetype of later ones that will play a central role in the scientific process, for (Humboldt argues) “[t]he rational experimentalist does not proceed at hazard, but acts under the guidance of hypotheses, founded on a half indistinct and more or less just intuition of the connection existing among natural objects or forces”(74). Eventually, “[t]hat which for a long time remains merely an object of vague intuition, by degrees acquires the certainty of positive truth; and man... ‘amid ceaseless change seeks the unchanging pole’”(36). Furthermore, he maintains, the importance of human instinct in generating empirical data is validated historically: “The most various forms of intuition have... age after age, aided in augmenting the prodigious mass of empirical knowledge, which in our own day has been enlarged with ever-increasing rapidity”(75). Humboldt also laments the increasingly common habit of dismissing certain kinds of science as impractical and as too overtly “theoretical,” which overlooks the fact that oftentimes what appears today as intuitive theory contains the seed of tomorrow’s practical discovery and technology. As Dettelbach suggests, “Humboldt had to develop a model of science that... made facts incipient theories and made sensations incipient concepts, so that fact-gathering was always implicit theorizing”(xvii).

However, the importance of intuition and imagination in Humboldtian science

must not obscure his awareness of the threat of “phantoms of the imagination,” that “superficial half-knowledge, so characteristic of the present day, which leads to the introduction of vaguely comprehended scientific views into general conversation”(43).

Humboldt appears as anxious as Lyell to avoid the excesses of former “speculative cosmogonies,” even as his study points beyond the realm of the strictly inductive:

“Devoid of the profoundness of a purely speculative philosophy, my essay on the Cosmos treats of the contemplation of the universe, and is based upon a rational empiricism, that is to say, upon the results of the facts registered by science, and tested by the operations of the intellect”(49). He is also highly conscious of both the benefits and dangers inherent in generalizing and writing science for the masses, as is evident from the following quote:

It is by this tendency to generalization, which is only dangerous in its abuse, that a great portion of the physical knowledge already acquired may be made the common property of all classes of society; but, in order to render the instruction imparted by these means commensurate with the importance of the subject, it is desirable to deviate as widely as possible from the imperfect compilations designated, till the close of the eighteenth century, by the inappropriate term of popular knowledge. (51-2)

But, in the end, Humboldt emphasizes the integral roles played by both reason and imagination, both induction and intuition, in the scientific process:

It does not become the spirit which characterizes the present age distrustfully to reject every generalization of views and every attempt to examine into the nature

of things by the process of reason and induction. It would be a denial of the dignity of human nature and the relative importance of the faculties with which we are endowed, were we to condemn at one time austere reason engaged in investigating causes and their mutual connections, and at another that exercise of the imagination which prompts and excites discoveries by its creative powers.

(78)

What is particularly striking about Humboldt's view of science is that it has evident affinities to the methodology of the flaneur, as described in the first two chapters of this study. To see the various "provinces" of science as distinct and yet contiguous or even intertwined with each other, to see all the myriad forms of life as separate and yet intimately related, is to espouse a science that approximates the inclusiveness of the general magazines. The Humboldtian scientist wanders and "browses" among these different areas in a non-linear and non-directed manner, much as the flaneur strolled aimlessly through the urban streets. In fact, the dialectic Humboldt articulates between global "abstraction" and local specificity can be seen as the scientific equivalent of the flaneur's leisured and "sidelong" but keenly perceptive glance. As Baudelaire would later poetize the flaneur as a "painter of the passing moment" in tune with the "bi-part"(ephemeral and eternal) nature of beauty, Humboldt calls for both inductive fact-gathering and the ability to abstract oneself, and perceive the eternal physical laws which these local phenomena manifest. Humboldt remarks that, due to the advance of technology and the expansion of scientific inquiry. "all works treating of empirical

knowledge, and of the connection of natural phenomena and physical laws, are subject to the most marked modifications of form in the lapse of short periods of time”(11). And yet, if science, like fashion for Baudelaire, moves fleetingly, it also contains in it the seeds of eternal truth; it is the duty of the Humboldtian scientist to “delineate nature in all its vivid animation and exalted grandeur, and to trace the stable amid the vacillating, ever-recurring alternation of physical metamorphoses”(12).

This ability to read surface features and interpret them for hidden truths raises another crucial similarity: both flanerie and Humboldtian science share a basis in “physiognomy,” a term that Humboldt employs frequently in describing the plant life and physical geography of particular regions of the earth. Also resonant is Humboldt’s suggestion that to examine the face of nature is not only to perceive its present state, but also to read its past history, the record of its development. Benjamin’s flaneur (most notably, Benjamin himself) would later utilize a methodology that discerned the effects of socio-economic and historic forces in the physiognomy of various cities. For Humboldt, the features of the earth’s physiognomy “animate the scenery by the associations of the past which they awaken, acting upon the imagination of the enlightened observer like traditional records of an earlier world”(72). To the flaneuristic observer of both human and cosmic faces, objects present their own past: “their form is their history”(72). Humboldt points to the ancient roots of such a perspective: “[t]he earlier Greek historians did not separate the descriptions of countries from the narrative of events of which they had been the theater. With these writers, physical geography and history were long intimately associated, and remained simply but elegantly blended...”(73).

But for Humboldt, the scientist's voice (or pen) was as important as his observing eye. He was a firm believer in the importance of the public's role in propagating science, though he is not always clear as to the nature of that role; regardless, he felt it was necessary to consider the feasibility of conveying scientific knowledge to the masses. This raised the fundamental question of "whether general considerations of physical phenomena can be made sufficiently clear to persons who have not acquired a detailed and special knowledge of descriptive natural history, geology, or mathematical astronomy"(46-7). Humboldt admits that "where there is an absence of positive knowledge of physical phenomena, the general results which impart so great a charm to the study of nature can not all be made equally clear and intelligible to the reader," but he also believes that in his book, "the greater part of the facts advanced can be made manifest without the necessity of appealing to fundamental views and principles"(47). Accordingly, at times his focus shifts to how scientific intelligence should be expressed. Humboldt asserts that, just as aesthetic concerns (form, order, harmony, etc.) inhere in a scientific examination of the cosmos, artistic considerations in conveying this information to a broad audience deserve attention. Humboldt was highly sensitive to the presentation of natural phenomena in writing; he was aware that such descriptions should have a "tone of lifelike truthfulness"(9), that "the delineation of that which appeals most strongly to the imagination, derives its collective interest from the vivid truthfulness with which the individual features are portrayed"(34). However, he also knew that "the mere enumeration of a series of general results" generates a "wearying impression" in the reader. Humboldt wanted to demonstrate in *Cosmos* that "a certain degree of scientific

completeness in the treatment of individual facts is not wholly incompatible with a picturesque animation of style”(9):

I take pleasure in persuading myself that scientific subjects may be treated of in language at once dignified, grave, and animated, and that those who are restricted within the circumscribed limits of ordinary life, and have long remained strangers to an intimate communion with nature, may thus have opened to them one of the richest sources of enjoyment, by which the mind is invigorated by the acquisition of new ideas. (52)

Humboldt’s goal in diffusing the “enjoyment” of a “communion with nature” seems on the one hand to stem from the familiar call to “better the masses,” but there is a deeper rationale as well. Humboldt devotes an entire section (Part I of Volume 2) to a historical study of “The Incitements to the Study of Nature,” in which he considers “the impressions reflected by the external senses on the feelings, and on the poetical imagination of mankind”(19). In so doing, his goal is to “depict the contemplation of natural objects as a means of exciting a pure love of nature, and to investigate the causes which, especially in recent times, have, by the active medium of the imagination, so powerfully encouraged the study of nature and the predilection for distant travels”(19). As Dettelbach points out, such a section might seem odd in an ostensibly “scientific work,” but “to Humboldt, however, it was one of the most important sections... [because] the immediate contact with nature produces in susceptible spirits a sense of grandeur, of universal connection and harmony”(xxvii). Thus travelers who had experienced nature

first-hand could through writing instill a kindred wonder in their readership.

But on a deeper level, this section is important to him because he believes “in order to comprehend nature in all its vast sublimity, it would be necessary to present it under a two-fold aspect, first objectively, as an actual phenomenon, and next subjectively, as it is reflected in the feelings of mankind”(62). The reaction of humanity to the splendor of nature must be included in any consideration of the cosmos, because humanity is not aloof from nature, but interwoven with it. The human subjective response to the cosmos is as important as any objective delineation of physical attributes, as the former will determine the direction of the latter:

in the midst of the universal fluctuation of phenomena and vital forces— in that inextricable net-work of organisms by turns developed and destroyed— each step that we make in the more intimate knowledge of nature leads us to the entrance of new labyrinths; but the excitement produced by a presentiment of discovery, the vague intuition of the mysteries to be unfolded, and the multiplicity of the paths before us, all tend to stimulate the exercise of thought in every stage of knowledge. The discovery of each separate law of nature leads to the establishment of some other more general law, or at least indicates to the intelligent observer its existence. (40-1)

Poe would later take up this idea, that the scientific path taken will determine the future order of the cosmos, in his concept of “adaptive reciprocity,” discussed later in this chapter. But Humboldt was before him in suggesting that written considerations of nature, and their resonances in the hearts of a sympathetic readership, could dictate future

directions of scientific inquiry.

As a result of this awareness, Humboldt was profoundly interested in the various popular forms of technology that had the potential to convey the harmony and splendor of Nature to the general public, including the daguerrotype, the panorama, and landscape gardening. In Volume 2, landscape painting is considered in “its representation of the physiognomy and character of different portions of the earth, and as it increases the desire for the prosecution of distant travels, and thus incites men in an equally instructive and charming manner to a free communion with nature”(83).

As in different organic beings we recognize a distinct physiognomy, and as descriptive botany and zoology are, in the strict definition of the words, merely analytic classifications of animal and vegetable forms, so there is also a certain physiognomy of nature exclusively peculiar to each portion of the earth.... But, even in the present imperfect condition of pictorial delineations of landscapes, the engravings which accompany, and too often disfigure, our books of travels, have, however, contributed considerably toward a knowledge of the physiognomy of distant regions, to the taste for voyages in the tropical zones, and to a more active study of nature. The improvements in landscape painting on a large scale (as decorative paintings, panoramas, dioramas, and neoramas) have also increased the generality and force of these impressions. (97)

Clearly, Humboldt anticipated Benjamin in understanding the importance of the panorama as a site and a technique for observing the physiognomy of our surroundings,

especially our natural environment. For Humboldt, these forms of popular technology could become not only an incitement to travel, but a replacement for it. As Dettelbach puts it, “modern civilization is blessed with increasingly perfect means and increasingly experienced and sensitive spirits to reproduce and render for others the effects of landscape, the ‘exalted grandeur of the creation,’ in the absence of nature itself. The arts are substitutes... for the immediate presence of nature itself”(xxvii). These applications of landscape painting could serve, Humboldt argues,

as a substitute for traveling through different regions. Panoramas are more productive of effect than scenic decorations, since the spectator, inclosed, as it were, within a magical circle, and wholly removed from all the disturbing influences of reality, may the more easily fancy that he is actually surrounded by a foreign scene. These compositions may give rise to impressions which, after many years, often become wonderfully interwoven with the feelings awakened by the aspect of the scenes when actually beheld. Hitherto panoramas, which are alone effective when of considerable diameter, have been applied more frequently to the representation of cities and inhabited districts than to that of scenes in which nature revels in wild luxuriance and richness of life. (98)

Humboldt even maintains that “the knowledge of the works of creation, and an appreciation of their exalted grandeur, would be powerfully increased if, besides museums, and thrown open, like them, to the public, a number of panoramic buildings, containing alternating pictures of landscapes of different geographical latitudes and from different zones of elevation, should be erected in our large cities”(98).

Humboldt's work gives us an important key to examining Poe's relation to the trends we have seen in the figurations of science during the first half of the nineteenth century. Without doubt, Poe's most important contribution to scientific thought was *Eureka*, which he dedicated to Humboldt, and the affinities between the two works will be readily apparent. Poe begins, however, by distinguishing his work from Humboldt's, arguing for a discussion of the universe that emphasizes its "individuality." He claims that Humboldt's "theme, in its last result, is the law of *each* portion of the merely physical Universe, as this law is related to the laws of *every other* portion of this merely physical Universe," an approach that creates a "multiplicity" of points that "occasions, necessarily, an amount of detail, and thus an involution of idea, which preclude all *individuality* of impression"(1262). Before addressing his subject, Poe presents the reader with a fictitious epistle, dated 2848 (one thousand years into the future from *Eureka's* publication), written by a woman named Pundita. In this communication, Poe establishes the rationale behind his (non-)scientific method, amid Pundita's amusing misprisions of scientific historiography:

'Do you know that it is scarcely more than eight or nine hundred years ago since the metaphysicians first consented to relieve the people of the singular fancy that there exist but two practicable roads to the Truth?... It appears... that long, long ago, in the night of Time, there lived a Turkish philosopher called Aries and surnamed Tottle.... He obtained a... celebrity as the founder, or at all events as the principal propagator, of what was termed the *deductive* or *à priori* philosophy. He started with what he maintained to be axioms, or self-evident truths:-- and the

now well understood fact that *no* truths are *self-evident*, really does not make in the slightest degree against his speculations:-- it was sufficient for his purpose that the truths in question were evident at all. From axioms he proceeded, logically, to results.... Aries Tottle flourished supreme, until the advent of one Hog, surnamed 'the Ettrick shepherd,' who preached an entirely different system, which he called the *à posteriori* or *inductive*. His plan referred altogether to sensation. He proceeded by observing, analyzing, and classifying facts-- *instantiae Naturae*, as they were somewhat affectedly called-- and arranging them into general laws. In a word, while the mode of Aries rested on *noumena*, that of Hog depended on *phenomena*.... (1263-4)

This description of Baconian method is not entirely accurate. In Book I of *Novum Organum*, Bacon maintains that

There are and can exist but two ways of investigating and discovering truth. The one hurries on rapidly from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from them ,as principles and their supposed indisputable truth, derives and discovers the intermediate axioms. This is the way now in use. The other constructs its axioms from the senses and particulars, by ascending continually and gradually, till it finally arrives at the most general axioms, which is the true but unattempted way.... Each of these two ways begins from the senses and particulars, and ends in the greatest generalities. But they are immeasurably different; for the one merely touches cursorily the limits of experiment and

particulars, whilst the other runs duly and regularly through them; the one from the very outset lays down some abstract and useless generalities, the other gradually rises to those principles which are really the most common in nature (108).

It is precisely this “rapid hurrying” from particulars to axioms to which Bacon objects, and which Poe will advocate. Bacon notes that such “anticipations” (as opposed to more methodical “interpretations”) are more readily accepted, since “being deduced from a few instances, and these principally of familiar occurrence, they immediately hit the understanding and satisfy the imagination”(108). While Bacon admits that “[t]he human understanding is, by its own nature, prone to abstraction, and supposes that which is fluctuating to be fixed,” he argues, “it is better to dissect than abstract nature.... It is best to consider matter, its conformation, and the changes of that conformation, its own action, and the law of this action or motion; for forms are a mere fiction of the human mind, unless you will call the laws of action by that name”(111). His primary reason for this is, in fact, the unreliability of the senses:

man’s sense is falsely asserted to be the standard of things; on the contrary, all the perceptions both of the senses and the mind bear reference to man and not to the universe, and the human mind resembles those uneven mirrors which impart their own properties to different objects, from which rays are emitted and distort and disfigure them.... [B]y far the greatest impediment and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency, and errors of the senses....(109-111).

Because of the subjective and unreliable nature of sensory perception, Bacon argues, we cannot

suffer the understanding to jump and fly from particulars to remote and most general axioms... and thus prove and make out their intermediate axioms according to the supposed unshaken truth of the former.... But we can then only augur well for the sciences, when the ascent shall proceed by a true scale and successive steps, without interruption or breach, from particulars to the lesser axioms, thence to the intermediate... and lastly, to the most general. For the lowest axioms differ but little from bare experiments; the highest and most general... are notional, abstract, and of no real weight. The intermediate are true, solid, full of life, and upon them depend the business and fortune of mankind.... We must not then add wings, but rather lead and ballast to the understanding, to prevent its jumping or flying.... (128)

Like Bacon, Poe acknowledges the problems of depending *solely* upon “ocular evidence” later in *Eureka*, though he felt it was still an absolutely crucial component for scientific discovery.²⁶ However, Poe strongly disagrees with Bacon’s emphasis on an evident and accountable methodology. Pundita’s view of science, self-validating as it comes from the distant future and a vastly more “developed” society, summarizes the shortcomings Poe found in Baconian inductive data-gathering:

... you can easily understand how restrictions so absurd on their very face must have operated, in those days, to retard the progress of true Science, which makes

its most important advances— as all History will show— by seemingly intuitive *leaps*. These ancient ideas confined investigation to crawling.... For many centuries, so great was the infatuation, about Hog especially, that a virtual stop was put to all thinking, properly so called. No man dared utter a truth for which he felt himself indebted to his soul alone....

[I]t cannot be maintained that by the crawling system, exclusively adopted, men would arrive at the maximum amount of truth, even in any long series of ages; for the repression of imagination was an evil not to be counterbalanced even by *absolute* certainty in the snail processes. But their certainty was very far from absolute. The error of our progenitors was quite analogous with that of the wiseacre who fancies he must necessarily see an object the more distinctly, the more closely he holds it to his eyes. They blinded themselves, too, with the impalpable, titillating Scotch snuff of *detail*.... The vital taint, however, in Baconianism— its most lamentable fount of error— lay in its tendency to throw power and consideration into the hands of merely perceptive men— ... the diggers and pedlers of minute *facts*, for the most part in physical science.... (1264-5)

Against such a plodding methodology, the narrowness of specialized training, and the blinding “snuff of detail,” Poe posits a science based on intuitive theorization, which is corroborated in retrospect by a continual mandate of consistency. He tasks scientists past for “their pompous and infatuate proscription of all *other* roads to Truth than the two narrow and crooked paths— the one of creeping and the other of crawling— to which, in

their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul— the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of ‘*path*’”(1268-9).

[N]one of them fell, even by accident, into what we now so distinctly perceive to be the broadest, the straightest and most available of all mere roads— the great thoroughfare— the majestic highway of the *Consistent*? Is it not wonderful that they should have failed to deduce from the works of God the vitally momentous consideration that *a perfect consistency can be nothing but an absolute truth*? How plain— how rapid our progress since the late announcement of this proposition! By its means, investigation has been taken out of the hands of the ground-moles, and given as a duty, rather than as a task, to the true— to the only true thinkers— to the generally-educated men of ardent imagination. These latter— our Keplers— our Laplaces— ‘speculate’-- ‘theorize’-- these are the terms— can you not fancy the shout of scorn with which they would be received by our progenitors, were it possible for them to be looking over my shoulders as I write? The Keplers, I repeat, speculate— theorize— and their theories are merely corrected— reduced— sifted— cleared, little by little, of their chaff of inconsistency— until at length there stands apparent an unencumbered *Consistency*— a consistency which the most stolid admit— because it is a consistency— to be an absolute and an unquestionable *Truth*.

I have often thought, my friend, that it must have puzzled these dogmaticians of a thousand years ago, to determine, even, by which of their two boasted roads it is

that the cryptographist attains the solution of the more complicate cyphers— or by which of them Champollion guided mankind to those important and innumerable truths which, for so many centuries, have lain entombed amid the phonetical hieroglyphics of Egypt. In especial, would it not have given these bigots some trouble to determine by which of their two roads was reached the most momentous and sublime of *all* their truths— the truth— the fact of *gravitation*? Newton deduced it from the laws of Kepler. Kepler admitted that these laws he *guessed*— these laws whose investigation disclosed to the greatest of British astronomers that principle, the basis of all (existing) physical principle, in going behind what we enter at once the nebulous kingdom of Metaphysics. Yes!-- these vital laws Kepler *guessed*— that is to say, he *imagined* them. Had he been asked to point out either the *deductive* or *inductive* route by which he attained them, his reply might have been— ‘I know nothing about *routes*— but I do know the machinery of the Universe. Here it is. I grasped it with *my soul*— I reached it through mere dint of *intuition*.’ Alas, poor ignorant old man! Could not any metaphysician have told him that what he called ‘intuition’ was but the conviction resulting from *deductions* or *inductions* of which the processes were so shadowy as to have escaped his consciousness, eluded his reason, or bidden defiance to his capacity of expression?... How it would have comforted him on his death-bed to know that, instead of having gone intuitively and thus unbecomingly, he had, in fact, proceeded decorously and legitimately....

Yes, Kepler was essentially a *theorist*; but this title, *now* of so much sanctity,

was, in those ancient days, a designation of supreme contempt. It is only *now* that men begin to appreciate that divine old man— to sympathize with the prophetic and poetical rhapsody of his ever-memorable words....-- *'I care not whether my work be read now or by posterity. I can afford to wait a century for readers when God himself has waited six thousand years for an observer. I triumph. I have stolen the golden secret of the Egyptians. I will indulge my sacred fury.'* (1269-1270)

One can see from this important passage the many confluences between Poe's and Humboldt's versions of science, but also the ways Poe has, in responding to Humboldt, amplified and altered certain aspects. For one thing, both writers emphasize intuition; but while Humboldt seems to employ the term as a primal (though undefined) means of access to metaphysical insight, for Poe it is "*the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression*"(1276). Thus, Poe is not attempting to dispute the validity or usefulness of induction or deduction. Rather, he is arguing that the insightful scientific mind will instinctively use both (and others), and should not be bound by blind faith in either one exclusively. By suggesting that intuition encompasses these processes of thought, Poe appropriates their credibility, while at the same time liberating the scientist from having to demonstrate a self-conscious method or "path" before entertaining or proposing a theory. And in his replacement of the data-gatherer with the theorist as "true" scientist, Poe is again responding to (but going further than)

Humboldt. Rather than the trained specialists focused on minutiae, Poe presents as model scientists the “generally-educated men of ardent imagination.”²⁷ It is these and not the “ground-moles” that will move science ahead, provided they are allowed to “soar” in “illimitable” regions, to listen to their intuitive souls, and are not trammelled in concerns for demonstrating their “path.” For Poe, the scientist should be a “true thinker” who can proceed, even if by guesswork, in advance of the rest of humanity, an imaginative vanguard scouting the territory on the limits of the known.²⁸

For Poe, as for Humboldt, the ability to achieve a critical distance through abstraction is as crucial as (if not more crucial than) the capacity for close analysis of details. In fact, in the beginning of *Eureka*, Poe faults Humboldt and others for not achieving a sufficiently abstract perspective.

He who from the top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the *extent* and *diversity* of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its *oneness*. But as, on the summit of Aetna, no man has thought of whirling on his heel, so *no* man has ever taken into his brain the full uniqueness of the prospect; and so, again, whatever considerations lie involved in this uniqueness, have as yet no practical existence for mankind. (1261)

It is Poe’s chosen task to so imbibe “the full uniqueness” of this prospect, and he explains how such a viewpoint might be obtained:

in aiming at this latter effect, and, through it, at the consequences— the conclusions— the suggestions— the speculations— or, if nothing better offer itself,

the mere guesses which may result from it— we require something like a mental gyration on the heel. We need so rapid a revolution of all things about the central point of sight that, while the minutiae vanish altogether, even the more conspicuous objects become blended into one. Among the vanishing minutiae, in a survey of this kind, would be all exclusively terrestrial matters. The Earth would be considered in its planetary relations alone. A man, in this view, becomes Mankind; Mankind a member of the cosmical family of Intelligences.

(1262)

Poe's emphasis on abstraction calls to mind Humboldt's "blending together [of] all created things, however dissimilar in form and attributes," and his reference to the moment when "man feels himself raised to a height from whence, as he embraces the vast horizon," and "individual things blend together in varied groups, and appear as if shrouded in a vapory veil."

As central as this abstraction is to Poe's scientific method, it must be corroborated (though only in retrospect) by careful attention to "consistency," presumably in terms of empirical data. To prevent a return to the "bad old days" of pure speculation, Poe maintains the necessity for (other?) thinkers to clear these theories of their "chaff of inconsistency." But this does not mean that theorists should be tied to a "foolish consistency," which, as Emerson argues in "Self-Reliance," is "the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines" ("Self-Reliance" 35). With consistency as a retrospective and seemingly secondary mandate, Poe establishes a methodological dialectic, incorporating both deduction and induction and blends thereof

that, for lack of a better term, he terms “intuitive.”²⁹ Poe’s “true thinker” must be able to “tack” like a sailboat between these various approaches (just as, Emerson notes, “the voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks” {“Self-Reliance” 36}). At several points during *Eureka*, Poe announces that he is indeed changing tacks. For instance, in asserting that the original and fundamental simplicity of the universe is the source of gravity, he begins by noting that in such a metaphysical inquiry,

We have attained a point where only *Intuition* can aid us:-- but now let me recur to the idea which I have already suggested as that alone which we can properly entertain of intuition. It is but *the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression*. With this understanding, I now assert-- that an intuition altogether irresistible, although inexpressible, forces me to the conclusion that what God originally created-- that that Matter which, by dint of his Volition, he first made from his Spirit, or from Nihilicity, *could* have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of-- what?-- of *Simplicity*.
(1276-7)

After exploring this idea, he writes,

In fact, I have attained a point at which it will be advisable to strengthen my position by reversing my processes. So far, we have gone on *à priori*, from an abstract consideration of *Simplicity*, as that quality most likely to have characterized the original action of God. Let us now see whether the established facts of the Newtonian Gravitation may not afford us, *à posteriori*, some

legitimate inductions. (1283)

And having done so, he concludes that

[t]he reversal of our processes has thus brought us to an identical result; but, while in the one process *Intuition* was the starting-point, in the other it was the goal. In commencing the former journey I could only say that, with an irresistible Intuition, I *felt* Simplicity to have been the characteristic of the original action of God:-- in ending the latter I can only declare that, with an irresistible Intuition, I perceive Unity to have been the source of the observed phaenomena of the Newtonian Gravity. (1288)

Later, in discussing the arrangement of the cosmos, he notes that “here, at length, it seems proper to inquire whether the ascertained *facts* of Astronomy confirm the general arrangement which I have thus, deductively, assigned to the Heavens. Thoroughly, they *do*. Telescopic observation, guided by the laws of perspective, enables us to understand that the perceptible Universe exists as *a roughly spherical cluster of clusters, irregularly disposed*”(1325). And when he broaches the concept of the gradual condensation of all matter in the universe, he recognizes that since “the startling thought of its [matter’s] instantaneous disappearance is one which the most powerful intellect cannot be expected readily to entertain on grounds so decidedly abstract, let us endeavor to look at the idea from some other and more ordinary point of view:-- let us see how thoroughly and beautifully it is corroborated in an *à posteriori* consideration of Matter as we actually find it”(1354-5).

This mental “zig-zagging” implies that the optimum “path” of inquiry is not a

direct one, as informs tradition scientific methodology, but an oblique, tangential approach. Poe's favorite metaphor for this process is visual; as indicated earlier, Poe felt that "[t]he error of our progenitors was quite analogous with that of the wiseacre who fancies he must necessarily see an object the more distinctly, the more closely he holds it to his eyes." In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin points to the fatal flaw in Vidocq's investigative technique: "He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole" (412). Dupin then illustrates the physiological basis for this principle at work in the observation of the heavens:

To look at a star by glances— to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the *retina* (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly— is to have the best appreciation of its lustre— a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it.... [Thus] it is possible to make even Venus herself vanish from the firmament by a scrutiny too sustained, too concentrated, or too direct. (412)

The most effective perspective requires the observer to be both "in" the scene, able to note accurately specific facts, and removed from it, free from a too-close scrutiny of an individual object and the "blinding" and "impalpable, titillating Scotch snuff of *detail*."

What is particularly striking about this indirect gaze is its resemblance to that of the flaneur, simultaneously in and removed from his environment. The flaneur also "tacks" between deductive assumptions about the nature of humanity and its appearances, and acute (though nonchalant) attention to individual facial features. "He who from the

top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around,” is he who, by browsing, can accurately note individual details of the “panorama” before him, the “diversity” of the scene. However, to be truly perceptive, he must also have the ability to execute a “mental gyration on the heel,” a rapid, almost disorienting whirl that will permit the viewer to see beyond empirical data, to glimpse the “eternal” truths behind their “ephemeral” manifestations. The flaneur’s original emphasis on movement is sustained here as well, but instead of the observer strolling through the street, Poe’s scientific observer stands at a central point, around which he makes the panorama of the cosmos revolve.

Intriguingly, Poe also asserts that the scientific flaneur must include human thought processes and theories (especially apparent contradictions in them) as part of the cosmic panorama. This is indicated by the following remarkable passage, in which Poe confronts the seeming contradiction between two apparent truths-- the diffusion of stars resulting from the explosion of the primordial Particle, and the equability of their diffusion, which would argue against an original Unity and center:

Now, I have elsewhere observed that it is by just such difficulties as the one now in question-- such peculiarities-- such roughnesses-- such protuberances above the plane of the ordinary-- that Reason feels her way, if at all, in her search for the True. By the difficulty-- the “peculiarity”-- now presented, I leap at once to *the* secret-- a secret which I might never have attained *but* for the peculiarity and the inferences which, *in its mere character of peculiarity*, it affords me.

The process of thought, at this point, may be thus roughly sketched:-- I say to myself-- “Unity, as I have explained it, is a truth-- I feel it. Diffusion is a truth-- I

see it. Radiation, by which alone these two truths are reconciled, is a consequent truth— I perceive it. *Equability* of diffusion, first deduced *à priori* and then corroborated by the inspection of phaenomena, is also a truth— I fully admit it. So far all is clear around me:-- there are no clouds behind which *the* secret— the great secret of the gravitating *modus operandi*— can possibly lie hidden;-- but this secret lies *hereabouts*, most assuredly; and *were* there but a cloud in view, I should be driven to suspicion of that cloud.” And now, just as I say this, there actually comes a cloud into view. This cloud is the seeming impossibility of reconciling my truth, *radiation*, with my truth, *equability of diffusion*. I say now:-- “Behind this *seeming* impossibility is to be found what I desire.” I do not say “*real* impossibility:” for invincible faith in my truths assures me that it is a mere difficulty after all— but I go on to say, with unflinching confidence, that *when* this *difficulty* shall be solved, we shall find, *wrapped up in the process of solution*, the key to the secret at which we aim. (1293-4)

This passage is an excellent example of Poe’s cosmic physiognomy in action; in fact, it may be taken as an accurate model of the complex mental processes at work in Poe’s approach to interpreting cosmic phenomena. The significance of Poe’s figurative language in the opening paragraph cannot be overstated; the metaphors he uses are at once visual and tactile, centered on the idea of the “plane of the ordinary,” and the disturbances and deviations on that plane, the “roughnesses” and “protuberances”-- in other words, the characteristic features on the “face” of reality. It is only by virtue of the

presence of these surface irregularities that Reason can “feel her way.” The resonances between these metaphors and the specific emphasis on physical features as indicative of character and/or mental traits in the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology cannot be ignored. One cannot “read” a wholly regular universe anymore than one can orient oneself on a purely level plane; it is the peculiarities that allow the cosmic physiognomist to interpret the world. This is what permits the “intuitive leap” that advances scientific thought, the instinctive grasping of the fact that there is a solution, one which can only be perceived through the acknowledgment of the “peculiarity.”

Thus, an intuitive balance of induction and deduction will enable the cosmic flaneur to identify the “features” of the landscape, putting him in a position to perceive, if not the truth itself, then the general direction of the truth. This mode of investigation is a scientific version of that articulated through Dupin in the detective tales, as will be discussed in the final two chapters of this study. In fact, in the second paragraph of the above excerpt, Poe traces his analytic train of thought, much as he dramatizes Dupin’s mental processes in “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” By means of this analytical technique, Poe establishes which truths seem to be solid and consistently valid, thereby identifying the precise point at which doubt first appears. It is significant that equal weight is given here to truths based on evidence of informed instinct (“Unity... is a truth-- I feel it”), sense perception (“Diffusion is a truth-- I see it”), logic (“*Equability* of diffusion,...deduced *à priori*”) and induction (the same equability “corroborated by inspection of phaenomena”). Note also that what had been characterized earlier as a “roughness” or “protuberance”-- an identifying mark in an otherwise undifferentiated

plane of sameness— has now been identified as the “cloud” behind which “the secret” lies. And the “peculiarity” must be the cloud, for otherwise “all is clear.” As an illustration of this method of elimination, it is useful to consider Dupin’s analysis of the “locked room” mystery of “Rue Morgue,” in which he identifies the apparently locked window, and eventually its deceptive nail, as the site of confusion and mystery. But Dupin can only locate the solution by perceiving what appears to be not only a “peculiarity” but an impossibility (the murderer’s apparent escape from a locked room); this is the “cloud” that in fact conceals both the solution to its own mystery, as well as a key to the solution of the overall mystery.³⁰ Such a methodology requires “unflinching confidence” based on “invincible faith” in the truths already established, through a complex blend of intuition, perception, deduction, induction.

It is no small irony that for Poe, it only by identifying these “roughnesses” and apparent asymmetries that one can glimpse what he (and Humboldt) felt was the fundamentally symmetrical nature of the universe. In fact, Poe seems to be arguing for a dialogic relation between regularity and irregularity, one that is exemplified in the method by which “the cryptographist attains the solution of the more complicate cyphers— or by which of them Champollion guided mankind to those important and innumerable truths which...have lain entombed amid the phonetical hieroglyphics of Egypt” (1270). To decipher a cryptograph, the reader must confront a text seemingly uniform in its “irregularity,” its “foreign” and “hidden” character, its lack of recognizable linguistic constructions. Yet the cryptographist unravels the riddle by spotting hidden regularities, recurrences, periodicities-- the frequency of three-letter words spelled “xyz” that might

suggest common words like “and” or “the.” Considered against the background of the cryptic text, though, these periodicities are in fact “protuberances,” seemingly isolated occurrences on an otherwise “flat” plane of unrecognizable language. And it is through these “peculiarities” (which are really “regularities,” only we cannot see them as such yet) that the cryptographer is able to “map” and interpret the rest of the cipher.³¹ In the next chapter, we will explore the uses to which Poe puts these “roughnesses” in his fiction, the way he focuses the reader on what seem to be “eccentricities” and exceptions to natural laws. However, what becomes clear, in *Eureka* as well as the fiction, is that Poe’s emphasis is on cosmic order, symmetry, regularity; what appear to be “peculiarities” are manifestations of imperfect human theories regarding that order.

This symmetry arises from a “Divine Adaptation” of all things in the universe to one another, the perfection of which, he writes,

stamps it *as divine*, in distinction from that which is merely the work of human constructiveness. I allude to the complete *mutuality* of adaptation. For example; in human constructions a particular cause has a particular effect; a particular intention brings to pass a particular object; but this is all; we see no reciprocity. The effect does not re-act upon the cause; the intention does not change relations with the object. In Divine constructions the object is either design or object as we choose to regard it— and we may take at any time a cause for an effect, or the converse— so that we can never absolutely decide which is which....

The pleasure which we derive from any display of human ingenuity is in the ratio of *the approach* to this species of reciprocity. In the construction of *plot*, for

example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the incidents that we shall not be able to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one other or upholds it. In this sense, of course, *perfection* of plot is really, or practically, unattainable— but only because it is a finite intelligence that constructs.

The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God. (1341-2)

It is this reciprocity that makes it necessary, to Poe and Humboldt, to consider human responses to the cosmos as an integral part of it. We are not removed from this divine order, but are encompassed within it, and the thoughts we have concerning it are both “effect” and “cause” of future physical and mental events in that cosmos.

The ability to perceive this symmetry, and to convey it to others, is what distinguishes Poe’s (and Humboldt’s) scientist from former versions. For both writers, an appreciation of the universe as art-form is the truest guide to scientific investigation, since at the most profound level, the aesthetic *is* the scientific:

in fact, the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended on with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe— *of the Universe* which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms:-- thus Poetry and Truth are one. A thing is consistent in the ratio of its truth— true in the ratio of its consistency. *A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth.* We may take it for granted, then, that Man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct. He must have a care, however, lest, in

pursuing too heedlessly the superficial symmetry of forms and motions, he leave out of sight the really essential symmetry of the principles which determine and control them. (1349)

Poe asserts this elision of Beauty and Truth at a number of points in *Eureka*; in the Preface, for instance, he writes, "I offer this Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an Art-Product alone:-- let us say as a Romance; or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem" (1259). Later, referring to Laplace's nebular hypothesis, he maintains that "[f]rom whatever point we regard it, we shall find it beautifully true. It is by far too beautiful, indeed, not to possess Truth as its essentiality-- and here I am very profoundly serious in what I say"(1312).

While Poe's redefinition of the "true thinker" in aesthetic terms de-emphasizes traditionally scientific skills (specialized knowledge and language, and a rigorously inductive method), and thus wrests scientific investigation from the hands of the "ground-moles," this is not a move towards democratization of scientific participation. He sets up another hierarchy in its place, one that privileges intuitive insight and aesthetic sensibilities rather than inductive abilities. While the capacity for observation and logical thought is granted to the masses (as the more democratic reviewers of scientific books had argued), not all possess these talents in the same degree. Poe argues that the nineteenth-century's distaste for scientific theorizing is misguided in assuming that all are equal in these techniques: "Among a tribe of philosophers who pride themselves excessively upon matter-of-fact, it is far too fashionable to sneer at all speculation under

the comprehensive sobriquet, ‘guess-work.’ The point to be considered is, who guesses. In guessing with Plato, we spend our time to better purpose, now and then, than in hearkening to a demonstration by Alcmaeon” (1332). This sets up a distinction between the truly perceptive and creative cosmic flaneur and the Alcmaeons, the “thinkers-that-they-think,” just as Baudelaire would later distinguish between the true “painter of the passing moment” and the “mere flaneur.” Thus Poe’s cosmic flaneur partakes of the same aristocratic bent as his earliest forbears, and his later poetic descendant.³²

In positing the viability of scientific “guessing,” Poe is also offering a dramatic revision of what constitutes scientific proof. In *Eureka*, he writes,

according to the schools, I *prove* nothing. So be it:-- I design but to suggest-- and to *convince* through the suggestion. I am proudly aware that there exist many of the most profound and cautiously discriminative intellects which cannot *help* being abundantly content with my-- suggestions. To these intellects-- as to my own-- there is no mathematical demonstration which *could* bring the least additional *true proof* of the great *Truth* which I have advanced-- *the truth of Original Unity as the source-- as the principle of the Universal Phaenomena.*

(1288)

In the case of Laplace’s nebular hypothesis, he maintains, “although all must admit the deficiency of what we are in the habit of terming “proof,” still there are many intellects, and those of the loftiest order, to which *no* proof could bring one iota of additional *conviction*” (1318). The basis for this confidence is an instinctive assessment of both the physical conditions under scrutiny and the theories that have been generated about them:

Without going into details which might impinge upon the Cloud-Land of Metaphysics, I may as well here observe that the force of conviction, in cases such as this, will always, with the right-thinking, be proportional with the amount of *complexity* intervening between the hypothesis and the result. To be less abstract:-- The greatness of the complexity found existing among cosmical conditions, by rendering great in the same proportion the difficulty of accounting for all these conditions *at once*, strengthens, also in the same proportion, our faith in that hypothesis which does, in such manner, satisfactorily account for them:-- and as *no* complexity can well be conceived greater than that of the astronomical conditions, so no conviction can be stronger-- to *my* mind at least-- than that with which I am impressed by an hypothesis that not only reconciles these conditions, with mathematical accuracy, and reduces them into a consistent and intelligible whole, but is, at the same time, the *sole* hypothesis by means of which the human intellect has been ever enabled to account for them *at all*. (1318)

Attendant upon this recasting of scientific "proof" is an important shift in the function of language in science. If only the plots of God are perfect, human plots are of necessity imperfect; one reason for this is the essential insufficiency of language (scientific and otherwise) to convey truth directly. Poe demonstrates this after he sets up his rationale of intuitive science (through Pundita's missive), as he begins his own investigation of the cosmos-- with *language*.

Let us begin, then, at once, with that merest of words, "Infinity." This, like

“God,” “spirit,” and some other expressions of which the equivalents exist in nearly all languages, is by no means the expression of an idea— but of an effort at one. It stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception. Man needed a term by which to point out the direction of this effort— the cloud behind which lay, forever invisible, the object of this attempt. (1272)

The crucial idea here is not that the idea of Infinity lays “forever invisible” in a “cloud,” but that as humans we are driven to establish a term towards which to “direct an effort.”

What matters is not the ultimate solution of the riddle, but the process by which we struggle towards it. Indeed, to Poe’s thinking, only a fool would assert the possibility of capturing such a (potential) idea in a word:

The fact is, that, upon the enunciation of any one of that class of terms to which “Infinity” belongs— the class representing *thoughts of thought*— he who has a right to say that he thinks *at all*, feels himself called on, *not* to entertain a conception, but simply to direct his mental vision toward some given point, in the intellectual firmament, where lies a nebula never to be solved. To solve it, indeed, he makes no effort; for with a rapid instinct he comprehends, not only the impossibility, but, as regards all human purposes, the *inessentiality* of its solution.... As our starting-point, then, let us adopt the *Godhead*. Of this Godhead, *in itself*, he alone is not imbecile— he alone is not impious who propounds— nothing. (1275-6)

However, by the same token, only an intellectual and spiritual degenerate would suggest that, given the impossibility of such a conception, we should not point our “mental vision” in its direction. As terrestrial and not celestial beings, we are unable to clearly

perceive the physiognomy of the cosmos obscured behind clouds. At these junctures, we are driven to imaginatively plot out the “face” of the universe, and the only tools we have at our disposal are intuitive thought and words that can but imperfectly approximate that thought.

What language *can* accomplish, according to Poe, it does by performing a linguistic approximation of the oblique “tacking” discussed earlier. If for scientists, as Gillian Beer suggests, “a necessary condition for professional interchange is usually held to be a stable locking of single signification”(181), Poe was arguing in favor of a more literary approach to scientific language— a *suggestive* one that paralleled his revision of scientific proof. For Poe, the path to truth in scientific inquiry lies not in the minutiae of individual fact, nor in unfounded abstract reasoning, but in the dialogue between the two. Similarly, we should not expect ourselves to fix truth directly in language, but should “tack” in its direction, using language to elicit resonances of sympathy and recognition in our listeners and readers. By doing so, the scientific writer establishes and capitalizes on a periodicity between writer and reader, between signifier and signified. In the next chapter, we will examine some of the specific suggestive strategies Poe utilized in his fiction to participate, and to get his reader to participate, in a version of this speculative scientific thought, through an intuitive physiognomic approach to the cosmos. The revelations of this imaginative science will have as much to do with our “interior” selves as with our “exterior” environment. For the symmetry of that cosmos is such that in scrutinizing it, we are actually scrutinizing ourselves, as Poe makes clear at the end of *Eureka*:

Guiding our imaginations by that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity, are we not, indeed, more than justified in entertaining a belief— let us say, rather, in indulging a hope— that the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine?

And now— this Heart Divine— what is it? *It is our own.*

Let not the merely seeming irreverence of this idea frighten our souls from that cool exercise of consciousness— from that deep tranquillity of self-inspection— through which alone we can hope to attain the presence of this, the most sublime of truths, and look it leisurely in the face. (1356)

The outward movement of scientific inquiry into the secrets of the universe leads us back to the Heart Divine within each of us; our physiognomical examination of the visible features of the cosmos turns out to be a leisurely scanning of our own physiognomy. Like the cosmos itself, we are both drawn and repulsed by this approaching union of the self with the non-self, and Poe dramatizes in his fiction both the wonder and the horror of being a cosmic flaneur, “an ego athirst for the non-ego.”

Chapter Four: Physiognomic Revelation: Faces and Interiors

In his essay “The Flaneur,” Walter Benjamin agrees with Paul Valéry’s assessment that Poe was “the first to attempt the scientific story, a modern cosmogony, the description of pathological phenomena,” and posits a unifying methodology behind these apparently divergent strands of Poe’s work:

These genres he regarded as exact products of a method for which he claimed universal validity. In this very point Baudelaire sided with him, and in Poe's spirit he wrote: 'The time is not distant when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to make its way in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature.' The detective story, the most momentous among Poe's technical achievements, was part of a literature that satisfied Baudelaire's postulate. (43)

Benjamin’s suggestion that Poe employed a “method for which he claimed universal validity” helps to illuminate his elliptical references to Poe as a physiognomist of the interior and of the crowd. The principles of flanerie connect *Eureka* with Dupin’s detection as well as Poe’s horror stories and “tales of sensation.” In this chapter I will discuss Poe’s strategies and maneuvers as a physiognomist of the interior. The next chapter will expand the analysis to include not only Poe’s physiognomic exploration of the urban crowd, but also his application of flaneuristic principles in imaginative and innovative ways to broader landscapes, both urban and natural— indeed, to the world

itself. If in *Eureka* Poe argues for the application of flanerrie to science, in his fiction he dramatizes both the potential revelations and the limitations (even the dangers) of such a perspective.

Before expanding in this manner, however, it will be instructive to “contract” the parameters of the discussion and examine Poe’s use of individual facial physiognomy, which is characterized paradoxically by promises of legibility and a nagging indeterminacy (which will figure prominently in Poe’s physiognomy of the globe, discussed in the next chapter). As Christopher Benfey asserts in “Poe and the Unreadable: ‘The Black Cat’ and ‘The Tell-tale Heart,’” “Poe was fascinated by mind readers and unreadable faces, the twin fantasies of utter exposure and complete secrecy”(28). That Poe was interested in the possibilities of surface physicality and what it could reveal about character is abundantly clear in his fascination with phrenology (the study of character through the shape of the skull) and autography (the study of character through handwriting). In *American Hieroglyphics*, John T. Irwin notes that “Poe attempts in ‘Autography’ to interpret the cryptographic characters of contemporary literary figures through an analysis of their signatures, while in ‘The Literati of New York City,’ he reads human character by using phrenology and physiognomy to decipher significant bodily features”(52).³³ And David S. Reynolds indicates that “phrenology directly influenced Poe’s literary theory, which was based upon distinct portions of the mind devoted to different impulses. Just as the phrenologists divided the brain up into apportioned functions, so Poe distinguished between pure intellect (concerned with truth), taste (concerned with beauty), and the moral sense (devoted to duty)”(244-5). In his

physiognomic portraits, Poe devotes considerable attention to the facial features of extraordinary characters, as his narrators explicitly and self-consciously scan these faces for clues to their mysterious history and meaning. But while their superficial features can yield insight into the mental states and characteristics of these beings, each face Poe describes has at its essential core a cipher, something that ultimately defies being “read” (as in “The Man of the Crowd”). They present a profile which, as Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman suggest about Poe’s own “cultural physiognomy,” is always “strangely shadowed or absent” (ix-x).

For instance in “MS. Found in a Bottle,” the narrator relates an *outré* experience he has had aboard a ship when it collides with a mysterious vessel, onto which he is propelled by the force of the impact. The ship’s occupants elicit the narrator’s fascination because of their apparently incredible age, their incomprehensible language, and the fact that they do not acknowledge the narrator’s presence. With such “invisibility,” the narrator is free to observe these strange beings, especially their leader, at greater leisure, as would the urban flaneur:

I have seen the captain face to face, and in his own cabin— but, as I expected, he paid me no attention. Although in his appearance there is, to a casual observer, nothing which might bespeak him more or less than man, still, a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with the sensation of wonder with which I regarded him. In stature, he is nearly my own height; that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well-knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkably otherwise. But it is the singularity of the expression which reigns

upon his face— it is the intense, the wonderful, the thrilling evidence of old age, so utter, so extreme, which excites within my spirit a sense— a sentiment ineffable.

His forehead, although little wrinkled, seems to bear upon it the stamp of a myriad of years. His gray hairs are records of the past, and his grayer eyes are sybils of the future.... He muttered to himself— as did the first seaman whom I saw in the hold— some low peevish syllables of a foreign tongue; and although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile. (197-8)

Here Poe employs physiognomy to assist the reader in entertaining suggestions about the mysterious navigator's past, intentions and mission. This passage distinguishes between what a "casual observer" (Baudelaire's "mere flaneur") would note, and by implication what a more discerning observer, a "true flaneur" like the narrator, would perceive. There are clearly "signs" of a fantastic history and destiny to be read in the sailor's face, yet what is signified is left hauntingly vague: only "the stamp of a myriad of years," "records of the past," and "sybils of the future."

A similar use of physiognomy is found in another story, "Silence— A Fable":

And I looked upwards, and there stood a man upon the summit of the rock; and I hid myself among the water-lilies that I might discover the actions of the man.

And the man was tall and stately in form, and was wrapped up from his shoulders to his feet in the toga of old Rome. And the outlines of his figure were indistinct— but his features were the features of a deity.... And his brow was lofty with

thought, and his eye wild with care; and, in the few furrows upon his cheek I read the fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude. (222)

Clearly, this is an example of Poe's fictional strategy of leaving particular details undelineated, a deliberate lack of specificity intended to create "a strong undercurrent of suggestion" (as he praises in his first review of Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales* {571}), an "amount of suggestiveness-- some under current, however indefinite of meaning" (as he puts it in "The Philosophy of Composition" {24}).³⁴ But the effectiveness of this narrative device is doubled by the persistent indeterminacy to which Poe doggedly points. While the narrator seems able to interpret the face to a limited extent, this information is conveyed to the reader vaguely as "fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude." And despite his physiognomic analysis, the narrator is forced to attribute the singularity of the sailor's face to his "expression," one which is ultimately "ineffable" both in its nature and in the response it prompts in him.

A similarly cryptic face is found in another early tale, "The Assignation." Here, the narrator initiates his physiognomic description with the promise to be thorough, analytic and detail-oriented: "There are some subjects upon which I take pleasure in being minute," he begins. "The person of the stranger... is one of these subjects." However, this narrator too ends by confronting a cipher in this face, after examining the physical frame of his subject:

In height he might have been below rather than above the medium size: although there were moments of intense passion when his frame actually *expanded* and

belied the assertion. The light, almost slender symmetry of his figure, promised more of that ready activity which he evinced at the Bridge of Sighs, than of that Herculean strength which he has been know to wield without an effort, upon occasions of more dangerous emergency. With the mouth and chin of a deity—singular, wild, full, liquid eyes, whose shadows varied from pure hazel to intense and brilliant jet— and a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed forth at intervals all light and ivory— his were features than which I have seen none more classically regular, except, perhaps, the marble ones of the Emperor Commodus. Yet his countenance was, nevertheless, one of those which all men have seen at some period of their lives, and have never afterwards seen again. It had no peculiar— it had no settled predominant expression to be fastened upon the memory; a countenance seen and instantly forgotten— but forgotten with a vague and never-ceasing desire of recalling it to mind. Not that the spirit of each rapid passion failed, at any time, to throw its own distinct image upon the mirror of that face— but that the mirror, mirror-like, retained no vestige of the passion, when the passion had departed. (203-4)

Poe provides physiognomic details for the reader to interpret the character's mysterious nature, origin and destiny. Yet like the navigator in "MS" and the old man in "Silence," this stranger's face both demands to be read and yet defies the reading. In this case, the face is one of classical beauty and proportions, and yet is somehow disconnected from his inner character, registering his passions but not leaving any traces to be read. Rather, "mirror-like, [it] retained no vestige of the passion, when the passion had departed,"

creating a face that eludes the memory but perpetually haunts it.

Poe's careful attention in these early tales to facial features, only to find at their core a riddle, anticipates his use of the same device in later and better-known tales. For instance, in "Ligeia" Poe provides copious detail on the "person" of the title character, once again beginning with a promise of faithful accuracy as to minute particulars. To give an idea of the extent to which Poe sketches this face, and to allow the reader to scan Ligeia's (and Poe's) lineaments for him or herself, I reproduce the section in full:

There is one topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia. In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease, of her demeanor, or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow.... In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her... Yet her features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord Verulam,... "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity— although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of the "strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead— it was faultless— how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!-- the skin rivalling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the gentle prominence of the regions above the

temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses.... I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose— and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip— the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under— the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke— the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin— and here, too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek.... And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.

For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals— in moments of intense excitement— that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia.... The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The “strangeness,” however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from

the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. (263-4)

This is probably the most complete physical description of Poe's idealized and etherealized woman, described in classically superlative terms of height, slenderness, quietness, beauty, ease and grace. Yet the narrator detects a "strangeness," and finds it impossible to identify or articulate the precise nature of that strangeness, beyond locating it in her "expression," that "word of no meaning." He often feels himself "*upon the very verge*" of comprehending the sentiment, but cannot satisfactorily "define... or analyze, or even steadily view it"(264-5). (This final phrase is particularly resonant given Poe's argument for "oblique" vision in *Eureka*, as discussed in the previous chapter.) Again Poe points suggestively to the "unnameable" element that will not submit to sustained direct scrutiny, and yet refuses to disappear, hovering persistently on verge of the narrator's and reader's peripheral vision.

In some tales, Poe provides the reader with sufficient detail about this "strangeness" to get somewhat closer to a complete sense of their physiognomy. The description of Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is more traditionally physiognomic, though it too ends without complete understanding or elucidation:³⁵

Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly

beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of the change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.

In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence— an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy— an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter, than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision— that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation— that leaden, self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may

be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement. (321-2)

The narrator observes that Usher has “a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy,” and correlates Usher’s particular behavior to more generalized stereotypes (“the drunkard” and “the opium-eater”), both of which smack of physiognomical analysis. However, once again Poe is not analyzing the physiognomy of “simple humanity,” but of a unique and idealized specimen who, like the sailor in “MS. Found in a Bottle,” the old man in “Silence,” and Ligeia, have about them intimations of the supernatural and metaphysical. The narrator can come no closer in identifying the source of Usher’s strangeness than recognizing it to be the exaggeration of his original features, especially the “now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye.” He detects in Usher’s features and movements “an incoherence— an inconsistency, ” stemming from his “struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy— an excessive nervous agitation” familiar from his childhood behavior, but cannot read the source of that agitation.³⁶

In “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” the reader is confronted with another countenance that demands yet defies interpretation, though here Poe supplies sufficient details at least to lay the groundwork for the story’s resolution. The character of Augustus Bedloe, who the reader ultimately learns is a reincarnation of a character named “Oldeb,” at first seems to have no past, but with so interesting an aspect as to arouse intense speculation in the narrator:

This young gentleman was remarkable in every respect, and excited in me a

profound interest and curiosity. I found it impossible to comprehend him either in his moral or his physical relations. Of his family I could obtain no satisfactory account. Whence he came, I never ascertained. Even about his age— although I call him a young gentleman— there was something which perplexed me in no little degree. He certainly *seemed* young— and he made a point of speaking about his youth— yet there were moments when I should have had little trouble in imagining him a hundred years of age. But in no regard was he more peculiar than in his personal appearance. He was singularly tall and thin. He stooped much. His limbs were exceedingly long and emaciated. His forehead was broad and low. His complexion was absolutely bloodless. His mouth was large and flexible, and his teeth were more wildly uneven, although sound, than I had ever before seen teeth in a human head. The expression of his smile, however, was by no means unpleasing, as might be supposed; but it had no variation whatever. It was one of profound melancholy— of a phaseless and unceasing gloom. His eyes were abnormally large, and round like those of a cat. The pupils, too, upon any accession of dimunition of light, underwent contraction or dilation, just such as is observed in the feline tribe. In moments of excitement the orbs grew bright to a degree almost inconceivable; seeming to emit luminous rays, not of a reflected, but of an intrinsic lustre, as does a candle or the sun; yet their ordinary condition was so totally vapid, filmy and dull, as to convey the idea of the eyes of a long-interred corpse. (655)

The reader, like the narrator, has no background on Bedloe; we are confronted simply

with the person as is, but his bizarre appearance prompts the use of physiognomic analysis in order to determine his past history. The narrator's inability to calculate Bedloe's age prepares the reader for the reader's eventual discovery that Oldeb and Bedloe are spiritually connected through metempsychosis. His tallness and thinness, his length and emaciation of limbs, the bloodlessness of his complexion, and the unevenness of his teeth conjure images of the walking corpse, later supported by the description of his smile ("one of profound melancholy— of a phaseless and unceasing gloom") and eyes, whose "ordinary condition was so totally vapid, filmy and dull, as to convey the idea of the eyes of a long-interred corpse." These same eyes seem nonetheless to have a mysterious and praeternatural sensitivity and vitality, evidence of the recumbent (yet lambent) soul of Oldeb.

While Poe both tempts and frustrates physiognomic analysis in these tales, it is in Poe's detective tales that one finds the most successful instances of flanerier. The flaneur/detective, whom Poe refers to as the "analyst" in "Rue Morgue," pays minute attention to details regarding facial features, expressions and body language. However, he achieves his masterly reading of individuals not by simply seeing "deeper into" their hidden souls, but by moving at will "into" their psyches and "out" to get a distanced perspective on them. In the following often-quoted passage, Dupin explains how the analyst employs the flaneur's physiognomic scrutiny and detachment to become "proficient" at the game of whist:

When I say proficiency, I mean that perfection in the game which includes a comprehension of *all* the sources whence legitimate advantage may be derived.

These are not only manifold but multiform, and lie frequently among the recesses of thought altogether inaccessible to the ordinary understanding. To observe attentively is to remember distinctly.... Thus to have a retentive memory, and to proceed "by the book" are points commonly regarded as the sum total of good playing. But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He makes, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. So, perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation. The necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe. Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game. He examines the countenance of his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents. He considers the mode of assorting the cards in each hand; often counting trump by trump, and honor by honor, through the glances bestowed by their holders upon each. He notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or of chagrin. From the manner of gathering up a trick he judges whether the person taking it can make another in the suit. He recognises what is played through feint, by the air with which it is thrown upon the table. A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness or trepidation— all

afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs. The first two or three rounds having been played, he is in full possession of the contents of each hand, and thence-forward puts down his cards with as absolute a precision of purpose as if the rest of the party had turned outward the faces of their own. (398-9)

By scrutinizing such details “outside” the rules of play, the detective/flaneur is able to identify the manner in which the opponent thinks. But equally important as this detachment is the analyst’s ability to identify and empathize completely with his opponent, to get “inside” his mind: “the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation”(398). This may be accomplished in a simple fashion, according to Dupin in “The Purloined Letter,” by approximating the opponent’s face to read his thoughts, as one schoolboy did particularly well in the game of “even and odd”:

This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd.... The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents.... [U]pon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: ‘When I wish to find out how wise, or

how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heard, as if to match or correspond with the expression'.... (689-90)

In both cases, the flaneur employs a method that incorporates close physiognomic scrutiny with an ability to detach himself from the game itself. He must, as Benjamin notes, remain “on the threshold,” existing “neither in nor out” of the situation at hand.³⁷ The consideration of such physiognomic details, though ostensibly “external” to a game such as whist, enables the analyst to rise “above,” to see “past” the mere “rules” and proscribed “method” of play. The knowledge of an opponent’s behavior represents an advantage that can be gained without any extraordinary understanding of the game’s more intricate strategies, if there are any; indeed, to focus too much on the play itself is to neglect this “external” information. Dupin’s claim that such advantages “lie frequently among the recesses of thought altogether inaccessible to the ordinary understanding” is somewhat misleading, as this data is emphatically available on the “surface” of the situation. But to one too thoroughly engaged in the complexity of play and unable to distance himself, even the most obviously superficial reality becomes a “hidden recess.” The most effective route to perceiving the “inner” truth of an event, or a person’s “inner” secrets, is not a direct or linear trajectory “inward,” but an oscillating zig-zag, an in-and-out movement that tends to problematize the traditional opposition of “inner” to “outer.”

This flexible relation between interiority and exteriority also impacts the detective's reading of an interior physiognomy to solve a crime. Both of Poe's most famous Dupin mysteries, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," are based upon apparent violations of fundamental principles of the interior and the way interiors are constructed. As John T. Irwin has pointed out in *The Mystery to a Solution*, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a "locked-room" mystery: a substantial part of the mystery is how the murderers gain ingress and egress from the seemingly locked apartment. "The Purloined Letter," on the other hand, is a "hidden-object" mystery; here the detective/flaneur must "read" an interior in order to locate the document that the Minister has stolen:

A locked-room mystery asks how a solid body got out of (or into) an internally sealed space without violating the space's appearance of closure, while a hidden-object mystery asks how a solid object remains present within a finite physical space without, as it were, making an appearance. In one case we are certain that what we seek is not inside a given space, in the other that what we seek cannot possibly be outside it. (181)

It is in the nature of such mysteries, therefore, to encourage the reader to question the assumptions regarding "interiority" and "exteriority": the orangutan escapes from the "locked" interior of the sailor's closet, proceeds out onto the urban street, obtains access into another "locked" interior, that of the apartment in the Rue Morgue, only to escape again. Such ease of ingress and egress seems to defy the artificial boundaries created by humanity, reinforcing the ambiguous and problematic relationship between "inner" and

“outer” upon which Benjamin’s flaneur would capitalize, turning the street into an interior, as much at home in that street as he would be in his study. And Dupin defies these boundaries both physically and intellectually, as Shawn James Rosenheim points out in *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet*: “Dupin’s ability to enter and leave [these] space[s], like his ability to identify the murderer from the evidence at the crime scene, is an attenuated form of his ability to read minds (an ultimate cryptographic end)”(67).

The flaneur’s ability to abstract himself from the deceptive complexity of the game also applies to the physical environments of these detective tales. In both stories, while considerable attention is paid to the actual interiors in question and their peculiar details (i.e., the grisly crime scene in “Rue Morgue” and the microscopic examination of the Prefect in “Purloined Letter”), Poe devotes much more care to the articulation of Dupin’s method of reading these interiors “at one remove,” and how it surpasses the plodding method of the Prefect and the Parisian police. Dupin faults the police, who perform the initial analysis of the crime scene in “Rue Morgue,” with the lack of the flaneur’s “method” of simultaneous engagement and detachment:

“We must not judge...” said Dupin, “by this shell of an examination. The Parisian police, so much extolled for *acumen*, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment.... The results attained by them are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail.... [T]here is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important

knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial.” (411-2)

The police have made the error of losing themselves in the complexity of the “game,” as Dupin points out in the following passage:

The wild disorder of the room; the corpse thrust, with the head downward, up the chimney; the frightful mutilation of the body of the old lady; these considerations, with those just mentioned, and others which I need not mention, have sufficed to paralyze the powers, by putting completely at fault the boasted *acumen*, of the government agents. They have fallen into the gross but common error of confounding the unusual with the abstruse. But it is by these deviations from the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels its way, if at all, in the search for the true.

(414)

In these detective tales, a number of connections with the “cosmic flaner” Poe advocates in *Eureka* become clear. One is that while the flaneur’s technique of observation may seem superficially to be more intuitive than “scientific,” and therefore suspect, it is in fact more methodical, and on a higher plane, than the “mere method” of the police. The analyst exhibits “in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension praeternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition”(397). This dialectic of close analytical scrutiny and disengaged, casual theorization is developed at greater length in *Eureka*, where Poe asserts that the “intuition” of “theorists” like Kepler is actually “*the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the*

processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression"(1276). The Prefect here represents a prefigurement of the inductive "ground-moles" Poe lampoons in *Eureka*, full of painstaking yet short-sighted and ultimately ineffective method; Dupin is the truly analytical "theorist," without specialized training, but endowed with naturally superior vision and reason. However, lacking assertiveness in this earlier version, Poe seems unwilling to argue (as he would later) for the scientific validity of such "guesses" outright. Dupin concedes, "I will not pursue these guesses— for I have no right to call them more— since the shades of reflection upon which they are based are scarcely of sufficient depth to be appreciable by my own intellect, and since I could not pretend to make them intelligible to the understanding of another. We will call them guesses then, and speak of them as such"(425). Yet the end of such guesses is clearly to identify the "cloud" behind which *must* lie the answer to the riddle, no matter how incredible it seems: "brought to this conclusion in so unequivocal a manner as we are, it is not our part, as reasoners, to reject it on account of apparent impossibilities. It is only left for us to prove that these apparent 'impossibilities' are, in reality, not such"(417). And in constructing such "guesses," Dupin announces that he has followed an indirect approach to the truth, an intellectual "zig-zag" pattern similar to that discussed in *Eureka*: "You will see," he says, "that I have shifted the question from the mode of egress to that of ingress.... Let us now revert to the interior of the room. Let us survey the appearances here"(421). The periodicity of this indirect approach also approximates the back-and-forth movement of Poe's science which progresses by "imaginative leaps" forward, followed by retrospective verification of "consistency."

Another important connection between Poe's detective methodology and his cosmic flaner is his early formulation of an emphatically tactile, yet detached and abstracted approach to physiognomy: all external reality constitutes a "surface" that is to be read, and read solely by means of ascertaining its "deviations," its phrenological "bumps," its topography. The full significance of this metaphor will be examined shortly; at this point, though, it is worth noting that newspapers and other ephemeral periodicals figure in this physiognomic landscape as well. It is no coincidence that in two of the detective tales ("Rue Morgue" and "Marie Roget"), Dupin arrives at a clearer understanding of the situation by means of reading newspaper accounts of the crime. In doing so, Dupin is "reading" the crime through the mediation of the news media, thus abstracting himself from the immediacy of the crime's overwhelmingly violent, complex and sensational reality.³⁸ He reiterates the importance of such abstraction implicitly in "The Purloined Letter": "If it is any point requiring reflection," he observes "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark"(680). However, in dealing with such topics, periodicals at this time often heightened their sensationalism; as Reynolds illustrates in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, "the antebellum public was fed an increasingly spicy diet of horror, gore, and perversity" in the ephemeral press (171). They are therefore to be read at yet another level of remove, as a flaneur would; they provide fragments only the flaneur can piece together, as he reads them at a meta-level.³⁹

What Dupin's detective methodology implies is that an accurate view of any given situation, one that yields the solution to the mystery, is often missed by the average person because he or she has not adopted the appropriate perspective or point of view.

And Dupin formulates this in a deliberately (topo)graphic manner: the Prefect “perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand”(689). When viewing an object of complexity, to hold it too close to the eye is to become bedazzled, immersed and literally “a-mazed” in its labyrinths. It is necessary to pay attention to details, but more important is the ability to gain a detached distance, so as to identify which details are crucial, and which are simply contributing to the confusing complexity of the situation. If, as Dupin points out, truth is not always found “in a well,” but is frequently discovered on the “surface” of a situation, then the ability *only* to plumb the “profound” and “deep” detail of an event’s intricate “recesses” amounts to blindness, no matter how adept the viewer is at this type of scrutiny. If the detective cannot detach himself and becoming a “meta-reader” of not only the “game” but the psychology of its players, he will commit fatal errors of assumption, as does the Prefect, according to Dupin:

Do you not see he has taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter,-
- not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg- but, at least, in *some* out-of-
the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a
man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see
also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary
occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for in all cases of
concealment, a disposal of the article concealed- a disposal of it in this *recherché*
manner- is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its
discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care,

patience, and determination of the seekers.... (690-1)

Dupin, on the other hand, recognizes that the Minister, as “both poet and mathematician,” would be sufficiently “analytic” to anticipate the Prefect’s highly thorough, microscopic, yet essentially simplistic and misguided procedures:

I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. (693-4)

The detective/flaneur’s perspective involves a curious inversion (or, to use one of Poe’s words, a “*bouleversement*”) regarding traditional concepts of “inner” and “outer.” If for the Prefect the “recess” of an event or an interior, with its devious complexities, becomes the focus of methodical and diligent scrutiny, its “hidden” objects will eventually be plain to see, but the surface becomes obscure; “deep” complexity becomes simple and “ordinary,” and “*simplicity*” becomes the more sophisticated and complex strategy. All that is concealed on the “inside” of the mystery is revealed, whereas all that is practically advertised on its “external” surface, though readily visible, becomes unseeable. This is why, Dupin tells the Prefect, “it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault.... Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain.... A little *too* self-

evident”(681). Appropriately enough, Dupin explains the matter to the narrator by means first of the urban street, home of the flaneur, and then of the map, which projects the intricacies of the street onto a global and even cosmic scale, though this time with words rather than topography:

[H]ave you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop-doors, are the most attractive of attention?... There is a game of puzzles... which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word— the name of a town, river, state, or empire— any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analagous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. (694)

Dupin brings these superior observational skills to bear on the interior of the Minister’s apartment, searching not in its “recesses” or “*recherchés* nooks for concealment” but on its “surface.” It is intriguing to note that to do this, he must present a deceptive “surface” of his own face: “... I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning... at the Ministerial hotel.... I complained of my

weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host..."(695). The reader imagines Dupin must keep his face turned towards the Minister even while scanning the interior, thus necessitating the flaneur's oblique glance, though here it is combined with the attentive gaze of the detective:⁴⁰

... while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister, on a topic which I knew had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as glove, inside out, re-directed, and re-sealed...."(696)

The problematic nature of the purloined letter has been the subject of considerable recent scholarly attention. In his seminar on the story, Jacques Lacan argues that the letter represents an empty signifier, important not for its contents, but for its function within the story as the (un)observed object of Oedipal triangulations of characters.⁴¹ Irwin argues in *The Mystery to a Solution* that the purloined letter illustrates

that the most accurate physical representation of the link between body and mind is the reversal or interchangeability of dimensional oppositions considered as the sign of the metaphysical's transcendence of the bodily. The turning of the purloined letter inside out symbolically depicts the relationship between the physicality of writing and the metaphysicality of thought as a continuous container/contained oscillation. (126)

I would apply the symbolism here to questions of interiority and exteriority, rather than to thought and writing, to philosophical ends rather than psychoanalytic ones. The letter itself, its inside turned out, becomes Poe's final reminder of the flexible nature of seemingly fixed relations between inner and outer. Irwin describes this convertibility nicely in the following passage:

The letter is concealed in plain sight on the surface, on the outside of this inside (the house), a concealment accomplished by, and symbolized in, the turning of the letter itself inside out. Thus everted, its outside— the part of the letter whose appearance is known to the prefect and Dupin from the queen's description, the part that usually serves to conceal, to envelop, the letter's contents— now becomes the content to be concealed from the eyes of the police; while the inside— the reality that gives this letter its special significance, the part of it that is not known to the prefect and Dupin— becomes a new outside that gives the letter a different appearance. (181-2)⁴²

The flaneur, who moves (intellectually) inside and outside his observed subject, is uniquely (perhaps solely) qualified to perceive the physical fluidity suggested here.

However, the physiognomic detective's reading of an interior is directionally opposite to the reading of facial physiognomy. In the latter, an analyst seeks "inner" truth based on outer appearances; in the former, the movement is from details of an "interior" to a broader perspective "outside" the room. Such a movement carries potentially disturbing significations regarding the stability of architectural and conceptual divisions of "in" and "out." If Dupin's mastery of this dynamic represents a comforting fantasy of control, the persistence of such an unsettling porosity undercuts that comfort. In the end, to maintain his spectatorial equanimity, he must gravitate towards a detached position "outside" these interiors and the events occurring within them. As Thomas Joswick suggests, this represents an important qualification of Dupin's "mastery":

by translating brutal events into a discursive order, Dupin can remain unperturbed by what most unsettles the narrator and readers: the horrifying violence of an 'Ourang-Outang' that uncannily resembles the violence of human mastery. With a 'mood of mind' detached because triumphant over senseless events, Dupin returns to the sanctuary of his own thought once the horror is explained. The world of sensational shocks and murderous impulses is left for the reader to wonder and tremble at. (241)⁴³

And, as Rosenheim suggests, this "translation" of events into a "discursive order" necessitates a reductionism that may be the price for Dupin's ultimate disengagement: "Objects and events in the world must be deprived of their polyvalent materiality, since the semiotic schema, as conceived by Poe, requires the replacement of contingency and indeterminacy with the detective's single, verifiable meaning. Just as in theory a

deciphered code ought to be completely intelligible, so Dupin believes in a corresponding transparency of events in the world..."(25).⁴⁴

Not all Poe's narrators possess this ability to abstract themselves wholly from their interiors. In some of his "tales of sensation," Poe depicts characters who struggle to ascertain the physical dimensions of an imprisoning and indeterminate interior, though their vision or their mental faculties or both are impaired. Certainly, this is a familiar "sensational" device, such as Poe mocked in "How to Write a Blackwood Article." But Poe's attention to the mental and perceptual processes that could occur in such a "sensational" predicament are not simply generic and *pro forma* conventions; he is seriously speculating on to the way the mind functions when attempting to glean sensory data from a surface that resists the "reading." His narrators must perform a "blind" flanerie of touch, groping their way, encountering and accounting for unseen obstacles both physical and mental. They are consistently challenged to detach themselves not only from the immediacy of the details upon which they depend, but also the thought processes which transform that tactile information into visual images that are often grossly mistaken. The first step in this process, as evidenced in works like "The Pit and the Pendulum" and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, is a reconstruction of memory and consciousness, the narrator's mental "interior," before deciphering his physical exterior surroundings. This process, ostensibly the prelude to the narrator's ultimate goal of escape, becomes a focal struggle of these works, analogous to Poe's "specific project of *physically locating the human*" in the detective tales (Irwin 160). What this interior is, and where the narrator is located within it, become as important in Poe's tales as how the

narrator will escape, which is, more often than not, through dumb luck. The frustrated struggle to identify an interior through physiognomy lends a powerfully nightmarish quality to these tales, raising troubling questions about our ability to identify correctly the environment in which we move and our relation to it.

In “The Pit and the Pendulum,” Poe’s narrator describes first his “frequent and thoughtful endeavors to remember,” his “earnest struggles to regather some token of the state of seeming nothingness into which my soul had lapsed” during his imprisonment, demonstrating that even now, his ability to reconstruct his memory of these experiences is incomplete at best, confined to “moments when I have dreamed of success” and “brief, very brief periods when I have conjured up remembrances”(492-3). The most successful of these recollections yield the following highly detailed description of his mental “surfacing”:

Very suddenly there came back to my soul motion and sound— the tumultuous motion of the heart, and, in my ears, the sound of its beating. Then a pause in which all is blank. Then again sound, and motion, and touch— a tingling sensation pervading my frame. Then the mere consciousness of existence, without thought— a condition which lasted long. Then, very suddenly, *thought*, and shuddering terror, and earnest endeavor to comprehend my true state....

So far, I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay upon my back, unbound. I reached out my hand, and it fell heavily upon something damp and hard. There I suffered it to remain for many minutes, while I strove to imagine where and *what* I could be. I longed, yet dared not to employ my vision. I dreaded the first glance

at objects around me. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see. At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me.... I still lay quietly, and made effort to exercise my reason. I brought to mind the inquisitorial proceedings, and attempted from that point to deduce my real condition....

A fearful idea now suddenly drove the blood in torrents upon my heart, and for a brief period, I once more relapsed into insensibility. Upon recovering, I at once started to my feet, trembling convulsively in every fibre. I thrust my arms wildly above and around me in all directions. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move a step, lest I should be impeded by the walls of a *tomb*. Perspiration burst from every pore, and stood in cold big beads upon my forehead. The agony of suspense grew at length intolerable, and I cautiously moved forward, with my arms extended, and my eyes straining from their sockets, in the hope of catching some faint ray of light.... (493-4)

That Poe is engaging the popular genre of the *Blackwood's* tale of sensation is immediately apparent. However, just as obviously Poe is not satirizing the genre here, as he does in "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "Loss of Breath." This is an earnest attempt on Poe's part to convey the sensations and the terror attendant upon finding oneself in an indeterminate state, of consciousness as well as external environment. The narrator's very status as a living entity is in question: "I strove to imagine where and *what* I could be." But the tool that the narrator needs most here, his vision, he dreads to

employ, “aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see,” a fear which proves to be all too well-founded. Confronted by blackness, he intuitively and desperately seeks visual information, his “eyes straining from their sockets, in the hope of catching some faint ray of light.” Deprived of this information, he attempts through reason to “deducc” his “real condition,” but this prompts him to form another, deeper fear: that he has been entombed alive. Poe’s fascination and dread regarding this prospect has been exhaustively documented,⁴⁵ but it acquires new implications when considered in the context of the flaneur’s impulse to read interiors.

The narrator must fall back on the other senses he has at his disposal, most significantly the sense of touch, to form a somewhat clearer, though still incomplete, idea of his surroundings. This act of “groping” represents a tactile translation of the flaneur’s visual activity; without his ability to see the interior and thereby read it, the narrator is forced to “feel” the interior’s surface, its recesses and its dimensions, in an attempt to ascertain its physiognomy:

My outstretched hands at length encountered some solid obstruction. It was a wall, seemingly of stone masonry—very smooth, slimy, and cold. I followed it up; stepping with all the careful distrust with which certain antique narratives had inspired me. This process, however, afforded me no means of ascertaining the dimensions of my dungeon; as I might make its circuit, and return to the point whence I set out, without being aware of the fact; so perfectly uniform seemed the wall. I therefore sought the knife which had been in my pocket, when led into the inquisitorial chamber; but it was gone; my clothes had been exchanged for a

wrapper of coarse serge. I had thought of forcing the blade in some minute crevice of the masonry, so as to identify my point of departure. The difficulty, nevertheless, was but trivial; although, in the disorder of my fancy, it seemed at first insuperable. I tore a part of the hem from the robe and placed the fragment at full length, and at right angles to the wall. In groping my way around the prison, I could not fail to encounter this rag upon completing the circuit. So, at least, I thought: but I had not counted upon the extent of the dungeon, or upon my own weakness. The ground was moist and slippery. I staggered on for some time, when I stumbled and fell. My excessive fatigue induced me to remain prostrate; and sleep soon overtook me as I lay.... Shortly afterward, I resumed my tour around the prison, and with much toil, came at last upon the fragment of the serge. Up to the period when I fell, I had counted fifty-two paces, and, upon resuming my walk, I had counted forty-eight more— when I arrived at the rag. There were in all, then, a hundred paces; and, admitting two paces to the yard, I presumed the dungeon to be fifty yards in circuit. I had met, however, with many angles in the wall, and thus I could form no guess as to the shape of the vault; for vault I could not help supposing it to be. (495)

Such groping is the physical enaction of Dupin's investigative credo: "it is by these deviations from the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels its way, if at all, in the search for the true"(414). A "blind" flaneur, this narrator has a greater dependence on, and achieves a more intimate familiarity with these deviations; he must place his fingers in them, in a real sense insinuating himself among them rather than viewing them from a

distance. In addition, he must pay greater attention to the landscape of his own thought processes, on which he depends, and which in turn depend on this tactile data. By extrapolating from these “deviations” or “recesses” in the room’s physiognomy, and by using ingenious mental contrivances such as the rag, the narrator constructs an inner imaginative “picture” of the room that will stand in for the visual one.

However, as the narrator discovers, the numerous “disorders of fancy” that make “trivial” difficulties seem “at first insuperable,” also create distortions in his interpretation of the room’s “landscape.” He discovers this after he has stumbled and fallen (by sheer chance) just before stepping into the pit; he awakes from a drugged sleep to find he has been strapped to a platform, and cannot move, but can now see indistinctly the nature of his prison cell.

In its size I had been greatly mistaken. The whole circuit of its walls did not exceed twenty-five yards. For some minutes this fact occasioned me a world of vain trouble; vain indeed— for what could be of less importance, under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon? But my soul took a wild interest in trifles, and I busied myself in endeavors to account for the error I had committed in my measurement. The truth at length flashed upon me. In my first attempt at exploration, I had counted fifty-two paces, up to the period when I fell: I must then have been within a pace or two of the fragment of serge; in fact, I had nearly performed the circuit of the vault. I then slept— and, upon awaking, I must have returned upon my steps— thus supposing the circuit nearly double what it actually was. My confusion of mind prevented

me from observing that I began my tour with the wall to the left, and ended it with the wall to the right.

I had been deceived, too, in respect to the shape of the enclosure. In feeling my way, I had found many angles, and thus deduced an idea of great irregularity; so potent is the effect of total darkness upon one arousing from lethargy or sleep! The angles were simply those of a few slight depressions, or niches, at odd intervals. The general shape of the prison was square. What I had taken for masonry, seemed now to be iron, or some other metal, in huge plates, whose sutures or joints occasioned the depression. The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstition of the monks has given rise. The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls. I observed that the outlines of these monstrosities were sufficiently distinct, but that the colors seemed faded and blurred, as if from the effects of a damp atmosphere. I now noticed the floor, too, which was of stone....

All this I saw indistinctly, and by much effort... (497-8)

The narrator's ability to read his interior is eclipsed by the disquieting realization of his mental miscalculations. There is good reason for this disquietude, despite his dismissals of such errors as "vain trouble" over "trifles." Without vision, he must depend on his other senses, but most of all upon his own intellectual ability to synthesize the data provided, and allow for exaggerations and tricks of the mind, especially when the interior has been constructed by an antagonist with deadly intentions. The particular "tricks of

the mind” that confuse him here are precisely the errors into which the Prefect falls, and which Dupin avoids. On the one hand, he does not know “what to observe”: while counting his steps carefully, after falling asleep he neglects to notice that he has changed the hand he keeps against the wall. He also gets lost in the complexity of sensory details. Unable to form a coherent visual picture of his interior’s shape, the narrator deduces from the numerous “angles” a highly complex shape, while in reality the room, like the Minister, partakes of a deceptive “simplicity.” On both counts, the narrator has failed to maintain the flaneur’s abstracted perspective, his critical distance from the immediacy of the situation.

The narrator’s lack of detachment even prevents him from seeing his means of escaping the descending pendulum until the very last moment. In the following passage, Poe delineates the mental process by which this means is found:

... there rushed to my mind a half-formed thought of joy— of hope. Yet what business had *I* with hope? It was, as I say, a half-formed thought— man has many such, which are never completed. I felt that it was of joy— of hope; but I felt also that it had perished in its formation. In vain I struggled to perfect— to regain it. Long suffering had nearly annihilated all my ordinary powers of mind. I was an imbecile— an idiot....

...I quivered in every nerve to think how slight a sinking of the machinery would precipitate that keen, glistening axe upon my bosom. It was *hope* that prompted the nerve to quiver— the frame to shrink. It was *hope*— the hope that triumphs on the rack— that whispers to the death-condemned even in the dungeons of the

Inquisition.

I saw that some ten or twelve vibrations would bring the steel in actual contact with my robe— and with this observation there suddenly came over my spirit all the keen, collected calmness of despair. For the first time during many hours— or perhaps days— I *thought*....

Scarcely had I dropped my head back into its original position, when there flashed upon my mind what I cannot better describe than as the unformed half of that idea of deliverance to which I have previously alluded, and of which a moiety only floated indeterminately through my brain... The whole thought was now present— feeble, scarcely sane, scarcely definite— but still entire. I proceeded at once, with the nervous energy of despair, to attempt its execution. (500-2)

Here, the narrator's "hope" for survival keeps him too emotionally involved in the situation, too mentally "excited" to think clearly. Once hope has been removed, and despair has taken its place, equanimity of mind is established, and observation and thought of a truly "analytical" cast may occur. Poe seems to suggest that in order for perception and analytical thought to take place, it is necessary *not* to think directly or attempt to reason about the issue at hand. If groping may be seen as the manual version of the flaneur's visual scanning, this oblique thinking may be regarded as the intellectual equivalent of the flaneur's casual or sidelong glance. (One thinks immediately here of Poe's reference in "Rue Morgue" and *Eureka* to seeing stars more clearly by looking at them "askance," using the edges of the retina rather than gazing directly at them.) Similarly, when the narrator senses a change in the prison's dimensions, he first

experiences “many minutes of a dreamy and trembling abstraction,” as he occupies himself in “vain, unconnected conjecture,” before “the mystery of the alteration in the chamber broke at once upon my understanding”:

I have observed that, although the outlines of the figures upon the walls were sufficiently distinct, yet the colors seemed blurred and indefinite. These colors had now assumed, and were momentarily assuming, a startling and most intense brilliancy, that gave to the spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own. Demon eyes, of a wild and ghastly vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions, where none had been visible before, and gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my imagination to regard as unreal. (503-4)

What transpires in this story is a flaneur’s nightmare— an ongoing battle to read the physiognomy of a deceptive and hostile interior, despite crippling limitations— and this is the moment of maximum tension for him. Although he acknowledges earlier in the story his awareness that he is being observed by his tormentors, whom *he* cannot see, this inversion of the flaneur’s anonymous spectatorship is magnified a thousandfold here, as the “demon eyes” and the walls themselves crowd in upon the flaneur who had demanded “elbow room.”

The room had been square. I saw that two of its angles were now acute— two, consequently, obtuse. The fearful difference quickly increased with a low rumbling or moaning sound. In an instant the apartment had shifted its form into

that of a lozenge. But the alteration stopped not here-- I neither hoped nor desired it to stop. I could have clasped the red walls to my bosom as a garment of eternal peace.... Fool! might I not have known that *into the pit* it was the object of the burning iron to urge me? ...[F]latter and flatter grew the lozenge, with a rapidity that left me no time for contemplation. Its centre, and of course, its greatest width, came just over the yawning gulf. I shrank back-- but the closing walls pressed me resistlessly onward. (505)

One would expect, as the narrator does, that the encroaching walls of this shrinking interior would eventually crush him to death. Yet curiously, the end of this hyper-enclosure, this increasingly claustrophobic interiority, is not immolation of the flaneur, but transition to another phase-- the pit. For the narrator, this thought holds only the terror of the unknown, the disorientation of a vertiginous fall, and a deeper level of enclosure. But like many of Poe's enclosures, it yields not an end but another beginning, in a different (often more nightmarish) direction. The room, like the purloined letter, or the glove in Dupin's analogy, is being turned "inside-out," and the narrator is being pushed to the other side, for better or worse. Here again Poe provides a physical dramatization of the flaneur's conversion of "inner" to "outer," but in this case the narrator is himself caught in the interior as it mutates. His experience in this transformation horrifically mimics the birth process: he finds escape from the claustrophobic contraction of the walls, only to be propelled to another, more terrifying level of experience.

The same emphasis on interiority, and similar difficulties in orienting oneself

within an interior, are found in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. In Poe's novel, the transmutation of inner and outer takes place on a more figurative level, as "cozy" interiors become increasingly claustrophobic, confusing, and alien. Pym devotes much attention to details regarding the ship's interiors as Augustus sneaks him aboard and secrets him in the hold:

We proceeded at once into the cabin, and found no person there. It was fitted up in the most comfortable style— a thing somewhat unusual in a whaling-vessel. There were four very excellent staterooms, with wide and convenient berths. There was also a large stove, I took notice, and a remarkably thick and valuable carpet covering the floor of both the cabin and staterooms. The ceiling was full seven feet high, and, in short, everything appeared of a more roomy and agreeable nature than I had anticipated. Augustus, however, would allow me but little time for observation, insisting upon the necessity of my concealing myself as soon as possible. He led the way into his own stateroom, which was on the starboard side of the brig, and next to the bulkheads. Upon entering, he closed the door and bolted it. I thought I had never seen a nicer little room than the one in which I now found myself. It was about ten feet long, and had only one berth, which, as I said before, was wide and convenient. In that portion of the closet nearest the bulkheads there was a space of four feet square, containing a table, a chair, and a set of hanging shelves full of books, chiefly books of voyages and travels. There were many other little comforts in the room, among which I ought not to forget a kind of safe or refrigerator, in which Augustus pointed out to me a host of

delicacies, both in the eating and drinking department. (1021-2)

Pym's eye for interior details— particularly the commodities intended to make these interiors more comfortable, more home-like, more “commodious”— takes them in, despite the fact that Augustus hurries him through a series of interiors within or beneath interiors: from cabin, to stateroom, to the hold, to the box prepared as Pym's hideaway. Cozy and snug as this “recess” is, it is located within a labyrinth in the dark, reinforcing its isolation and requiring substantial “groping” to find one's way in— or out:

The taper gave out so feeble a ray, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could grope my way through the confused mass of lumber among which I now found myself. By degrees, however, my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and I proceeded with less trouble, holding on to the skirts of my friend's coat. He brought me, at length, after creeping and winding through innumerable narrow passages, to an iron-bound box.... In every other direction around was wedged as closely as possible, even up to the ceiling, a complete chaos of almost every species of ship-furniture, together with a heterogeneous medley of crates, hampers, barrels, and bales, so that it seemed a matter no less than miraculous that we had discovered any passage at all to the box. I afterward found that Augustus had purposely arranged the stowage in this hold with a view to affording me a thorough concealment....

My companion now showed me that one of the ends of the box could be removed at pleasure. He slipped it aside and displayed the interior, at which I was excessively amused. A mattress from one of the cabin berths covered the whole

of the bottom, and it contained almost every article of mere comfort which could be crowded into so small a space, allowing me, at the same time, sufficient room for my accommodation, either in a sitting position or lying at full length. Among other things, there were some books, pen, ink, and paper, three blankets, a large jug full of water, a keg of sea-biscuit, three or four immense Bologna sausages, an enormous ham, a cold leg of roast mutton, and half a dozen bottles of cordials and liqueurs. I proceeded immediately to take possession of my little apartment, and this with feelings of higher satisfaction, I am sure, than any monarch ever experienced upon entering a new palace. (1022-3)

Pym's satisfaction with his temporary abode is short-lived, however; he falls into an extraordinarily deep and long sleep, and suffers a severe disorientation similar to that experienced by the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum." The details he observes (specifically the commodity of the mutton leg), which should have been comforting and reassuring, have instead become strange and repulsive:

Upon awaking I felt strangely confused in mind, and some time elapsed before I could bring to recollection all the various circumstances of my situation. By degrees, however, I remembered all.... Presently, feeling an almost ravenous appetite, I bethought myself of the cold mutton.... What was my astonishment at discovering it to be in a state of absolute putrefaction! This circumstance occasioned me great disquietude; for, connecting it with the disorder of mind I experienced upon awaking, I began to suppose that I must have slept for an

inordinately long period of time. The close atmosphere of the hold might have had something to do with this, and might, in the end, be productive of the most serious results. (1024-5)

This disfigurement of the interior's commodity coincides with Pym's confused mental state: all is not as it should be in either physical or mental interior. Augustus has mysteriously neglected to come and retrieve him or provide him with news, giving rise to all sorts of uneasy conjecture by Pym. Furthermore, Pym's disordered fancy converts an image of one's safest and best-loved interior— the home— into something foreign, strange and terrifying. He becomes aware of another presence in the box with him, straddling and staring at him, which he takes to be a "beast":

The beast, whatever it was, retained his position without attempting any immediate violence, while I lay in an utterly helpless, and, I fancied, a dying condition beneath him. I felt that my powers of body and mind were fast leaving me— in a word, that I was perishing, and perishing of sheer fright. My brain swam— I grew deadly sick— my vision failed— even the glaring eyeballs above me grew dim.... He precipitated himself at full length upon my body; but what was my astonishment, when, with a long and low whine, he commenced licking my face and hands with the greatest eagerness, and with the most extravagant demonstrations of affection and joy! I was bewildered, utterly lost in amazement— but I could not forget the peculiar whine of my Newfoundland dog Tiger, and the odd manner of his caresses I well knew. I experienced a sudden rush of blood to my temples— a giddy and overpowering sense of deliverance and reanimation.

(1026-7)

As illustrated in “Pit,” the senses are highly susceptible to mistaken perceptions, particularly in moments of emotional duress and mental uncertainty, but the narrator’s perceptual error has additional resonances here. Tiger takes a number of transformations through the course of the story: from terrifying beast to reassurance and remembrance of home (above), to ravenous and rabid threat (as he and Pym starve in the box), to heroic savior (during the fight with the mutineers). This facile conversion of the “home-like” (*heimlich*) into something profoundly “un-home-like,” something that once belonged to our interior becoming an invading force from the “outside,” brings to mind Tsvetan Todorov’s delineation of the uncanny. It underscores the disorientation experienced by the narrator and the difficulty he has in clearly figuring his interior, while pointing to the nightmarish tendency of interiors to become porous, and to flip themselves inside-out.

This disorientation is also heightened, of course, by Pym’s hunger, thirst and sleepiness, the pestilent air of the hold, his resulting weakness of body and mind, and the labyrinth in which he now finds himself a prisoner. He decides to risk following the whipcord left by Augustus as a trail to the trapdoor in the hold:

In this attempt my great feebleness became more than ever apparent. It was with the utmost difficulty I could crawl along at all, and very frequently my limbs sank suddenly from beneath me; when, falling prostrate on my face, I would remain for some minutes in a state bordering on insensibility. Still I struggled forward by slow degrees, dreading every moment that I should swoon amid the narrow and intricate windings of the lumber, in which event I had nothing but death to expect

as the result. (1028-9)

But he finds his passage blocked by a piece of lumber that has fallen in the path:

It became necessary... enfeebled as I was, either to leave the guidance of the whipcord and seek out a new passage, or to climb over the obstacle, and resume the path on the other side. The former alternative presented too many difficulties and dangers to be thought of without a shudder. In my present weak state of both mind and body, I should infallibly lose my way if I attempted it, and perish miserably amid the dismal and disgusting labyrinths of the hold. (1029)

This is an interior that cannot be read, even by means of groping. The challenge of a labyrinth, of course, is that one is immersed in the complexity of the puzzle, and can only go left or right; it is the inability to “pull back,” to achieve a “bird’s-eye” perspective that makes finding the escape difficult. Furthermore, as Irwin points out, in a labyrinth

the correlation between bodily and geographic directionality is disrupted; one becomes disoriented, no longer knowing, as the word implies, where the east is in relation to oneself. Because a labyrinth is usually a subterranean structure, a person trapped within one is effectively cut off from the two great natural indicators of direction— the sun and the North Star. To be lost in a labyrinth, then, raises the specter of an ultimate loss of differentiation itself... [of] the ability to distinguish between right and left, to make those bodily differentiations by which the self locates itself. (161)

There is no way Pym to achieve the necessary detachment from his surroundings in order to successfully read their physiognomy. And, as Irwin suggests, this inability to orient

oneself impacts the observing subject's ability to differentiate itself *at all* from the object it views, or the environment in which it finds itself: recall the struggles of the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" as he awakes and strives to "imagine where and *what* [he] could be."

The need for such detachment, and for non-directed thinking and perception, is made abundantly clear when Pym finds a note from Augustus tied to Tiger. Because he has no more tapers, he cannot read the note, just as he cannot read his interior. Again, we see Poe's articulation of his theory of the "oblique glance," evocative of the flaneur's casual and random gaze:

The hold was so intensely dark that I could not see my hand, however close I would hold it to my face. The white slip of paper could barely be discerned, and not even that when I looked at it directly; by turning the exterior portions of the retina towards it, that is to say, by surveying it slightly askance, I found that it became in some measure perceptible. Thus the gloom of my prison may be imagined, and the note of my friend, if indeed it were a note from him, seemed only likely to throw me into further trouble, by disquieting to no purpose my already enfeebled and agitated mind. In vain I revolved in my brain a multitude of absurd expedients for procuring light— such expedients precisely as a man in the perturbed sleep occasioned by opium would be apt to fall upon for a similar purpose— each and all of which appear by turns to the dreamer the most reasonable and the most preposterous of conceptions, just as the reasoning or imaginative faculties flicker, alternately, one above the other. (1032-3)

Yet even when Pym strikes upon a means by which to read the letter, it comes up blank. Like the narrator in “Pit,” Pym must endure an extended period of cognitive disorientation before a potential solution presents itself in his mind:

I have before stated more than once that my intellect, for some period prior to this, had been in a condition nearly bordering on idiocy. There were, to be sure, momentary intervals of perfect sanity, and, now and then, even of energy; but these were few.... This will account for the fact that many miserable hours of despondency elapsed... before the thought suggested itself that I had examined only one side of the paper.... The blunder itself would have been unimportant, had not my own folly and impetuosity rendered it otherwise— in my disappointment at not finding some words upon the slip, I had childishly torn it in pieces and thrown it away, it was impossible to say where. (1033-4)

Having retrieved these pieces, Pym confronts the flaneur’s supreme challenge: he must first ascertain which side of the letter is the “face” to be read, and which side is the blank. (Note that like “Purloined Letter,” we have a letter capable of being read, or of having its “interior” contents concealed.) In order to determine this, Pym must cautiously reason his way, groping intellectually, until he hits on a possible solution: using his fingers to “feel his way” along the page, hoping to detect surface irregularities, “deviations from the plane of the ordinary”— a physical groping with the fingertip. The following passage, quoted at length, offers a comprehensive instance of tactile flanerierie and analysis, its frustrations and its revelations, and the narrator’s ultimately incomplete

reading of this surface:

My difficulties had taught me the necessity of caution, and I now took time to reflect upon what I was about to do. It was very probably, I considered, that some words were written upon that side of the paper which had not been examined— but which side was that? Fitting the pieces together assured me that the words (if there were any) would be found all on one side, and connected in a proper manner, as written. There was the greater necessity of ascertaining the point in question beyond a doubt, as the phosphorus remaining would be altogether insufficient for a third attempt, should I fail in the one I was now about to make.... At last I thought it barely possible that the written side might have some unevenness on its surface, which a delicate sense of feeling might enable me to detect. I determined to make the experiment, and passed my finger very carefully over the side which first presented itself— nothing, however, was perceptible, and I turned the paper.... I now again carried my forefinger cautiously along, when I was aware of an exceedingly slight, but still discernable glow, which followed along as it proceeded. This, I knew, must arise from some very minute remaining particles of the phosphorus with which I had covered the paper in my previous attempt. The other, or under side, then, was that on which lay the writing, if writing there should finally prove to be.... Having rubbed in the phosphorus, a brilliancy ensued as before— but this time several lines of MS. in a large hand, and apparently in red ink, became distinctly visible. The glimmer, although sufficiently bright, was but momentary. Still, had I not been too greatly excited, there would have been ample

time enough for me to peruse the whole three sentences before me— for I saw there were three. In my anxiety, however, to read all at once, I succeeded only in reading the seven concluding words, which thus appeared: “*blood— your life depends upon lying close.*”

Had I been able to ascertain the entire contents of the note— the full meaning of the admonition which my friend had thus attempted to convey, that admonition, even although it should have revealed a story of disaster the most unspeakable, could not, I am firmly convinced, have imbued my mind with one tithe of the harrowing and yet indefinable horror with which I was inspired by the fragmentary warning thus received. And “*blood*” too, that word of all words— so rife at all times with mystery, and suffering, and terror— how trebly full of import did it now appear— how chillily and heavily (disjointed, as it thus was, from any foregoing words to qualify or render it distinct) did its vague syllables fall, amid the deep gloom of my prison, into the innermost recesses of my soul! (1034-5)

Whether or not Pym actually finds the “deviations” on the page, his plan leads him into the fortuitous discovery that the phosphorus has left “traces,” and by means of these he identifies the face of the letter. Once again, though, when his opportunity to read finally presents itself, he is too emotionally involved and not sufficiently detached to effectively do so.

This incomplete form of reading, this “fragmentary” text that inspires “harrowing and yet indefinable horror,” is of central importance in understanding Poe’s work, as it marks the intersection of the two modes of perception that characterize both the flaneur

and Dupin's "bi-part soul." The analytic or "resolvent" mode relies on the observer's ability to abstract himself from the dazzling immediacy of his senses and surroundings, to rise "above" them or see "past" them, to view them obliquely and at a distance. Failure to achieve this means an incomplete analytical reading of the event at hand. Yet the "horror" experienced in this case is not only a result of frustrated analysis, nor would it utterly disappear were the analysis complete. It is a residue of the conflict between this mode of reading and that which Poe calls the "creative" mode, or which one might term the aesthetic, the imaginative, the artist's mode. This form of interpretation depends in large part on the artist's sensory openness, his willingness and ability to immerse himself in such overwhelming sensations and experience their intoxication. To attain this degree of perceptiveness, which yields metaphysical rather than analytical insight, is impossible if the observer remains detached. While the discoveries of such readings dwarf the comparatively mundane rewards of purely analytical perception, they are inevitably attended by the "horror" of glimpsing the sublime, hidden mechanisms of life, divine revelations that not only transcend but often defy outright the dictates of analytical logic. Accordingly, such experiences are not found in Poe's detective fiction, but his horror stories and, as shall be shown in the next chapter, his "tales of sensation."

In his horror fiction, Poe creates interiors that offer both an opportunity for analytical reading (for evidence of their owners' character) and a more aesthetic and disturbing imaginative experience of their convertible nature. In "The Assignment," for instance, the narrator relates his visit to a stranger's Palazzo, after witnessing the latter's extraordinary rescue of his beloved's child from drowning.⁴⁶

I was shown up a broad winding staircase of mosaics, into an apartment whose unparalleled splendor burst through the opening door with an actual glare, making me blind and dizzy with luxuriousness.

I knew my acquaintance to be wealthy.... But as I gazed about me, I could not bring myself to believe that the wealth of any subject in Europe could have supplied the princely magnificence which burned and blazed around.

Although, as I say, the sun had arisen, yet the room was still brilliantly lighted up. I judged from this circumstance, as well as from an air of exhaustion in the countenance of my friend, that he had not retired to bed during the whole of the preceding night. In the architecture and embellishments of the chamber, the evident design had been to dazzle and astound. Little attention had been paid to the *decora* of what is technically called *keeping*, or to the proprieties of nationality. The eye wandered from object to object, and rested upon none—neither the *grotesques* of the Greek painters, nor the sculptures of the best Italian days, nor the huge carvings of untutored Egypt. Rich draperies in every part of the room trembled to the vibration of low, melancholy music, whose origin was not to be discovered. The senses were oppressed by mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censers, together with multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues of emerald and violet fire. The rays of the newly risen sun poured in upon the whole, through windows formed each of a single pane of crimson-tinted glass. Glancing to and fro, in a thousand reflections, from curtains which rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver, the beams

of natural glory mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light, and lay weltering in subdued masses upon a carpet of rich, liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold. (204-5)

The stranger's extreme wealth and the randomness with which the objects have been gathered indicate the flaneur's sensibility, and foster the narrator's desultory scanning of the interior. Poe's narrator also points out the stranger's apparent natural aristocracy, suggesting that "in the manner of the true gentleman, we are always aware of a difference from the bearing of the vulgar"(207). Yet even in this early tale, Poe foreshadows his later infusion of the flaneur with Dupin's intellectual prowess, as well as the neurasthenic (neuraesthetic?) apprehension/apprehensiveness of his more psychically disturbed narrators. In his speech and actions, the narrator detects a "peculiarity of spirit" in the stranger,

a *habit* of intense and continual thought, pervading even his most trivial actions— intruding upon his moments of dalliance— and interweaving itself with his very flashes of merriment— like adders that writhe from out the eyes of the grinning masks in the cornices around the temples of Persepolis.

I could not help, however, repeatedly observing, through the mingled tone of levity and solemnity with which he rapidly descanted upon matters of little importance, a certain air of trepidation— a degree of nervous *unction* in action and in speech— an unquiet excitability of manner which appeared to be at all times unaccountable, and upon some occasions even filled me with alarm. (207-8)

The stranger also seems a clear example of the figure Benjamin termed the “collector,” who, as Anke Gleber points out in *The Art of Taking a Walk*, is a close relative of the flaneur (47); for who is the flaneur but he who “pursues and collects all the evidence of his visual experience that he can retrieve from exterior reality”(50)? And for both collector and flaneur, “the potentially unlimited continuum of impressions in the city... can best be experienced in a state of intoxication, an intoxication that provides the only viable access to a modernity that can neither be fixed in static positions nor stopped and comprehended in terms of a preceding generation”(50). The intoxication that the stranger evokes here is also of an overwhelming sensory plenitude, though more of the aesthetic dimension than of the urban. The apartment has evidently been designed with a specific effect in mind: that of dazzling its inhabitant with aesthetic and sensory brilliance to the point of disorientation, as the stranger acknowledges: “I see you are astonished at my apartment— at my statues— my pictures— my originality of conception in architecture and upholstery— absolutely drunk, eh? with my magnificence”(205). It represents the ultimate in display, surpassing even the fashionable: “Europe cannot produce anything so fine as this, my little regal cabinet. My other apartments are by no means of the same order; mere ultras of fashionable insipidity. This is better than fashion— is it not? Yet this has but to be seen to become the rage— that is, with those who could afford it at the cost of their entire patrimony”(206). But its underlying aim is not so much to impress the viewer (the narrator being the only “outsider” permitted to see it) as to approximate the wild splendor and terrible beauty beyond the terrestrial and the mundane— glimpsed in dreams, in the beloved, and in death.

“To dream,” he continued, resuming the tone of his desultory conversation... “to dream has been the business of my life. I have therefore framed for myself, as you see, a bower of dreams.... You behold around you, it is true, a medley of architectural embellishments. The chastity of Ionia is offended by antediluvian devices, and the sphynxes of Egypt are outstretched upon carpets of gold. Yet the effect is incongruous to the timid alone. Proprieties of place, and especially of time, are the bugbears which terrify mankind from the contemplation of the magnificent. Once I was myself a decorist: but that sublimation of folly has palled upon my soul. All this is now fitter for my purpose. Like these arabesque censors, my spirit is writhing in fire, and the delirium of this scene is fashioning me for the wilder visions of that land of real dreams whither I am now rapidly departing.” (210-1)

This interior has been fashioned not solely for display, ostentatious though it is, but also as an appropriate site for transcending merely earthly magnificence, with the effect of transporting its inhabitant beyond the realm of the physical. This is possible due in large part to the stranger’s willingness to abandon the “mere rules” of interior decorating. The room can be seen both as an indicator of the stranger’s characteristic hyper-aestheticism, and as his attempt as an artist to construct an interior that will prefigure his propulsion from this world into the next, his willed fulfillment of that artistic yearning.

The bridal chamber in “Ligeia” also functions as a readable text and an interior designed to access other-worldly experience through wildness and intoxicating complexity. Just as the narrator reads Ligeia’s face for insights into her hidden character,

he suggests that his bridal chamber for the Lady Rowena could have been read for indications of his own mental instability. “Alas,” he cries, “I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold!”(270). He blames Rowena’s family for not correctly interpreting this interior: “Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment *so* bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved?”(270). And there is ample evidence of his “incipient madness.” The disorder of the room might have been one warning sign. He states that there is “no system, no keeping in the fantastic display” of the chamber; the drapes are “spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures”; the room itself is “odd” both in its (pentagonal) shape and in its disobedience to structural aesthetics (the walls are “lofty” and “gigantic in height– even unproportionately so”{270-271}). Another clue to his disturbed psyche, of course, is the presence of Gothic gloom: the location in a “high turret of the castellated abbey,” the “leaden hue” of the window and its “ghastly lustre,” the “aged vine” creeping along the window and the “massy” walls, the “gloomy-looking oak” of the ceiling, the “pall-like canopy” above the bridal couch, the sarcophagi made of “black granite” in each corner of the room (270-1). These items not only create a formidable Gothic atmosphere, but also suggest the narrator’s obsession with the death of the beloved Ligeia.

But there are signs of another, more unsettling thread present in the room– what Benjamin calls in Poe’s detective tales the “rank Orient”: the “solemn carvings of Egypt,”

the “Saracenic” censer, the scattered ottomans, the “golden candelabra, of Eastern figure,” the bridal couch “of an Indian model”(270-1). These references to an “exotic” Eastern culture carry with them associations with Eastern mysticism, and combine with the Gothic focus on death to conjure images of reincarnation. To the observant physiognomist, such trappings might indicate the narrator’s own desire (only barely subconscious) to reanimate the deceased Ligeia. Indeed, a number of inanimate objects within the room even seem to take on “a life of their own.” Flames “writhe in and out” of the Saracenic censer, “as if endued with a serpent vitality”(271). The draperies are decorated with arabesque figures that are “changeable in aspect”; they transform themselves as the viewer proceeds further into the room, from “simple monstrosities” into truly “ghastly forms”(271). The “phantasmagoric effect” of these drapes is “vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind... giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole”(271).

The features of this room are more than elements of a text that is passively read, yielding evidence of an unnatural state of mind. The furnishings combine with character’s psychic condition to facilitate perceptual (and even physical) transformations that under “ordinary” circumstances would seem impossible. In other words, the room, created for “effect,” in fact *has effects* on its inhabitants. The furnishings not only reflect but also afflict the narrator’s unsettled mind, and contribute as well to the illness and inevitable death of the Lady Rowena. Yet the narrator himself has created this room, has deliberately chosen the furnishings (though in a fit of “child-like perversity” in the “dotage” of his grief). David Ketterer in *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* points out

that the arabesque details in the interiors of “The Assignation” and “Ligeia” are almost identical; in the latter, “the dimensions of time and space give way to a new dimension that will allow Ligeia’s return from the dead. *The room itself*, properly perceived, is the means of her resurrection”(41; emphasis added). But unlike the interior of “The Assignation,” which enabled the stranger’s propulsion “upward” and “outward” from the physical to the metaphysical level, in “Ligeia” the interior is so constructed as to conjure a metaphysical presence “inside” to its physical plane. The narrator’s active role in creating this interior has pushed his physiognomical approach beyond simply “reading” the features of Ligeia’s face; consciously or no, he has become a participant, a conjurer, an artist, a creator. For it is only in the presence of these fetishes to death and to reincarnation, that Ligeia’s “gigantic volition” and passion “for life— *but* for life” can precipitate her return from the grave.⁴⁷

A similar conjuration takes place in “The Masque of the Red Death.” As in “Ligeia,” the setting is an utterly secluded and isolated interior, shut in upon itself; in fact, it is made so by the Prince Prospero, in a desperate effort to save himself and his followers from the plague of the Red Death:

...[H]e summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince’s own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to

leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. (485)

The Prince seems to revel in the apparent security of this locked interior, decorating its rooms with an eye towards display so outré that it approaches madness. Once again, it is an extended and carefully constructed delineation of an interior's physiognomy that merits full reproduction:

There were seven— an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's love of the *bizarre*. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue— and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and

lighted with orange— the fifth with white— the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet— a deep blood color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illuminated the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all. (485-6)

The revelers are located in what amounts to a closed maze, unable to grasp a view of the whole suite, to get “outside the game.” But everywhere the courtiers may perceive evidence of the Prince’s unsettled frame of mind. Poe directs the reader’s attention explicitly to the connection between the Prince’s sense of decor and his own personal character:

The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He

disregarded the *decora* of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great *fête*; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm—much of what has been since seen in “Hernani.” There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre*, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. (487-8)

The revelers themselves, in fact, have been “decorated” by the Prince, and thus become part of the suite’s furnishings and subsumed “within” the interior, heightening its “grotesque” blending of the animate and inanimate.

Like the stranger in “The Assignation,” the Prince is a connoisseur, but also an original artist, and a collector; he pays no heed to “rules” of decorating, but strikes out in apparently random directions. Yet within such a “scattered” decor, there is a terrible logic and geometry: the division of interior lighting into individual and discrete color components, along with the psychic disorder at the heart of this desperate gaiety, practically demands that the suite end in its western-most chamber with black and red, the

colors of death. And all the Prince's attention to creating the impermeable interior, filled with mad revelry so as to forget the raging plague outside, practically conjures the presence of the Red Death, the very thing it seeks to exclude.⁴⁸ The very emphasis on interiority and its security seems to invite hostile presences in from "outside," as Benjamin suggests in a passage from "One Way Street" entitled "MANORIALY FURNISHED TEN-ROOM APARTMENT," in which he describes the "horror of apartments" and links it to Poe's detective tales:

The arrangement of the furniture is at the same time the site plan of deadly traps, and the suite of rooms prescribes the fleeing victim's path. That this kind of detective novel begins with Poe-- at a time when such accommodations hardly yet existed-- is no counterargument. For without exception the great writers perform their combinations in a world that comes after them.... The bourgeois interior of the 1860's to the 1890's, with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where palms stand, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames, fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxuriance of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body. (64)

Just as these interiors are fashioned with an apparently deliberate (if unconscious) intent of subverting their own interiority, Poe designed fictional "interiors" to have unsettling "effects" upon the readers who temporarily "inhabit" them. In fact, the physiognomies practiced by the narrators in his detective, sensational and horror tales

have striking parallels in Poe's theories of fiction and artistic techniques. Like these narrators, Poe perceived the "strangeness," the shadowy intimations of truths not fully readable in faces and interiors, readings that lurk beneath Dupin's promise of legibility, creeping at the edges of his highly effective but dislocated (and ultimately incomplete) analytic interpretations. Always keeping the primacy of "effect" in mind (see "Philosophy of Composition" 16), Poe constructs mental and physical interior states replete with a haunting "suggestiveness," an "under current, however indefinite of meaning," hinting at what might lie beyond, or within, the surface "reality" of these features and facades ("Philosophy of Composition" 24). As in many of Poe's tales, the reader can adopt his/her own stance of "analytic detachment," dismissing such outré ideas and events as the hallucinations of a deranged mind. But the "verisimilitude" or realistic detail Poe employs in depicting these events frustrates such an easy rejection. Furthermore, the allure of an *incompletely* solved mystery, the terrific and terrifying promise of a face that never fully opens itself, an enclosure that never completely closes, keeps us on the threshold, making us *want* to question our own perceptual limitations as much as the narrator's sanity. In fact, the narrator's "madness" could be precisely the key to interpreting the physiognomy of material surfaces with more accurate (though more disturbing) results than "sane" observers can. This is a possibility Poe gestures towards in countless tales, but articulates most clearly in "Eleonora": "whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence— whether much that is glorious— whether all that is profound— does not spring from disease of thought— from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect"(468). Poe stages his incomplete readings to expand the reader's

imaginative horizons, to question the very basis of our comfortably neat and logical explanations of the world— the concepts of “outer” appearance and “inner” reality— as will be further demonstrated in the final chapter of this study.

Chapter Five: Imperfect Readings of Perfect Plots

The flaneur's complex dynamic of intoxication and disengagement elucidated in the previous chapter on interiors may also be read in Poe's approach to exterior environments. As I shall argue later in this final chapter, Poe placed equal importance on both aspects of the flaneur's "bi-part soul," and applied the underlying tenets of flanerie to his readings of (super)natural topographies as well as urban ones, but I shall begin by examining Poe's physiognomy of the city. Having spent most of his life living in various metropolitan centers on the Eastern seaboard (Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York), Poe was certainly sensitive to both the wonders and dilemmas of city life. As Dana Brand has illustrated, he was also thoroughly familiar with the idea and practices of the literary flaneur as urban observer; Catherine Quoyeser has suggested that Poe's "Doings of Gotham" series emulated the work of Nathaniel Parker Willis, whom she views as a prime example of the nineteenth-century American literary "salaried flaneur"(158). But, as discussed in Chapter Two, Poe was skeptical about the conventional notions regarding flanerie, and on occasion poked fun at some of the more facile pretensions of flanerie as a mode of viewing, interpreting, and thereby ordering the city.

The complexities of this ambiguous relationship may be observed in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Man of the Crowd," two of the tales traditionally cited as instances of Poe's flanerie. In these stories, urban chaos serves as stimuli for

certain characters, for different reasons; though they flirt with the city's intoxication, both Dupin and the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" ultimately represent the triumph of detached analysis over urban chaos, the resistance of immersion in the city's labyrinth. This is certainly the case in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," where the city serves as locus and impetus for Dupin's analytical exercises: "[At] the advent of the true Darkness... we sallied forth into the streets, arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford" (401). This extraordinary relationship between "quiet observation," "wild" sensory stimulation, and "mental excitement" points to the ambiguous nature of flaneuristic detachment dramatized later, when Dupin detects the narrator's train of thought. That train is in fact initiated by an encounter with urban detritus while the two are "strolling one night down a long dirty street," as Dupin reveals in his explanation to his companion:

As we crossed into this street, a fruiterer, with a large basket upon his head, brushing quickly past us, thrust you upon a pile of paving-stones collected at a spot where the causeway is undergoing repair. You stepped upon one of the loose fragments, slipped, slightly strained your ankle, appeared vexed or sulky, muttered a few words, turned to look at the pile, and then proceeded in silence.... You kept your eyes upon the ground— glancing, with a petulant expression, at the holes and ruts in the pavement, (so that I saw you were still thinking of the stones,) until we reached the little alley called Lamartine, which has been paved, by way of

experiment, with the overlapping and riveted blocks. Here your countenance brightened up, and, perceiving your lips move, I could not doubt that you murmured the word “stereotomy,” a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement.... (403-4)

Clearly, as Quoyeser argues, “Dupin succeeds where the newspapers and the police fail because he is *proof against the overwhelming stimulations, the bewildering distractions and contingencies of metropolitan life*”(177; emphasis added). But Dupin also *thrives* on these stimulations and distractions, intoxicated by them in an abstracted, analytical fashion. Urban complexity here functions as an occasion for Dupin to demonstrate his mastery of observational technique; the variety of random experience in the city enhances the apparently desultory train of thought in the narrator, which makes Dupin’s “mind-reading” seem all the more fantastic. Despite his appreciation for the Minister’s “poetic” sensibilities in “The Purloined Letter,” and the narrator’s speculation in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” regarding a “bi-part soul” both “creative” and “resolvent,” Dupin’s *overall* orientation gravitates inevitably toward “resolvent” analysis and control, rather than intoxicated immersion.

In “The Man of the Crowd,” the imperatives and difficulties involved in maintaining the flaneur’s delicate balance between detachment and engagement are more clearly delineated.⁴⁹ Both the narrator and the wanderer feed off the overwhelming intricacy and superfluity of sensory experience in London, but in different ways and for different reasons. The narrator finds himself in the ideal frame of mind, and the perfect location, to appreciate the peculiar intoxication which the city’s density of sensation

offers. For one thing, he relates,

I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui*— moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from the mental vision departs... and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its every-day condition, as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias. Merely to breathe was enjoyment; and I derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain. I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in every thing. (388)

In his heightened state of intellectual and sensory acuteness, this narrator calls to mind innumerable Poe narrators who are similarly “imaginative” or “highly sensitive.” But here, as Baudelaire points out, Poe explicitly links the “newness” with which both infant and convalescent see the world, “always *drunk*” with their “keen interest in things, be they apparently of the most trivial,” with intoxication (7). In states of childhood, drunkenness and convalescence, reality may be unhinged from the mediating influence of intellect, knowledge or reason, which usually classifies new data into a framework of the already-known, recognizable, familiar and understood. To be a child, to be drunk, to be convalescing, is to be sensitive to the fundamental “shock” of perception Baudelaire discusses, a shock that derives in Poe’s work both from the recognition of unspeakable affinities and the replacement of the familiar with the uncanny. In the mature adult, this shock is tempered with Reason; but the flaneur/artist has enhanced access to this childhood freshness of perception, this disengagement of sensibility from reason.

Whether he can disengage from this intoxicated state is another question.

In Poe's tale, this intoxication is fed by the spectacle outside the narrator's window, which looks out on "one of the principal thoroughfares of the city," which "had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momentarily increased; and, by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door"(388). His initial reaction to this spectacle is broadly aesthetic, registering the impression made by the entire urban canvas before him.⁵⁰ He feels a "delicious novelty of emotion" prompted by the "tumultuous sea of human heads" around him (388); he points out that his first "observations took an abstract and generalizing turn," as he "looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations"(388). Later in the tale, he goes out of his way to note another aesthetic impression, the "odd effect upon the crowd" brought on by a sudden rain: "the whole... was at once put into new commotion, and overshadowed by a world of umbrellas. The waver, the jostle, and the hum increased in a tenfold degree"(393).

But this aesthetic visual engagement with the spectacle of the city is increasingly described by Poe's narrator in terms of surrender: "I *gave up*, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became *absorbed* in contemplation of the scene without (389; emphasis added). Even when he later moves from an aesthetic to an analytic mode of perception, "descend[ing] to details, and regard[ing] with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance"(388-9), the degree to which he is in "control" is questionable. He states that "[t]he wild effects of the

light *enchained* me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, *prevented me* from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years”(392; emphasis added). In fact, it may be the very ease with which the narrator “descends” from abstract generalization to details and induction, and then re-ascends to broad categories of “tribes” and “divisions” of workers, detecting their “race” and “order,” that spurs his addiction: detached mastery fosters the craving for further material to master, which demands further immersion.

As successful as the narrator is in his Enlightenment fantasy of taxonomy, he points out that such easily-read “common-places of society... did not greatly excite my attention”(389). Here he anticipates Benjamin’s critique of the flaneur’s *physiologies* as being “of perfect bonhomie,” and therefore of little interest or value. The narrator is compelled to perform another descent, along a moral rather than a logical axis, which marks a stage of more profound engagement with this crowd:

Descending in the scale of what is termed gentility, I found darker and deeper themes for speculation. I saw Jew pedlars, with hawk eyes flashing from countenances whose every other feature wore only an expression of abject humility; sturdy professional street beggars scowling upon mendicants of a better stamp, whom despair alone had driven forth into the night for charity; feeble and ghastly invalids, upon whom death had placed a sure hand, and who sidled and tottered through the mob, looking every one beseechingly in the face, as if in

search of some chance consolation, some lost hope; modest young girls returning from long and late labor to a cheerless home, and shrinking more tearfully than indignantly from the glances of ruffians, whose direct contact, even, could not be avoided; women of the town of all kinds and of all ages— the unequivocal beauty in the prime of her womanhood, putting one in mind of the statue in Lucian, with the surface of Parian marble and the interior filled with filth— the loathsome and utterly lost leper in rags— the wrinkled, bejewelled and paint-begrimed beldame, making a last effort at youth— the mere child of immature form, yet, from long association, an adept in the dreadful coquetries of her trade, and burning with a rabid ambition to be ranked the equal of her elders in vice; drunkards innumerable and indescribable— some in shreds and patches, reeling, inarticulate, with bruised garments, with a slightly unsteady swagger, thick sensual lips, and hearty-looking rubicund faces— others clothed in materials which had once been good, and which even now were scrupulously well brushed— men who walked with a more than naturally firm and springy step, but whose countenances were fearfully pale, whose eyes hideously wild and red, and who clutched with quivering fingers, as they strode through the crowd, at every object that came within their reach; beside these, pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps; organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors and ballad mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye. (391-2)

Robert H. Byer, in “Mysteries of the City: A Reading of Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd,’” also marks this crucial transformation of the narrator’s observational perspective: “The ‘aching sensation’ imparted by the crowd to the narrator’s eyes is a consequence of the shift in his gaze from a kind of casual detachment that composes the crowd to a wild discipline that seeks to identify with it and is captivated by its motions. Rather than providing distracted pleasure, the crowd, in this second view, compels the narrator with a series of physiognomies that he strains after...” (236).⁵¹ And this compulsion drives him toward discoveries of a decidedly dark nature. While Poe’s narrator is clearly employing the flâneur’s methods here, it is just as clear that this narrator cannot be Baudelaire’s “lover of universal life,” who “delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed-- in a word, [who] delights in universal life”(11). The flâneur Baudelaire describes in this passage functions in the daylight, and in “official” society; for Poe’s narrator, “as the night deepened, so deepened to me the interest of the scene”(392). In fact, the site of maximum interest for this narrator is that of minimum morality and social acceptability: the face (and character) of the wanderer.

The narrator’s propensity for physiognomic analysis is both teased and taxed to the fullest in his observation of this figure. The stranger’s countenance and actions seem to both demand and defy interpretation:

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepid old man, some

sixty-five or seventy years of age,)-- a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before.... As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense-- of supreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. "How wild a history," I said to myself, "is written within that bosom!" Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view-- to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take; for he had already disappeared. (392-3)

The narrator's heightened mental state enables him to read such an absolutely novel character, but only incompletely, leading to a dark fascination and even a "craving desire" to "read" him further.⁵² Shortly thereafter, he obtains a "good opportunity of examining his person":

He was short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble. His clothes, generally, were filthy and ragged; but as he came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp, I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely-buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaire* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a

diamond and of a dagger. These observations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go. (393)

Though increasingly compulsive, neither the narrator's taste for intoxicating spectacle nor his craving for analysis is of the same order as the wanderer's desperate hunger for the city's complex stimuli. That hunger becomes most evident when the crowds in which the wanderer immerses himself begin to disappear as night deepens. In a scene that prefigures the near-collision between the fruiterer and Dupin's companion in "Rue Morgue," the wanderer is propelled into a desultory physical (rather than mental) journey by means of an urban shove:

A shop-keeper, in putting up a shutter, jostled the old man, and at the instant I saw a strong shudder come over his frame. He hurried into the street, looked anxiously around him for an instant, and then ran with incredible swiftness through many crooked and people-less lanes, until we emerged once more upon the great thoroughfare whence we had started— the street of the D----- Hotel.... It was brilliant with gas; but the rain fell fiercely, and there were few persons to be seen. The stranger grew pale. He walked moodily some paces up the once populous avenue, then with a heavy sigh, turned in the direction of the river, and, plunging through a great variety of devious ways, came out, at length, in view of one of the principal theatres. It was about being closed, and the audience were thronging from the doors. I saw the old man gasp as if for breath while he threw himself amid the crowd.... [U]pon the whole, I was at a loss to comprehend the

waywardness of his actions. (394-5)

Poe's verbal play here (the shop-keeper's raising a "shutter" raises a "shudder" in the wanderer) suggests that it is the vibrancy and motion of urban life which the wanderer craves; the closing of the stores signals the withdrawal of this stimulus. Ironically, his dependence upon the city's animation and sensory overload eventually brings him to seek life amidst scenes of utter decay:

It was the most noisome quarter of London, where every thing wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. By the dim light of an accidental lamp, tall, antique, worm-eaten, wooden tenements were seen tottering to their fall, in directions so many and capricious that scarce the semblance of a passage was discernible between them. The paving-stones lay at random, displaced from their beds by the rankly-growing grass. Horrible filth festered in the dammed-up gutters. The whole atmosphere teemed with desolation. Yet, as we proceeded, the sounds of human life revived by sure degrees, and at length large bands of the most abandoned of a London populace were seen reeling to and fro. The spirits of the old man again flickered up, as a lamp which is near its death-hour. (395)

In this case, the complexity of city streets serves as a substitute for the density of urban experience otherwise found in the crowd. The wanderer finds in the "crooked and people-less lanes" and the "great variety of devious ways" in the city not only a *means* of finding the moral dregs of the urban crowd, but also a temporary *stand-in* for it, a set of "ways" that are "wayward" enough to keep him from being alone with himself, and his

unspeakable secret.⁵³ The “accidental lamp,” “tottering” tenements falling in “capricious” directions, the “random” and “displaced” paving-stones, all point to urban physical disorder, which the narrator seeks for its inevitable spark of human life— “*but for life,*” as the narrator of “Ligeia” would have it-- but equally for its own sake, as a simulacrum of the crowd that will demand the full attention, thereby soothing the conscience, of the sociopath.

It must be remembered that *this* is the motivation for the wanderer’s self-immersion in the crowd. He seeks not information or a sense of control over the maladies of the metropolis, but nepenthe, merciful forgetfulness of his mysterious crime against humanity. This becomes apparent when the narrator finally confronts him at the tale’s conclusion:

The sun arose while we proceeded, and, when we had once again reached that most thronged part of the populous town, the street of the D----- Hotel, it presented an appearance of human bustle and activity scarcely inferior to what I had seen on the evening before. And here, long, amid the momentarily increasing confusion, did I persist in my pursuit of the stranger. But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. (396).

It is difficult to see this wanderer as a version of the flaneur (as Benjamin mistakenly

interprets Baudelaire), or even the *badaud* or gaper (as Brand suggests): the wanderer seeks neither sight nor insight, but the blindness of an urban automaton, perpetually confronted with superfluity of detail. He compulsively seeks immersion in society, but an immersion doomed to be anonymous, lacking in genuine contact or warmth. The intoxication he craves is sensory distraction from his burdened conscience, not an aesthetic appreciation of the diverse stimuli of urban life. The detachment from which he suffers is not a self-conscious objectivity, but an internally-imposed expatriation from the social compact.

The narrator of the tale is more clearly a flaneur figure than the wanderer, despite his ultimate inability read the wanderer's secret history. In fact, that failure represents a key aspect of Poe's delineation of the flaneur. The eerie quality of the story derives largely from the refusal of *material reality* to disclose its *own* secrets; the fault (if it is a fault) lies not in our narrator, but in the opaque materiality of urban people and places. Poe announces as much at the opening of the tale:

It was well said of a certain German book that "*er lasst sich nicht lesen*"-- it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes-- die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed.... And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged. (388)

The secret writing *itself* refuses to be read; its recalcitrance is not an indictment of the

flaneur's methodology, but a testament to the city's (and humanity's) tendency to retain mystery. The narrator's final assessment of the wanderer illustrates that the analytic flaneur's limitations are in fact his salvation: "This old man... is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the 'Hortulus Animae,' and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that 'er lasst sich nicht lesen.'"(396). At a pivotal moment in his analysis, the narrator articulates a truth (that the old man is "the type and the genius of deep crime") without having achieved an intimate experiential knowledge of that truth (as "the essence of all crime is undivulged"). The illegibility of the "strangely shadowed or absent" face, as Rachman and Rosenheim phrase it, is a boon from God, not a critique of the flaneur's circumscribed abilities. It allows the narrator finally to detach from his fascinating subject without suffering the psychic damage of complete identification with the sociopath. The detached analyst's insight is less metaphysically satisfying than the intoxicated "ego athirst for the non-ego," but it is also less threatening, less horrifying.

This dialectic between the human yearning for legibility and the refusal of the universe to divulge its secrets is at the heart of flanerie, and central to Poe's fictional concerns. Poe insistently places us precisely at the juncture between what we know and what we cannot know. This forces the reader to negotiate the flaneur's critical detachment from his environment, which yields analytic insight, and an intoxicating and disorienting immersion that leads toward metaphysical insight, though probably of a horrendous and/or sublime nature. Initially, as Baudelaire suggests, the narrator "hurls

himself headlong into the midst of the throng, in pursuit of an unknown, half-glimpsed countenance that has, on an instant, bewitched him. Curiosity [flanterie] has become a fatal, irresistible passion!"(7). But the dangers involved in maintaining Baudelaire's empathic state of genius, the childlike openness to the "newness" of things, prove to be too much; the flaneur recoils and detaches, settling instead for analytical truth at the expense of larger metaphysical insight. As Byer states,

The narrator in "Usher" is, like the narrator in "The Man of the Crowd," simultaneously dissociated from and drawn into the confining, haunting milieu of its obsessed "genius" or poet.... The narrator of "Usher" observes Usher throughout the story at a diminishing distance from the latter's increasing animation and disorder. In "The Man of the Crowd" the narrator's mystery is not only his need for proximity to the old man, but in his obsessive, seemingly endless pursuit. Both stories end with their narrators preserving their individual identities by narrowly escaping from the influence of these mysterious environments. (233-4)⁵⁴

The narrator in "Man of the Crowd" disengages from the wanderer without unraveling his secret, just as Dupin's solution of specific criminal incidents can never wholly account for the brutality and illegibility of urban and human nature.

Thus, Dupin and the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" ultimately purchase a comforting analytical control and certainty by detaching themselves from the complexity of the city, though they are powerfully attracted to it. Their caution in engaging urban intricacy suggests that Poe recognized disturbing implications in that disorder, though he

also perceived the transparent fantasy in the flaneur's complete dominance. As Catherine Quoyeser has suggested, "Poe's own literary or aesthetic responses to the characteristic sights and sounds of city life can be summed up in a contradiction: he embraced and reviled them"(147). In several of his earlier, less well-known grotesque tales, he offers a depiction of cities as confusing, disorienting and even nightmarish, even when presented within a comic framework. For instance, in "Four Beasts in One: the Homo-Cameleopard," the narrator announces his role as flaneur when he says to the reader, "I perceive we have arrived at the city itself. Let us ascend this battlement, and throw our eyes upon the town and neighboring country"(182). Through this narrator's vision, we are able to see the "extraordinary spectacle" of Antioch in the year 3830 B.C., which he calls the "most grotesque habitation of man"(181).⁵⁵ This urban landscape (notably ancient rather than modern), is indeed "grotesque," in its extremities of wealth and poverty and its varieties of architecture (its "stately palaces" and "sumptuous and magnificent" temples alongside an "infinity of mud huts, and abominable hovels"{182}), and its bewildering sensory complexity:

we cannot help perceiving abundance of filth in every kennel, and, were it not for the overpowering fumes of idolatrous incense, I have no doubt we should find a most intolerable stench. Did you ever behold streets so insufferably narrow, or houses so miraculously tall? What a gloom their shadows cast upon the ground! It is well the swinging lamps in those endless colonnades are kept burning throughout the day; we should otherwise have the darkness of Egypt in the time of her desolation. (183)

Furthermore, an important aspect of the grotesque is the intermingling of human forms with those of animals and other living beings; as the respondent points out, “the town is swarming with wild beasts! How terrible a spectacle!— how dangerous a peculiarity”(183). The scene descends into outright chaos when the animals, incensed at the King’s mockery of their kind, mutiny and wreak havoc, leading the respondent to exclaim, “Surely this is the most populous city of the East! What a wilderness of people! what a jumble of all ranks and ages! what a multiplicity of sects and nations! what a variety of costumes! what a Babel of languages! what a screaming of beasts! what a tinkling of instruments! what a parcel of philosophers!”(188).

In “King Pest,” Poe depicts a similarly jumbled, irregular and confusing city (this time London) which has become depopulated due to the plague, looting and disrepair. Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, in taking to the streets of the city, are “soon bewildered in its noisome and intricate recesses”(243):

The paving-stones, loosened from their beds, lay in wild disorder amid the tall, rank grass, which sprang up around the feet and ankles. Fallen houses choked up the streets. The most fetid and poisonous smells everywhere prevailed;-- and by the aid of that ghastly light which, even at midnight, never fails to emanate from a vapory and pestilential atmosphere, might be discerned lying in the by-paths and alleys, or rotting in the windowless habitations, the carcass of many a nocturnal plunderer arrested by the hand of the plague in the very perpetration of his robbery. (243)

This is a version of London that corresponds perfectly to “noisome quarter” to which the

narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” follows the wanderer after the crowd has dispersed; here, “in those horrible regions, in the vicinity of the Thames, where amid the dark, narrow, and filthy lanes and alleys, the Demon of Disease was supposed to have had his nativity, Awe, Terror, and Superstition were alone to be found stalking abroad”(242). And it is upon “losing themselves” in this bizarre landscape that Legs and Hugh encounter the grotesquely distorted party described in Chapter 2.

This emphasis on losing oneself within the labyrinth of the city is crucial in understanding Poe’s relation to flanerie. Though such disorientation is frightening and intimidating, Benjamin suggests in “A Berlin Chronicle” that it is a central element in playing the flaneur, with important connections between “wilderness” and “bewilderment”:

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance— nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city— as one loses oneself in a forest— that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, sign-boards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center. Paris taught me this art of straying.... (8-9)

While Benjamin implies a good degree of control in the flaneur’s mastery of this “art,” in Poe’s tales disorienting cityscapes subvert the narrator’s proclaimed spectatorial management of the metropolis. For instance, in “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” (one of Poe’s more “arabesque” tales), a character named Bedloe relates a “waking dream”

that he experiences while on a “long ramble” through the hills under the influence of morphine:

I found myself at the foot of a high mountain, and looking down into a vast plain, through which wound a majestic river. On the margin of this river stood an Eastern-looking city, such as we read of in the Arabian Tales, but of a character even more singular than any there described. From my position, which was far above the level of the town, I could perceive its every nook and corner, as if delineated on a map. The streets seemed innumerable, and crossed each other irregularly in all directions, but were rather long winding alleys than streets, and absolutely swarmed with inhabitants. The houses were wildly picturesque. On every hand was a wilderness of balconies, of verandahs, of minarets, of shrines, and fantastically carved oriels. Bazaars abounded; and in these were displayed rich wares in infinite variety and profusion.... Besides these things, were seen, on all sides, banners and palanquins, litters with stately dames close veiled, elephants gorgeously caparisoned, idols grotesquely hewn, drums, banners and gongs, spears, silver and gilded maces. And amid the crowd, and the clamor, and the general intricacy and confusion— amid the million of black and yellow men, turbaned and robed, and of flowing beard, there roamed a countless multitude of holy filleted bulls, while vast legions of the filthy but sacred ape clambered, chattering and shrieking, about the cornices of the mosques, or clung to the minarets and oriels. (659-60)

The narrator’s ability to view the city as a whole, to “perceive its every nook and corner,

as if delineated on a map,” suggests a flaneuristic fantasy of dominance and mastery. But his gaze is in fact overwhelmed by the “innumerable” streets and their “irregularity,” the “infinite variety and profusion” of merchandise, the “swarm” of inhabitants blended with the “countless multitude” and “vast legions” of animals— “the general intricacy and confusion” of the metropolitan topography. The complexity of urban landscapes in these tales problematizes the more reassuring “analytical” treatment of the metropolis in tales like “The Man of the Crowd” and the Dupin stories.

“A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” is also an important story because it links urban spectatorship with a non-urban form of flanerie, also characterized by both the discoveries and the dangers involved in abandoning detachment. Immersed in a labyrinthine natural setting, Bedloe has access to insights profoundly metaphysical and intuitively analytical. His “singularly vigorous and creative” imagination “derived addition force from the habitual use of morphine.... It was his practice to take a very large dose of it immediately after breakfast... and then set forth alone, or attended only by a dog, upon a long ramble among the chain of wild and dreary hills that lie westward and southward of Charlottesville”(657). One morning he sets off in this manner, and after a while comes to a “gorge,” following “the windings of this pass with much interest,” due to its “delicious aspect of dreary desolation.... So entirely secluded, and in fact inaccessible, except through a series of accidents, is the entrance of the ravine, that it is by no means impossible that I was indeed the first adventurer— the very first and sole adventurer who had ever penetrated its recesses”(657-8). He says, “The path was excessively sinuous, and as the sun could not be seen, I soon lost all idea of the direction

in which I journeyed. In the meantime the morphine had its customary effect— that of enduing all the external world with an intensity of interest. In the quivering of a leaf... there came a whole universe of suggestion— a gay and motly train of rhapsodical and immethodical thought”(658). Bedloe’s “rambling,” non-linear progression through the ravine (“through a series of accidents”), his equally “rambling” mental journey (“a gay and motly train of rhapsodical and immethodical thought”), and his utter isolation point to the methodology of the flaneur, even though this is a natural landscape. In fact, his drug-enhanced mental excitement, his wandering, and the contorted topography of the hills seem to function as required preconditions for the urban spectatorship he later performs in his “dream.” The “wilderness” of the path and its visual stimuli seem to overwhelm Bedloe’s vision and thought with chaotic claims on his observational powers, even as he exhibits a keen interest in the minute details that envelop him.

This complex dialectic of immersion in and control over confounding natural environments may be seen in Poe’s sensational “exploration” tales, in which Poe and his narrators attempt to plot and read the physiognomy of the earth itself. John Irwin notes in *Mystery to a Solution* that “this progression of the labyrinth image from house to city to world is significant for our purposes because it arrays, in narrative terms, the analytic detective story’s project of differentiating the human through the analysis of self-consciousness as the specific project of *physically locating the human*”(160). But the same image, and the same project of “locating the human” extends throughout Poe’s sensational travelogues as well.⁵⁶ Poe was by no means idiosyncratic in his use of this genre; exploration narratives and tales of geographic discovery figured prominently in the

cultural consciousness and literary landscape of the early nineteenth century. Frank Luther Mott quotes an 1829 article from the *American Quarterly* as proclaiming, "Authorship and travelling are all the fashion... Sailors wash the tar from their hands and write verses in their log books; midshipmen indite their own adventures, and naval commanders, not content with discovering countries and winning battles, steer boldly into the ocean of literature" (422). And as Bruce Greenfield points out in his book *Narrating Discovery*, the subject had so much "popular appeal" and spawned so many narratives that by the 1830's it had developed into a popular genre with "standard tropes if not outright clichés"(173-4): the traveler usually provided a first-person account of a journey where no "white man" had ever gone before, written chronologically, as if based on a journal; it supplied empirical details such as longitude and latitude, unusual plant and animal life encountered, climatic phenomena, and anecdotes about the suffering and extreme sensations experienced in the voyage (167-72).

Poe was certainly alert to the popularity of such narratives and their familiar rhetorical devices. However, Poe's imaginary expeditions bear less resemblance to the exploration narratives of his time than to an earlier seventeenth-century mode that Wayne Franklin calls the "discovery narrative," in which "adventure is a matter of seeing and hearing and tasting; the adventurer is less an actor than a passive receptor, a traveller poised in wonder... At the heart of the discovery narrative stands the ravished observer, fixed in awe... The keynote is wonder, rapture, and a language which comports with such emotions by its own superlative uplift" (22-3). There is evidence that Poe may have been exposed to these earlier "discovery" narratives, as they were collected and published in

important nineteenth century magazines like the *North American Review* and the *Knickerbocker* (Franklin 206). Franklin contrasts these tales with the "exploratory narrative," a form which seems much closer in rhetorical tone to the other narratives written in Poe's time. This mode is much more explicitly concerned with mercantile, colonial, and imperialist agendas: "the discoverer... aims at a goal less clearly defined than the explorer's. Whereas the former rests with a sense of generalized-- perhaps only anticipated-- revelation, the latter seeks to attach his uplifted feelings to some actual and tangible objective... the large profit which may be realized... Exploration is the hunter's act, the locating of a desired commodity, the catch of a usable quarry" (71). Such exploration was facilitated by scientific and technological advances of the time, and its narratives often used language that reflected a "scientific" objectivity and emphasis on control.

In contrast, Poe's sensational tales of discovery offer a narrative dramatization of a more experiential logic, one that demands the observer's near-complete engagement in an environment that threatens to engulf and destroy him, and his (at least temporary) abandonment of control. These stories initially articulate a pragmatic rationale for the exploration and traditionally scientific methods, but quickly take on outré and life-threatening dimensions in which self-preservation becomes the only practical goal. Furthermore, the narrator becomes increasingly aware of limitations in that "detached" discourse, dwarfed by a transcendent experience promising to reveal the "inner" workings of the world. If, as Shawn James Rosenheim argues in *The Cryptographic Imagination*, "Poe used his cryptographic writing to conduct a systematic investigation into the nature

of language,” he also performed the flaneur’s oblique interpretation of the *language of nature* by reading what Rosenheim calls the “opaque materiality of the world”(3). Though he strives to master the situation analytically, the narrator ultimately discovers the need for a flaneur’s intuitive and “oblique thinking” discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, in the course of the narrative, this revelation transforms the narrator spiritually, mentally and physically. Poe thereby demonstrates the fitness of an approach to scientific and geographical discovery that embraces (as Alexander von Humboldt’s did) aesthetic as well as analytic dimensions, immersion as well as detachment, instinct as well as logic, imagination along with reason.

For instance, "MS Found in a Bottle" (one of Poe’s earliest tales) dramatizes precisely the kind of scientific conversion Poe would later preach in *Eureka* (his last major work).⁵⁷ It is the story of a scientific skeptic, haunted by nervous restlessness, who takes a voyage as a passenger on a merchant ship traveling from Batavia to the Sunda Islands. Soon bizarre meteorological phenomena foretell the impending assault of a violent simoon. These signs are ignored by the captain and crew, and when the storm hits, all are killed except the narrator and an old Swedish sailor. The ship, though irreparably damaged and gradually sinking, is born aloft as the storm pushes them southward, in fear of imminent destruction. Another vessel appears, immeasurably huge, which smashes into the sinking wreck and propels the narrator through the air onto the mysterious ship. Its inhabitants are all incredibly aged, speak in an unintelligible tongue, and apparently cannot see the narrator, who begins to write journal entries that comprise the present "manuscript." All this time, the ship is being pushed furiously south, past the

limits of known geography, into darkness, chaotic seas and walls of ice. Suddenly the ice clears; the ship falls into the grasp of a huge whirlpool, spins round its tightening concentric circles, and finally disappears into the center of the vortex.

In this tale, Poe clearly adopts some rhetorical devices familiar to the "exploratory narrative." His narrator speaks in the voice of an experienced seaman, displaying knowledge of ships and seafaring matters, providing details about the tonnage of the ship, its materials, its freight, its stowage, its course, as well as using maritime terms like "taffrail" and "beam-ends," and phrases such as "stood along the coast" and "got under way" (189-91). Narratively, this attention to "verisimilitude" makes Poe's narrator and his story more convincingly real; thematically, the rhetorical stance also prompts the reader to infer the narrator's pragmatic rather than creative values, his love for skeptical science and his admitted "deficiency of imagination" (189). This is the stereotypical voice of the scientific explorer-- observant, analytic, descriptive, and attentive to details of meteorology and geography. It is significant, though, that his is not an esoteric or specialized knowledge of science, but a practical and generally accessible one. For example, when a preternatural stillness paralyzes the ship, the narrator describes the strange physical phenomena closely but understandably in terms of visual observation, from the red color of the moon to the transparent quality of the water. He even measures the stillness and lack of wind with rather "homespun" indices: "the flame of a candle burned on the poop without the least perceptible motion, and a long hair, held between the finger and thumb, hung without the possibility of detecting a vibration" (190).

However, when the storm hits, the narrator experiences (literally) a bewildering

submersion into the situation. Quickly, his scientific stance becomes insufficient, as do his descriptive language, his reference to past experiences as analogues, and his own ability even to conceive of these events. The simoon is "terrific, beyond the wildest imagination"; the ship "flew at a rate defying computation"; the wind is "more terrific than any tempest I had before encountered"; "the swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible"(191-3). The narrator's rhetoric reflects his attempt to maintain rational, scientific observation: he discusses the ship's apparent course, noting that the wind " had hauled round a point more to the northward," and even guesses at an approximate position "farther to the southward than any previous navigators"(192-3). But he is soon forced to abandon scientific or nautical instruments; he states that he and the Swede "neglected all care of the ship, as worse than useless... We had no means of calculating time, nor could we form any guess of our situation"(192). Instead, the narrator once again notes striking visible phenomena, such as the sinking of the sun at high noon "by some unaccountable power," and the absence of the "phosphoric sea-brilliance to which we had been accustomed in the tropics"(192).

To admit that scientific or navigational instruments are useless is to acknowledge a fundamental loss of control, and this contrasts starkly to the dominant tone of mastery found in most exploration narratives in the 1830's. Bewildered and embittered by his impotence, the narrator reluctantly accepts it, and thereby experiences the value of intuitive rather than consciously logical thought. In a moment of "sudden self-possession," the narrator embraces his fate and moves instinctively to the part of the wreck furthest from the oncoming giant ship, there to "[await] fearlessly the ruin that was

to overwhelm"(194). But in so doing, the narrator saves his life, for when the larger ship crushes the smaller, he is catapulted into safety. Only by giving up his own aspirations to agency and abandoning hope for despair, analysis for instinct, is he literally propelled toward temporary safety, and further discovery. Later, the narrator relates another incident that further emphasizes the mysterious access that instinct provides to external forces beyond human analysis: "While musing upon the singularity of my fate, I unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly-folded studding-sail which lay near me on a barrel. The studding-sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word DISCOVERY"(195).

In trying to read and interpret the mysterious ship and its inhabitants, the narrator finds the epistemological tools of logic and prior experience to be manifestly inadequate. He calls them "incomprehensible men! Wrapped up in meditations of a kind which I cannot divine," who mutter "in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, who "*will not* see' him and "pass [him] by unnoticed"(194-5). A wholly "invisible" spectator, his eldritch flanerie fills him with "an indefinite sense of awe," and "vague novelty, doubt and apprehension"(194). This indefiniteness and vagueness further indicate how he has abandoned the scientific rhetoric of precision and adopted one of subjective impression, sensation and wonder. He joins the ship's inhabitants in casting aside the "decayed charts of navigation," the "strange, iron-clasped folios, and mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete, long-forgotten charts," the "mathematical instruments of the most quaint and obsolete construction" that lie "scattered" all around the deck (194, 197).

Even the narrator's sensations confound his past experience, scientific background, and his very ability to articulate his perceptions. He experiences a feeling "for which [he has] no name" and that will "admit of no analysis"; he knows that "the lessons of by-gone time" do not apply here, and that "futuraity itself will offer [him] no key," an "evil" which particularly galls a man of his scientific orientation (195). However, that orientation itself, his very identity and soul, is being transformed by these experiences, being conditioned to perceive forces that transcend the scope and method of science, forces to which he can only respond with wonder. Even his description of this transformation casts his soul grammatically in a passive role: "A feeling, for which I have no name, has *taken possession of* my soul... A new sense-- a new entity is *added to* my soul"(195; emphasis added).

Yet the narrator's language reveals his reluctance to transform his scientific viewpoint and values. He still seeks a natural (rather than supernatural) explanation for the ship's survival: "I am led to attribute these frequent escapes to the only natural cause which can account for such effect. I must suppose the ship to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous undertow"(197). The rhetoric reflects rationality and intellectual control; however, the statement points substantively to the narrator's absolute lack of control, just as it finds a spurious comfort in identifying a "natural" cause while ignoring the larger, supernatural cause behind it. Later, even as the narrator verifies this hypothesis, he admits the lack of appropriate language or precedent for this phenomenon: "As I imagined, the ship proves to be in a current-- if that appellation can properly be given to a tide which, howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the

southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract"(198). He realizes the impossibility of depicting such a "warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which, the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective"(198). Eventually, he gives up hope of conveying his experience accurately to the reader, because "to conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible"(198).

In the face of events and sensations that outpace his ability to describe, understand or evaluate them, the narrator perceives the true intrinsic value and terror of discovery. As he does so, he finds himself so fully engaged in this metaphysical reading of the earth's physiognomy that he abandons the detachment necessary for him to even think about self-preservation: "A curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge-- some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction"(198). The narrator briefly reverts back to what the reader must construe as the lesser, limited voice of the pragmatic explorer: "Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself. It must be confessed that a supposition apparently so wild has every probability in its favor"(198). But this "relapse" is quickly overshadowed by the profound mystery of the moment; as the sailors "pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step... there is upon their countenances an expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair"(199). Yet the final note of the story, as he and his fellow travelers submerge into the whirlpool, is one of fear, madness and chaos:

Oh, horror upon horror!-- the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and

we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny! The circles rapidly grow small-- we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool-- and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering-- oh God! and-- going down! (199)

The figure of the vortex is a central one in Poe's imagery for a number of reasons. First, it demonstrates Poe's familiarity with popular scientific and exploratory speculation of his day: Poe was capitalizing on the notoriety of the theories propounded by Dr. John Cleves Symmes between 1818 and the late 1820's (Goetzmann 258). Symmes "believed that the earth was hollow, and that at the poles, once one passed beyond the ice barrier, there existed a warmer climate and an entrance into the center of the earth"(258), a theory Poe is clearly working with in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.⁵⁸ Poe's tales incorporating this theory are not merely playful *jeu d'esprits*, but efforts of well-considered speculation, an attempt to point towards physical and metaphysical truth, the same way that Johannes Kepler as a "theorist" "guessed" at the laws of gravity (1270).⁵⁹ The vortex is also important metaphorically and conceptually: it is the physical embodiment of immersion or "getting into" an environment while still remaining on its surface, and the specific site at which the earth's physiognomy or "outside" transmutes into its "inside," making it the crucial location to perform Poe's metaphysical flanerier. It also tangibly represents the mental *bouleversement* or disorientation that Poe felt was

required in order to experience metaphysical rather than analytic truth. Finally, it can be seen as a metaphor for the universal dynamic that Poe points to in *Eureka* between gravitation and repulsion, as becomes evident in another story, “A Descent into the Maelstrom.”

This story begins on a high peak in Norway, which the narrator describes as a “sheer unobstructed precipice of black shining rock, some fifteen or sixteen hundred feet from the world of crags beneath us”(432). The setting is so sublime and imposing that the narrator suffers an extraordinary reaction on first arriving, establishing a keynote of both wonder and terror: “I fell at full length upon the ground, clung to the shrubs around me, and dared not even glance upward at the sky— while I struggled in vain to divest myself of the idea that the very foundations of the mountain were in danger from the fury of the winds. It was long before I could reason myself into sufficient courage to sit up and look out into the distance”(432). When he does, he perceives that the crag looks out over an expanse of sea between the cliff and two islands; as he watches, this sea is transformed into a raging whirlpool that shakes the very earth under their feet. The narrator responds as he did before: “The mountain trembled to its very base, and the rock rocked. I threw myself upon my face, and clung to the scant herbage in an excess of nervous agitation”(435).

Like the narrator in “MS Found in a Bottle,” the narrator makes a fleeting attempt to read this phenomenon within a context of previous knowledge and experience. He provides an “excerpt” from an account of the Maelstrom by one Jonas Ramus, by way of comparison. Poe’s strategy here also is to make the events of the tale more plausible by

comparing them to a detailed, *faux*-historical and scientific-naturalist account of similar experiences. But while this “reasoned” and “observational” narrative lends additional veracity to the Maelstrom, it also contains explanations for the phenomenon, which had at first, the narrator says, “seemed to me sufficiently plausible in perusal” but “now wore a very different and unsatisfactory aspect”; “however conclusive on paper,” they become “altogether unintelligible, and even absurd, amid the thunder of the abyss”(437). From the outset, the narrator points out the account’s failure to “impart the faintest conception either of the magnificence, or of the horror of the scene– or of the bewildering sense of the novel which confounds the beholder”; it is “exceedingly feeble in conveying an impression of the spectacle”(435). At this point, the “old man” who accompanies the narrator assumes the role of storyteller, relating an experience he had with his brothers, who were fishermen in the province. The three had fished the fertile areas by these islands, calculating the swells and ebbs of the Maelstrom so as to avoid encountering it at its peak. However, one day they are caught by a vicious hurricane, which propels them into the vortex.

In the old man’s tale of his experiences and sensations, first in the storm and then in the whirlpool, Poe stages the same dialectic between sensory confusion, logic and instinct as he does in many of his “sensational” episodes. At first, the narrator is overcome by a confusion of senses brought on by the storm: he writes, “If you have never been at sea in a heavy gale, you can form no idea of the confusion of mind occasioned by the wind and spray together. They blind, deafen, and strangle you, and take away all power of action or reflection”(443). Significantly, it is not through logic, but intuition

that he preserves his life in this first encounter: for, he says, it was “mere instinct” that prompted him to do “the very best thing I could have done,” which is to grasp a ring-bolt on the foremast before the blast of the storm (440). This initial bewilderment having passed, the old man says, “I was now trying to get the better of the stupor that had come over me, and to collect my senses so as to see what was to be done...”(440). He reassures himself that though they are being blown into the Maelstrom, they have timed it so as to arrive at the slack. But his reliance on human ability to “manage” the situation is misguided: he soon realizes that his watch has run down, and that they are about to plunge into the vortex at its greatest fury.

Soon they are caught in the belt of water created by the suction of the great pool, and face complete immersion, disorientation and immolation: “down we came with a sweep, a slide, and a plunge, that made me feel sick and dizzy, as if I was falling from some lofty mountain-top in a dream”(442). But as they enter the vortex, the narrator relates a curious change in his sensations:

It may appear strange, but now, when we were in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than when we were only approaching it. Having made up my mind to hope no more, I got rid of a great deal of that terror which had unmanned me at first. I suppose it was despair that strung my nerves.

It may look like boasting– but what I tell you is truth– I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God’s power. I do believe that I blushed with shame

when this idea crossed my mind. After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see. These, no doubt, were singular fancies to occupy a man's mind in such extremity— and I have often thought since, that the revolutions of the boat around the pool might have rendered me a little light-headed. (442-3)

The sensory overload makes this narrator, like so many others Poe creates, “too much confused to observe anything accurately.” Like the narrator in “The Pit and the Pendulum,” he regains mental self-possession by abandoning hope; here the process is augmented by his fervent desire to observe the secrets revealed in the whirlpool, even at the expense of his life.

The connection between this yearning to see the hidden wonders at the center of the whirl, and the cosmic intoxication of the narrator in “MS Found in a Bottle,” seeking the “never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction,” is as important as it is obvious. The old man in this tale, after escaping the vortex and returning to his quotidian existence, minimizes his instinctual impulse to read (and write) the earth's physiognomy, attributing it to a limited physical version of the larger perceptual confusion involved (“a little light-headed[ness]”). The reader easily sees this perfunctory dismissal as transparent, however, because of the emphasis on the supernatural terror and wonder of the scene within the vortex. His sensations are of “awe, horror, and admiration”(444). The “rays of the full moon... streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls”;

he is dazzled by “the general burst of terrific grandeur,” but soon he is able to perceive toward the bottom of the abyss “a thick mist in which everything there was enveloped, and over which there hung a magnificent rainbow, like that narrow and tottering bridge which Mussulmen say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity”(444-5). This last detail in particular suggests that this Maelstrom has a greater spiritual significance, that it is not merely a localized or purely physical phenomenon; it is an opening of the earth’s text, the reading of which promises both ultimate wisdom and immediate annihilation. As Richard D. Finholt suggests in “The Vision at the Brink of the Abyss: ‘A Descent into the Maelstrom’ in the Light of Poe’s Cosmology,” these characters are suspended between an attraction towards the center of the whirl, which represents a “returning to original unity” with God, and an instinctive repulsion from that return prompted by the desire for self-preservation (356-66).

Unlike the narrator in “MS Found in a Bottle,” the old man does not achieve this reading in its fullness. Instead, having arrived at clarity of thought through sensory confusion and abandonment of pragmatic escape attempts, he experiences an episode of “oblique thinking,” similar to those in *Pym* and “The Pit and the Pendulum.” He relates that “the unnatural curiosity which had taken the place of my original terrors... appeared to grow on me as I drew nearer and nearer to my dreadful doom. I now began to watch, with a strange interest, the numerous things that floated in our company. I must have been delirious— for I even sought amusement in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below”(445). And yet it is precisely this “delirium” which leads to his rational observation that smaller cylindrical objects descend

more slowly than larger spherical ones, which proves to be his salvation. He lashes himself to an empty cask (which his brother, overcome by terror, had abandoned), and propels himself into the water. His descent is slow enough to outlast the Maelstrom, and he survives.

Nevertheless, the narrator has been transfigured by his experience: “My hair which had been raven-black the day before, was as white as you see it now. They say too that the whole expression of my countenance had changed”(448). In his brief reading of the earthly “pathway between Time and Eternity,” this character has enacted Dupin’s technique of “throwing himself into the spirit,” not of an opponent, but of God, and “identifying” with the divine Creator. This act is not completed, though the narrator had obviously reconciled himself to it. It is important to note that this is not a willed or self-conscious act, as Dupin’s is, but one wholly uncontrolled by the narrator. Accordingly, the old man does not deliberately “fashion the expression of [his] face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his [opponent’s],” as Dupin’s young friend does. Instead, the old man finds his face, the record of his experience and marker of his identity, radically *transformed by* that experience: like the narrator in “MS Found in a Bottle, a “new sense-- a new entity” has been added to his soul, and his own facial physiognomy must perforce reflect such a “vision.”

Once again, Poe depicts this willingness to embrace fully both physical dissolution and metaphysical discovery, and to abandon analytical detachment, as a necessary precursor to true insight. This mental and perceptual state, which may be termed an oblique “circum-cerebration,” represents an experiential form of logic. It calls

for the observing subject to first become wholly “present” in the surrounding circumstances before glimpsing their apocalyptic vision, and before critically disengaging from it. The observer alternates between surrender to sensation and return to reason, between fervid activity and torpid passivity, between conflicting human desires for self-preservation and for transcendent revelation. His is a fluid and flexible observational stance, not a static one. It is a viewpoint that allows (indeed, compels) him *almost completely* to “read” his environment, *nearly* to transcend the boundary between interpretation and experience, but at the last moment offers an instinctive detachment.

This mental dialectic is paralleled by-- indeed, activated by-- the narrator’s experience of the physical dialectic Poe points to in *Eureka*: between gravitation and repulsion. With its violence of movement and sensory confusion, the vortex creates a period of near-stasis through two contradictory forces: centripetal gravitation towards the center, and centrifugal repulsion towards the edges. The narrator is caught on the plane of surface tension created by these warring impulses. In the moment of stillness between detachment and immersion, he can see both the physical revelation of God’s handiwork, promising to solve the riddle of eternity, and the potential analytical solution to the time-bound problem of survival. E. Miller Budick formulates the tension here nicely: “As an Idealist, man yearns for the experience of reunion; he craves the dissolution of self into ‘general consciousness’ and ‘identity with God.’ But as a frail mortal and as one of the many fragments of the universe whose duty it is to resist the in-drawing of the atoms, man recoils from the horror of what he knows is his own extinction in death” (76).⁶⁰ This is the moment of flanerier, when a liminal observer is “neither in nor out” of the world,

and experiences the flux of analytic and aesthetic thought even as he negotiates the physical tension between attraction and repulsion. *Thus the elemental dialectical process Poe designates as the mechanism of the universe is both figurative analogue and direct activator to the mental process by which that universe may be understood.* The supernatural vortex, a “deviation from the plane of the ordinary,” as Dupin puts it, where the world’s “outside” mutates to “inside,” may be read as a feature of the world’s physiognomy that allows the cosmic flaneur to experience this dialectic on physical, mental, perceptual, and even literal planes.

The vortex at the conclusion of Poe’s novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* offers a similarly cosmic (and cryptic) insight. It is described in terms most closely approximating those propounded by Dr. Symmes in his “holes at the poles” theory, and contains important similarities to the other two “exploration” tales discussed above. In the final chapter, Pym relates that he and his traveling companions in sailing south “had been leaving behind us the severest regions of ice— this, however little it may be in accordance with the generally-received notions respecting the Antarctic, was a fact experience would not permit us to deny”(1175). Indeed, “the temperature of the water was here far too warm for its existence in any quantity”(1176), a heat increasing to the point of being “truly remarkable”(1177). The travelers also find that “the wind blew constantly with us, and a very strong current set continually in the direction we were pursuing”(1176); even after “the wind had entirely ceased,” though, “it was evident that we were still hurrying on to the southward, under the influence of a powerful current”(1178). At the novel’s conclusion, it becomes apparent that they are drawn by

a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense, and far-distant rampart in the heaven. The gigantic curtain ranged along the whole extent of the southern horizon. It emitted no sound.... The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and the distance. Yet we were evidently approaching it with a hideous velocity. At intervals there were visible in it wide, yawning, but momentary rents, and from out these rents, within which was a chaos of flitting and indistinct images, there came rushing and mighty, but soundless winds, tearing up the enkindled ocean in their course.... And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of snow. (1179)

This enigmatic ending can be read (appropriately enough, incompletely) in light of the flaneuristic readings Pym attempts en route to this cataract and chasm, and the perceptual transformations he undergoes in the process.⁶¹

Pym, like Poe's other "sensational" narrators, must negotiate a perceptual stance that incorporates both immersion and detachment. Early in the novel, he demonstrates his affinity for reckless discovery, even at the cost of his life, when he and his friend Augustus take out his sail-boat in a violent gale, one of "the maddest freaks in the world"(1009). This "mad" idea strikes him as "one of the most delightful and reasonable things in the world"(1010). Thus Pym needs no conversion from the attitude of "pragmatic explorer" to that of "discoverer": he is already predisposed in this direction.

But in order to accomplish his “freak,” he must stow away in the hold of the *Grampus*, a whaling vessel engaged in an emphatically mercantile expedition. Later, when he is rescued from the wreck of the *Grampus*, he boards the *Jane Guy*, “bound on a sealing and trading voyage to the South Seas and Pacific”(1112). Pym attempts to subvert the detached and businesslike nature of both expeditions (though it must be noted that his narrative voice is often that of the objective chronicler rather than the “ravished observer, fixed in awe”). The opposition between Pym’s desire for discovery and the captain’s commercial inclinations is evident later when the crew encounter the natives of Tsalal and the unique commodities particular to their environment:

These anomalies, for they were such when considered in regard to the latitude, induced Captain Guy to wish for a thorough investigation of the country, in the hope of making a profitable speculation in his discovery. For my own part, anxious as I was to know something more of these islands, I was still more earnestly bent on prosecuting the voyage to the southward without delay (1139).

Captain Guy’s emphasis on exploration for the purposes of exploitation emerges again later, in a passage replete with reference to business, markets, and commodities:

Finding the ease with which the vessel might be loaded with *biche de mer*, owing to the friendly disposition of the islanders, and the readiness with which they would render us assistance in collecting it, Captain Guy resolved to enter into negotiation with Too-wit for the erection of suitable houses in which to cure the article, and for the services of himself and tribe in gathering as much as possible.... Upon mentioning this project to the chief he seemed very willing to

enter into an agreement. A bargain was accordingly struck, perfectly satisfactory to both parties.... (1147)

Poe clearly suggests the inappropriateness of this mercantile exploratory perspective: by agreeing to do business with Too-wit, Captain Guy effectively signs his own and his crew's death warrant, as they are later massacred by these natives. A more fit viewpoint is articulated later by Pym who, having escaped the slaughter, continues to sail further south: "Many unusual phenomena now indicated that we were entering upon a region of *novelty and wonder*"(1176; emphasis added).

However, Pym also has abundant opportunity to experience the deprivations and dangers involved in too close an immersion in "sensational" episodes, including the disorientation and claustrophobia of the hold (discussed in the previous chapter), a murderous mutiny, a violent storm, and starvation and thirst leading to cannibalism. In each situation, he attempts to employ observation and analysis to read his circumstances and thereby survive them, only to discover the insufficiency of these tools. He also experiences the undependability of merely "ocular evidence" Poe discusses in *Eureka* and dramatizes in his "sensational" tales. Deceptive visual stimuli, coupled with a lack of analytic detachment, problematize his understanding or resolution of the situation. Perhaps the most memorable instance of this is when Pym and his fellow survivors on the wreck of the *Grampus*, suffering from delirium, finally see a ship and believe their salvation is imminent:

No person was seen upon her decks until she arrived within about a quarter of a mile of us. We then saw three seamen, whom by their dress we took to be

Hollanders. Two of these were lying on some old sails near the forecastle, and the third, who appeared to be looking at us with great curiosity, was leaning over the starboard bow near the bowsprit.... He seemed by his manner to be encouraging us to have patience, nodding to us in a cheerful although rather odd way, and smiling constantly so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth. As his vessel drew nearer, we saw a red flannel cap which he had on fall from his head into the water; but of this he took little or no notice, continuing his odd smiles and gesticulations. I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they *appeared* to us. (1085)

Actually, the figures on board the mysterious ship are all corpses, victims of disease, and the “odd smiles and gesticulations” of the sailor are caused by a seagull pecking at the back of his skull. Pym’s problem is one of distance, physical and emotional: ironically, here he is *too* distant physically, and not *sufficiently* distanced emotionally, to perceive accurately the ship’s nature.

Pym also finds himself too emotionally engaged when he and shipmate Dirk Peters attempt to descend a cliff to escape the treacherous Tsalalians. His account of the mental *bouleversement* that accompanies vertigo and the fear of falling recalls the similar scene at the beginning of “A Descent into the Maelstrom,” as well as the kind of self-destructive thought processes Poe cites in “The Imp of the Perverse.” Here they are directly linked to Pym’s failure to abstract himself from his immediate position on the cliff, and the sensations involved; the more he tries not to think these thoughts, the more insistently they present themselves to his mind:

[P]resently I found my imagination growing terribly excited by thoughts of the vast depth yet to be descended, and the precarious nature of the pegs and soapstone holes which were my only support. It was in vain I endeavoured to banish these reflections, and to keep my eyes steadily bent upon the flat surface of the cliff before me. The more earnestly I struggled *not to think*, the more intensely vivid became my conceptions, and the more horribly distinct. At length arrived that crisis of fancy, so fearful in all similar cases, the crisis in which we begin to anticipate the feelings with which we *shall fall*— to picture to ourselves the sickness, and dizziness, and the last struggle, and the half swoon, and the final bitterness of the rushing and headlong descent. And now I found these fancies creating their own realities, and all imagined horrors crowding upon me in fact. I felt my knees strike violently together, while my fingers were gradually yet certainly relaxing their grasp. There was a ringing in my ears, and I said, “This is my knell of death!” And now I was consumed with the irrepressible desire of looking below. I could not, I would not, confine my glances to the cliff; and with a wild, indefinable emotion, half of horror, half of a relieved oppression, I threw my vision far down into the abyss. For one moment my fingers clutched convulsively upon their hold, while, with the movement, the faintest possible idea of ultimate escape wandered, like a shadow, through my mind— in the next my whole soul was pervaded with *a longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable. I let go at once my grasp upon the peg, and, turning half round from the precipice, remained tottering for an instant against its naked face.

But now there came a spinning of the brain; a shrill-sounding and phantom voice screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me; and, sighing, I sunk down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms.

I had swooned, and Peters had caught me as I fell. (1170-1)

Confronted by the “naked face” of the physical terrain, the “surface” of the sheer cliff which can only be read pragmatically (to locate and utilize the pegs and footholds), Pym succumbs to a “passion utterly uncontrollable,” the allure of another, more “forbidden” reading: the “never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction.” Pym’s direct gaze into the depths of the chasm, his failure to maintain the flaneur’s “view askance,” activates the hidden human desire to merge with the infinite. A psychoanalytic critic might view this as a desire to return to the primal oneness of infancy; for Poe, it represents the residue of “gravitation” in us all. This scene also prefigures the kind of *bouleversement* and cosmic flanerism that will occur in the vortex at the book’s conclusion.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, more than any other Poe text, dramatizes the difficulties in maintaining an effective observational stance vis a vis our world’s physiognomy. Poe’s tales suggest that we are too immersed in the earth’s topographic text to accurately read it, as is evident in the numerous instances of Pym’s physiognomic “groping.” In Poe’s imaginative physiognomic plotting of the Antarctic, the most commonly found spaces are “fissures” and “recesses.” The fissure and vortex are both dominant tropes in the novel and features in the earth’s physiognomic face. And in *Pym* especially, the characters actually move *within these lineaments of the earth’s*

physiognomy. For instance, having made their business agreement with the Tsalalians, the crew of the *Jane Guy* are led by the natives through a deep gorge, leading out of which are innumerable cracks or “fissures”:

Dirk Peters, a man named Wilson Allen, and myself were on the right of our companions, examining, as we went along, the singular stratification of the precipice which overhung us. A fissure in the soft rock attracted our attention. It was about wide enough for one person to enter without squeezing, and extended back into the hill some eighteen or twenty feet in a straight course, sloping afterward to the left. (1151)

In exploring this crevice, Pym and Peters save their lives, for just at this moment, the Tsalalians spring the trap they have set for the crew: by pulling on ropes attached to pegs driven into either side of the ravine’s cliffs, they cause an avalanche that buries the remainder of the explorers. After this catastrophe, Pym and Peters find themselves enclosed within the fissure, and the latter “proposed that we should endeavor to ascertain precisely the extent of our calamity, and grope about our prison; it being barely possible, he observed, that some opening might be yet left us for escape”(1153).

In groping their way along these fissures, Poe’s characters attempt to read a text in whose “letters” and “words” they are already wholly contained. If there were any doubt about the connection Poe is making between navigating these fissures in the earth’s physiognomy and reading a text, it would be removed by the following well-known passage:

We were about leaving this fissure, into which very little light was admitted, when

Peters called my attention to a range of singular-looking indentures in the surface of the marl forming the termination of the *cul-de-sac*. With a very slight exertion of the imagination, the left, or most northerly of these indentures might have been taken for the intentional, although rude, representation of a human figure standing erect, with outstretched arm. The rest of them bore also some little resemblance to alphabetical characters, and Peters was willing, at all events, to adopt the idle opinion that they were really such. I convinced him of his error, finally, by directing his attention to the floor of the fissure, where, among the powder, we picked up, piece by piece, several large flakes of the marl, which had evidently been broken off by some convulsion from the surface where the indentures were found, and which had projecting points exactly fitting the indentures; thus proving them to have been the work of nature. (1167)

Clearly, the reader is being asked to entertain (if only temporarily) the possibility that these figures on the walls of the fissure are a form of writing. Despite Pym's peremptory dismissal of their textual appearance, Poe (as "editor") provides a note at the story's conclusion that reinforces this supposition:

Mr. Pym has given the figures of the chasms without comment, and speaks decidedly of the *indentures* found... as having but a fanciful resemblance to alphabetical characters, and, in short, as being positively *not such*.... But as the facts in relation to *all* the figures are most singular (especially when taken in connexion with statements made in the body of the narrative), it may be as well to say a word or two concerning them all....

Figure 1, then, figure 2, figure 3, and figure 5, when conjoined with one another in the precise order which the chasms themselves presented... constitute an Ethiopian verbal root-- ... "To be shady"-- whence all the inflections of shadow or darkness.

In regard to the "left or most northwardly" of the indentures in figure 4, it is more than probably that the opinion of Peters was correct, and that the hieroglyphical appearance was really the work of art, and intended as the representation of a human form. The delineation is before the reader, and he may, or may not, perceive the resemblance suggested; but the rest of the indentures afford strong confirmation of Peters's idea. The upper range is evidently the Arabic verbal root... "To be white," whence all the inflections of brilliancy and whiteness. The lower range is not so immediately perspicuous. The characters are somewhat broken and disjointed; nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that, in their perfect state, they formed the full Egyptian word... "The region of the south"....

Conclusions such as these open a wide field for speculation and exciting conjecture. They should be regarded, perhaps, in connexion with some of the most faintly-detailed incidents of the narrative; although in no visible manner is this chain of connexion complete. (1181-2)

Poe even went so far as to request that his publisher insert graphic reproductions of these chasms into the text of *Pym* (at considerable expense to the publisher, as Burton Pollin has noted in a recent lecture).⁶² Poe deliberately prompts the reader to read these fissures

and their cryptic messages as texts, while simultaneously frustrating that instinct.

The significance of the gorges Poe outlines in *Pym* (1165-7), or whether they mean anything at all, or whether they were caused by man or nature, is indeterminable; that is precisely Poe's point. Poe's "editorial" gloss on the mysterious writing yields no more than a tantalizing gesture towards legibility, a vague reference to "the region of the south" as a land of mere "inflections" of blackness and whiteness, suggesting only the *possibility* of textuality (in black and white) without committing to a clear message. The whiteness of the shrouded figure at the novel's end is also the whiteness of the unread page Pym encounters in the hold, to be read only obliquely. Thus Paul Rosenzweig is correct when he notes in "'Dust Within the Rock': The Phantasm of Meaning in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*" that "*Pym* reflects the inability of meaning, on every level, to assert or declare itself, and of any end to complete itself despite man's constant search— whether he be adventurer or reader— for enduring meaning"(139). The discovery of that meaning can only come with death. Similarly, as J. Gerald Kennedy maintains in "The Invisible Message: The Problem of Truth in *Pym*," the book continually "presents itself as unreadable; the letter from Augustus to Pym finally becomes, in fact, a synecdoche of the novel, manifesting its excruciating doubleness: one side contains a legible but confounding inscription, while the other reveals an essential blankness— the absent meaning of an effaced, incommunicable message"(133-4). However, I feel these poststructural interpretations (and others that stress the indeterminacy of *Pym*) fail to account for the relentless *compulsion* in Poe, his narrators and his readers to *seek* that meaning. And I suggest that Poe figures this need as a function of the world-text *itself*,

and not our desire to project meaning onto senseless nature.⁶³ For Poe, the physiognomy of the earth's surface *does* constitute a text to be read, but resists the reading, largely because we are "in the text" itself. Rosenheim points to this paradox, but attributes the two components to different types of Poe tales:

Although the characteristic semiotic strategy of detective fiction is that of encryption— of language embedded , covered over, hidden by bodies, buildings, and the opacity of social relations— Poe's science fiction is predicated on the sense of the sign's apocalypse (from *apo-calyptos*, to unclose or discover), in which the crypt of the letter is shattered and immediate communication becomes the basis for unfettered self-realization and sociality. (89)

I would argue that in *any* Poe tale, both of these processes-- encryption and apocalypse-- are embedded and at work, in varying degrees, particularly when engaging with the world-text.⁶⁴ As we grope our way about the earth's surface, we are driven to interpret it, to "[read] the signatures in nature to grasp the character of its Author"(Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics* 53), but we are too intricately engaged in it to achieve a critical distance from our world.

For Poe as for the flaneur, the experience of material topography (whether natural or artificial) in all its complexity would always exceed our abilities to understand it. However, this does not dismiss or diminish the validity of the flaneur's methodology; if anything, for Poe it is enhanced. As an artist, Poe sought to maintain the flaneur's balance between detachment and engagement, between an oblique survey and a direct scrutiny of cosmic secrets. To attain Dupin's idealized "bi-part soul," to be both artist

and analyst, creative and resolute, master and slave of both eternal and ephemeral, is to be a “perfect flaneur,” poised in a perfectly liminal observational relation to his subject. This dialectic, and Poe’s “dark” version of flanerie, is not without its risks. If the generic flaneur offered the transparent fantasy of panoramic vision and social control, Poe offered an example of flanerie that is definitely *not* “harmless and of perfect bonhomie” (“Flaneur” 36); it *does* acknowledge the inscrutable and the terrifying in the individual, the urban masses and the cosmos. And just as the flaneur must participate in the market and yet elude commodification, Poe’s narrators (and Poe himself) perform a perceptual high-wire act, walking a very tight rope between insight and madness. But as potentially grave as the costs are, there are equally promising vistas that open through this perspective. In exploring the (meta)physical as well as physiognomic implications of the flaneur’s methods, Poe found a spatial vertigo offering mental and physical experiences that transcend our familiar epistemological framework. His agenda in his horror and sensation tales is, as Dupin puts it, “to prove that these apparent ‘impossibilities’ are, in reality, not such”(417).

But despite its promise, cosmic flanerie can never deliver more than an incomplete reading at best. We occasionally experience only a fleeting and obscure glance at the metaphysical underpinnings of the cosmos, in precisely the sort of scenes Poe figures in his tales of sensation and horror. This partial deciphering reflects Poe’s vision of humanity’s fallen mortal state. Both artist and reader are caught between the yearning to imagine revelation and the inability to completely “capture” it, between the necessity for, and the nagging inadequacy of, previous experience and knowledge to

imagine the never-experienced and unknown. To acknowledge the presence of physical and metaphysical forces *beyond* our control or understanding in this way is to reinscribe wonder into a world that was increasingly categorized, controlled and industrialized. This is where Poe parts company with traditional science, with its aspirations of fully reading the text of the universe. Poe's flanerie emphasizes our capacities for perception, imagination, and artistic creativity, but *also* the limitations of those capacities; the face of the universe will always hint at the mystery beneath its surface, a "wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!" ("Ligeia" 266).

The artist-flaneur is subject to the same constraints, and to accommodate them Poe developed artistic principles with marked parallels to his flaneuristic perceptual and scientific theories. If obliqueness of vision is necessary for accurate perception, then the "suggestiveness" Poe champions in "The Philosophy of Composition" is the artistic technique best suited to initiate that indirect imaginative gaze in the reader. *Too* clear a delineation of the fictional subject in this case would be the equivalent of staring directly at the stars, to use Dupin's analogy. Its corollary in Poe's scientific methodology is the "intuitive guess" that springs fully-formed from uncharted fathoms of shadowy induction and deduction. But Poe's scientific "guessing" is counterbalanced by his insistence on a rigorous retrospective attention to "consistency," and the flaneur's oblique gaze gains solidity through analytical inspection. Similarly, Poe's use of the "suggestive under current— however indefinite of meaning" is matched with his careful commitment to realistic detail, to "verisimilitude." By realistically portraying the seemingly impossible, Poe challenges the fundamental assumptions readers have made about the nature of life,

identity, appearance and reality. He takes and places the reader's hand into the shadowy recesses of material life, whispering indefinite suggestions about what might lie there.

In his unsettling depictions of these elusive mechanisms of life, Poe takes his reader to the penultimate moment before discovery and destruction; he can go no further. Even the most imaginative creation of the artist's pen pales before the infinitely rich possibilities of the physical universe, which Poe calls in *Eureka* a perfect "plot of God," whose construction we can never fully comprehend or copy because of our "finite intelligence"(1342). To experience this ultimate "discovery," a human being would have to undergo the "destruction" of the individual identity, to be one with God. This frustrates but can never eradicate the desire in Poe and in us to enact "imaginative decipherment[s] of the cosmic hieroglyph"(Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics* 44). The world must always retain an element of mystery; the face of this apparently finite globe must always have unexplored features in its physiognomy. Driven to rely upon our senses and rationality, we are tempted to succumb to the alluring scientific promises of legibility and logic, but in Poe's eyes, the only appropriate scientific response to this incomprehensible "plot of God" is an aesthetic, even a poetic one— to gaze in wonder at the endless "DISCOVERY" it offers us.

NOTES

1. The male possessive is used here because, with few exceptions, the flaneur has been an explicitly male figure; however, scholars such as Janet Wolff have pointed to the problems women face[d] in attempting to “stroll” urban streets as leisurely observers. Cf. Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flaneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity,” in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 141-156 and “The Artist and the Flaneur: Rodin, Rilke, and Gwen John in Paris” in *The Flaneur*, ed. Keith Tester pp. 111-137.
2. It is important to note here that Wiese is discussing physiognomy from a twentieth-century perspective, and in connection with the work of Topffer, the author of a popular book of line drawings; this being the case, Wiese is more interested with the application of physiognomical principles to questions of artistic representation rather than scientific inquiry.
3. Brand acutely notes the reciprocal relationship between the discontinuous and fugitive nature of the periodical medium (as compared to the relatively static and self-contained book medium) and the experience of the city as disjointed and ephemeral in the eyes of the flaneur, a relationship I will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 2.
4. Directing aesthetic attention to the ephemera of life is not an idea that emerged with Baudelaire, nor is it solely a product of Western culture. In Japan, the *ukiyo-e* school of painting and print design focused on *ukiyo* or “the floating world” as early as the sixteenth century. According to Richard Lane in *Images from the Floating World*, the word originally “appeared as a Buddhist expression which connoted first ‘this world of pain,’ with the derived sense of ‘this transient, unreliable world’ But for the newly liberated townsman of the seventeenth-century Japanese Renaissance ‘floating world’ tended to lose its connotations of the transitory world of illusion and to take on hedonistic implications. It denoted the newly evolved, stylish world of pleasure...”(11).
5. According to Benjamin, government authorities attempted to counter the city’s capacity to offer “cover” through the use of photography (so that a person’s physical characteristics could be preserved permanently and unmistakably) and the numbering of houses in Paris after the French Revolution (“Flaneur” 47-48). Another manifestation of this impulse cited by Benjamin was Baron Hausmann’s demolition of the narrow, winding streets of the Parisien quartiers, and replacement of them with broad, straight avenues. Benjamin argues that such alterations in the urban environment had drastically dehumanizing effects upon the city’s streets and crowds, and dramatically altered the flaneur’s relationship to them.

6. This is an expansion of an idea Benjamin gets from Marx: “If the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed, it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle. Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the flaneur abandons himself in the crowd”(“Flaneur” 55).

7. It is at this point that Benjamin’s analysis of the flaneur intersects with Lukacs’s Marxist theories, contextualizing the flaneur in the historical development of class consciousness: “the more conscious he becomes of his mode of existence, the mode imposed upon him by the system of production, the more he proletarianizes himself, the more he will be gripped by the chill of the commodity market and the less he will feel like empathizing with commodities”(“Flaneur” 58). As the flaneur achieves what Lukacs terms the “self-consciousness of the commodity,” his viability in a Marxist theoretical framework declines, and eventually evaporates. For more details on Lukacs and commodification, see Chapter 2 pp. 56-60.

8. Benjamin is not particularly interested in the physiognomical study of individual faces, although he does note one particular experience in “Hashish in Marseilles”when he relates that the drug “made me into a physiognomist, or at least a contemplator of physiognomies”(139).

9. In “Poe and Gentry Virginia,” David Leverenz offers an intriguing examination of the ways in which Poe manifests his ambivalence regarding aristocratic privilege:

Poe inhabits and undermines gentry fictions of mastery, not least by exposing the gentleman as a fiction. Typically, he displays cultivated narrators unable to master themselves.... Poe’s narratives exaggerate gentry contradictions, especially the double imperatives of cool reasoning and impulsive bravado.... Poe plays with gentry specters of a debased capitalist future to put his own indulgent yet satiric spin on nostalgia for an idealized aristocracy. He is especially keen to make textuality itself the source for true aristocracy, a status to which only his genius can pretend (212).

As a result, Leverenz argues, “Poe’s best tales invite an undecidable doubleness of interpretation, pointing simultaneously to idealized gentry traditions of aristocratic contemplation and demonized mass-market conditions for literary production”(223).

10. See, for instance, the engraving of Fetridge and Company’s Periodical Arcade from *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, 31 July 1852 p.80. The engraving is also featured on the cover of *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith.

11. In a letter to F. W. Thomas dated 25 February 1843, Poe writes, “I have managed, *at last*, to secure... a partner possessing ample capital, and, at the same time, so little self-esteem, as to allow me entire control of the editorial conduct. He gives me, also, a half interest... I agreeing to supply, for the first year, the literary matter. This will puzzle me

no little, but I must do my best-- write as much as possible myself, under my own name and pseudonyms... until the first stage of infancy is surpassed..."(Ostrom 224). For more on Poe and anonymity or pseudonymity, see Meredith L. McGill's "Poe, Literary Nationalism, and Authorial Identity" in Rosenheim and Rachman's *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, in which she argues that "the pseudonymous strategies deployed by Poe" helped his "texts and textual practices [drift] free from the confines of individual authorship"(283).

12. For further material on the sandwichman and Benjamin, consult Susan Buck-Morss's "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering" in *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 99-140. It is also interesting to examine Poe's tale "The Business Man" in this regard, as the narrator of that story takes a turn as sandwichman in a series of misguided and even dangerous, though "methodical" business ventures.

13. According to Reynolds, Poe was by no means alone in his ambivalence toward the popular sensationalist writing of the time, an ambivalence that can be seen as flaneuristic; indeed, Reynolds argues, *all* "the major writers fully absorbed the paradoxes of sensational literature but mightily resisted the prevailing tendency toward vulgarization and inhumanity in popular culture"(225).

14. Auerbach also points out that Poe recognized the tendency of the "Anastatic Printing" process to "cheapen information, to diffuse knowledge and amusement, and to bring before the public the very class of works which are most valuable," a quote which "neatly captures the ambivalence the journalist felt toward his profession, an ambivalence partly derived from his misgivings about the written word itself"(347).

15. It is worth pointing out, though, that when the narrator attempts to collect some form of "remuneration" for his efforts, his editor can barely resist thrashing him. This is a note Poe would strike again a year later, in "Some Secrets from the Magazine Prison-House," a brief piece in which he attacks publishers and audience alike, implicating as well America's call for "national literature" and the absence of international copyright, in making the magazinist's lot an insupportable one:

It would *not do...* to let our poor devil authors absolutely starve, while we grow fat, in a literary sense, on the good things of which we unblushingly pick the pocket of all Europe: it would not be exactly the thing *comme il faut*, to permit a positive atrocity of this kind: and hence we have Magazines, and hence we have a portion of the public who subscribe to these Magazines (through sheer pity), and hence we have Magazine publishers... [who] make it a point of conscience to encourage the poor devil author with a dollar or two, more or less as he behaves himself properly and abstains from the indecent habit of turning up his nose. (1036-7)

16. This term, which Poe used to mean an "up-ending," will be shown in Chapters 3-5 to play a crucial role in Poe's intuitive approach to scientific and metaphysical discovery, as

well.

17. Poe also sent slightly different versions of this letter to many of the literary luminaries from whom he sought to elicit submissions, subscriptions and/or support.

18. Poe's fixation with the work of Grandville has intriguing implications, when considered in the context of Benjamin's remarks on Grandville's "secret theme": "the enthronement of merchandise, with the aura of amusement surrounding it" ("Paris" 152). In extending "the character of a commodity to the universe," Benjamin suggests, Grandville disclosed how fashion "couples the living body to the inorganic world. Against the living it asserts the rights of the corpse" (153). This linking of lively and fashionable "novelties" with death and the inanimate has striking resonances with Poe's "grotesques" and his seemingly commodified horror tales, as well as Roderick Usher's conviction that his dying "house" is a sentient being (327). It is no coincidence that recent editions of the *Poe Studies Association Newsletter* (Vol. XXVI, Numbers 1-2, Spring and Fall 1998) have featured illustrations by Grandville.

19. Richard P. Benton suggests that "Lionizing" was "aimed at the literary circle surrounding Lady Blessington, which included Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and [significantly] the American N.P. Willis, and that Poe was slapping particularly at Willis's social climbing and self-puffery" (121).

20. Accepting for utility's sake Michael Allen's-- and Poe's own-- categorization of the tales into "grotesques" and "arabesques," I shall discuss in this chapter only Poe's comic use of physiognomy in the "grotesques," leaving his more "serious" employment of such descriptions in the "arabesques" for Chapters 4 and 5.

21. Benton points out that "what the allegory of 'King Pest' consists of has largely been ignored by modern commentators. In an allegory worked out by... Lynne Chaleff, each one of the 'pesty' persons sitting drinking around the table represents some character type.... However, William Whipple proposed that 'King Pest,' like 'Four Beasts in One,' was a satire directed against President Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian equalitarian democracy"(126).

22. This collection, ironically, was to include a number of the "grotesques" discussed in this chapter. It would eventually be published in 1840 as *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

23. When George Graham assumed the helm in 1840, though, the tenor of the magazine became much more literary, and scientific articles and notices disappeared almost entirely.

24. These selections were culled from David K. Jackson's *Poe and the Southern Literary Messenger*.

25. For example, Newton's courtship of his wife, Galileo's forced retraction of his theory of planetary revolution, Smithson's discovery of two different types of salt in tears-- "the fount of beauty itself."

26. See Poe's discussion of the supposed "ocular evidence" that nebulae are stars in the process of formation in *Eureka* pp. 1319-1322; Poe argues that in developing his nebular theory, Laplace "had, very properly, an inferior faith in his own merely perceptive powers. In respect, therefore, to the actual existence of nebulae-- an existence so confidently maintained by his telescopic contemporaries-- he depended less upon what he saw than upon what he heard"(1322).

27. Note the striking resemblance to the 1817 review of Cleaveland's *Mineralogy* discussed earlier, which celebrates the "men of ardent, enthusiastick minds, who have accidentally been led to collect minerals, and who would have been devotees to any opinions or pursuits, which chance might have dictated."

28. For Poe, this intuitive ability also makes in-depth, specialized scientific training and complex scientific technology unnecessary. His "balloon hoaxes," often considered foremost examples of his seminal "science fiction" (and linked here to Pundita's voyage) are convincing in part because the technology used to create these vehicles is emphatically ordinary and accessible. In "The Balloon-Hoax," Poe's narrator points out that "to accomplish the great desideratum of aerial navigation, it was very generally supposed that some exceedingly complicated application must be made of some unusually profound principle in dynamics"(746). In "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall," the narrator relates that his balloon is constructed of "cambric muslin,... twine,...varnish of caoutchouc" and "a large and deep basket of wicker-work"; the balloon itself is filled with gas created by combining "a quantity of a *particular metallic substance, or semi-metal...* and a dozen demijohns of *a very common acid*"(958). These materials, Poe suggests, are easily available; it is the intuitive scientific thought required to conceive the project that is rare.

29. According to Nancy Harrowitz in "The Body of the Detective Model: Charles S. Pierce and Edgar Allan Poe," this process correlates to the mode of thought Pierce called "abduction," or "the step in between a fact and its origin; the instinctive perceptual jump allows the subject to guess an origin which can be tested out to prove or disprove the hypothesis"(qtd. in Rachman 55).

30. See John Irwin's fascinating discussion of the "clue" as "clew," or the thread by which one traces the way out of a maze, in *The Mystery to a Solution*.

31. For a book-length analysis on Poe's connection to cryptography, see Shawn James Rosenheim's *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet*.

32. This intuitive approach to science did not die with Poe. Later in the nineteenth century, John Tyndall would articulate similar theories in his essay "Use and Limit of the Imagination in Science." For Tyndall, scientific questions inevitably lead "beyond the region of sense, and into that of imagination," which is "the divining rod of the man of science. Not, however, an imagination which catches its creations from the air, but one informed and inspired by facts... (3). Like Poe, Tyndall disparages the

tories... in science who regard imagination as a faculty to be feared and avoided rather than employed. They had observed its action in weak vessels and were unduly impressed by its disasters. But they might with equal justice point to exploded boilers as an argument against the use of steam. Bounded and conditioned by cooperating Reason, imagination becomes the mightiest instrument of the physical discoverer. Newton's passage from a falling apple to a falling moon was, at the outset, a leap of the imagination. (16)

And, like Poe, Tyndall argues that while "it is plain that beyond the present outposts of microscopic enquiry lies an immense field for the exercise of the speculative power," it is only "the privileged spirits who know how to use their liberty without abusing it, who are able to surround imagination by the firm frontiers of reason, that are likely to work with any profit here"(41). Tyndall's description of this imaginative scientific process has obvious affinities with Poe's dialectic of "guessing" and "consistency":

Side by side with the mathematical method we have the method of experiment. Here, from a starting-point furnished by his own researches or those of others, the investigator proceeds by combining intuition and verification. He ponders the knowledge he possesses and tries to push it further, he guesses and checks his guesses, he conjectures and confirms or explodes his conjecture. These guesses and conjectures are by no means leaps in the dark; for knowledge once gained casts a faint light beyond its own immediate boundaries. There is no discovery so limited as not to illuminate something beyond itself. The force of intellectual penetration into this penumbral region which surrounds actual knowledge is not, as some seem to think, dependent upon method, but upon the genius of the investigator. There is, however, no genius so gifted as not to need control and verification. The profoundest minds know best that Nature's ways are not at all times their ways, and that the brightest flashes in the world of thought are incomplete until they have been proved to have their counterparts in the world of fact. Thus the vocation of the true experimentalist may be defined as the continued exercise of spiritual insight, and its incessant correction and realization. His experiments constitute a body, of which his purified intuitions are, as it were, the soul. (53-4)

33. Irwin also makes clear the connection between these scientific and pseudoscientific inquiries and the idea of writing/reading:

As the hieroglyphical problem of the relationship between outer shape and inner meaning becomes the question of the origin of man and language, the image of "writing" expands until all physical shapes become obscurely meaningful forms of script, forms of hieroglyphic writing each of which has its own science of

decipherment– signature analysis, physiognomy, phrenology, fingerprint analysis, zoology, botany, geology, and so on. (61)

34. Richard Wilbur noted long ago in his essay “The House of Poe” that “Poe’s criticism places a positive value on the obscuration of meaning, on a dark suggestiveness, on a deliberate vagueness by means of which the reader’s mind may be set adrift toward the beyond”(332).

35. For David S. Reynolds, “Poe’s very careful descriptions of Roderick Usher, with his cadaverous skin and protruding brow, and Ligeia, with her lofty forehead and luminous eyes, typify his use of face-reading procedures to give a mystical depth to concrete physical description” (244).

36. As Richard Wilbur points out in “The House of Poe,” “the House of Usher *is*, in allegorical fact, the physical body of Roderick Usher, and its dim interior *is*, in fact, Roderick Usher’s visionary mind”(339). As such, it represents an opportunity for a conflation of facial and “interior” physiognomic analysis. However, Wilbur’s focus is on Usher as “a state of mind,” as “an allegorical figure representing the hypnagogic state”(340); as a result, his readings of Poe’s interiors all point to “the mind’s final spiralling plunge into unconsciousness”(342).

37. Richard Wilbur has called Dupin a “godlike genius who, possessing the highest and most comprehensive order of mind, includes in himself all possible lesser minds, and can therefore fathom any man– indeed, any primate– by mere introspection”(“Edgar Allan Poe” 62); I would revise this to suggest that Dupin is able to *insinuate* himself into, and *approximate*, the minds of others. His talent is not merely looking within himself, but “throwing himself into” another (in what may be called “extrospection”) and then looking inward introspectively.

38. In ““(Horrible to Relate!)’: Recovering the Body of Marie Rogêt,” Laura Saltz points out that this critical distance is purchased at the expense of the “real” Mary Rogers: “Using newspaper reports of Marie’s disappearance as the sole source of information, Dupin conducts an inquest into a world, and a crime, that is entirely textual”(238). As a result, “Marie has no ‘real’ referent, for the story concerns only an already textualized Mary as she appears in the print world of the newspapers”(258-9). In an interesting aside, Saltz also suggests that “Marie is a kind of female flaneur, a wanderer who habitually leaves the confines of home and neighborhood to traverse the whole of the city”(251).

39. It is also intriguing to note that the “distance” such periodicals provide also represents an opportunity for duplicity on the side of the law; Dupin apprehends the owner of the orangutan by planting a “lure” advertisement in a newspaper, much as Poe, in his hoaxes, set his own traps for the “lazier” analysts among his readers.

40. This passage also brings to mind Benfey's discussion of the "twin fantasies of utter exposure and complete secrecy" in Poe's work, which I feel are united in the incomplete reading of the flaneur's gaze. Benfey implies a causal relation between the two, particularly in "The Tell-tale Heart," in which the narrator, "for all his secrecy... claims to have access to the mind of the old man. His very privacy, his enclosedness, seem to allow him to see into the minds of other people"(33).

41. Jacques Derrida faults Lacan for making the "lack" of the letter's meaning into the meaning of the story itself, and for neglecting to consider the other Dupin tales and the incessant doubling of narrative, rather than triangulation. For a thorough and lucid discussion of these readings, see Barbara Johnson's essay "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida" in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, & Psychoanalytic Reading*.

42. Irwin also addresses this convertibility in *American Hieroglyphics*, in reference to the narrator's ruminations in "Morella" on the fluidity of identity:

The paradox here involves the way in which a mutually constitutive opposition simultaneously depends upon and dissolves the notion of a limit, whether that limit be internal or external. Like a Möbius strip in which a two-sided surface is turned into a one-sided surface but is still experienced as if it had two sides, a mutually constitutive opposition involves the same bewildering interpenetration of one and two. (122)

If we substitute "inner and outer" for "one and two," we can perceive the same disorienting "effect."

43. Joswick is also quite correct in pointing to the "ambiguities" of Dupin's "control," as when he admits that "observation has become with [him], of late, a species of necessity" "as if darkly hinting at inner compulsions to which his will is merely contingent"(240).

44. Rosenheim notes the parallels between Dupin's analysis and cryptography (and, incidentally, the "transparent fantasy" of the flaneur noted by Benjamin, Brand and others) in a number of dimensions: "The cryptograph reflects on the level of the sign what Dupin embodies on the level of character, and what the form of the detective fiction implies on the level of narrative: the fantasy of an absolutely legible world"(70).

45. See particularly Leonard W. Engels' series of articles on Poe's use of the enclosure device.

46. According to Richard P. Benton, "The Assignment" is "Poe's personal, imaginative, and creative conception of what he deemed would have been a fitting conclusion to the life of Lord Byron— an assignation with a beautiful woman in a suicide pact"(120).

47. Reynolds correctly takes this a step further, attributing the artistry of this conjuring interior to Poe himself as well as the narrator, suggesting that "the weird arabesque chamber in which Rowena dies and Ligeia comes back to life represents the nurturing

power of Poe's art, the conversion of horror into fantastic beauty that both reflects and piques the creative visions of the narrator"(237).

48. Similarly, Thomas Joswick notes both this inexorable narrative movement and the inevitable breaching of the inner/outer boundary: he writes that the interior details of Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" "all convey the sense of the plot's inevitable progression to a climax," and that "Prince Prospero, whose 'august taste' gave shape to the lavish palace, seeks to control the horrible reality of the Red Death by closing it out from the realm of his authority. He succeeds, however, only to ensure its presence within and his subjection to it"(247).

49. In "Es lässt sich nicht schreiben": Plagiarism and 'The Man of the Crowd,'" Stephen Rachman offers a different twist on Poe's flanerier— the plagiaristic reading of other texts: "Poe is a textual flaneur, and if Poe's flaneur-like narrator is observing anything it is Dicken's text [*Sketches by Boz*], not the streets of London, Paris, or New York. Poe explores two kinds of public "reading," the latent one being about textual doubling, fusing physiognomic reading with not only social control but textual doubling— that is, plagiarism"(77-8).

50. As Baudelaire suggests, the tale itself "really is a picture!... painted-- or rather written-- by the most powerful pen of our age"(7).

51. While I find Byer's reading here convincing, I am less persuaded by his assertion that as a result of this new level of interaction, the narrator develops a "craving desire" that "transforms the need satisfied by the narrator's gazing at the crowd into the unappeasable hunger to read the man's physiognomy, to penetrate the physiognomy of the crowd... to find a reality in the crowd that he can have access to only by becoming part of it"(237). While he approximates the wanderer's behavior, and comes *close* to identifying with him, his immersion in the crowd can also be read as is simply a necessary prerequisite to read the wanderer's secret.

52. I am not fully convinced that, as Rachman puts it, "The old man is a purely phrenological man, an aggregation of physiognomic traits construed as a whole, and this makes him uncanny or 'scary.' Phrenological vocabulary, because of its typological abstraction, voids itself of stabilized meaning, and does not as such permit itself to be read"(80). Certainly, this "novel" character cannot be read as any one physiognomic "type," but I read this more as an example of Poe's "suggestiveness," his sketching of a character's hidden physiognomy by means of plotting and shading the areas "around" it.

53. David S. Reynolds interprets Poe's depiction of the wanderer's waywardness as a comment upon the subversive lack of direction in popular sensation writing of the time: "We have seen that in his literary criticism Poe often criticized popular sensational literature as directionless, unregulated, amoral. Here the directionless wandering of an amoral man itself becomes the main action of the story"(234).

54. Byer provides a much more “Benjaminian” analysis of the story and the narrator’s flânerie, interpreting the “noisome quarter” as a “social landscape whose fearful physiognomy is that of the uncontrollable wilderness lying at the margins of the bourgeoisie’s ‘orderly’ and controlling vision of social life,” one that is “tinged by the uncanny physiognomy of the old man, whose mysterious story as the man of the crowd is inscribed in and expresses the elusive and fateful connection among these social realities”(225). For Byer, Poe’s “depiction of the uncanny spectacle of the crowd... destroys the picture of social life as the product of, or the motion imparted by, the activity of mutually free and openly communicating, and exchanging, private citizens.... Neither freedom nor progress, but the circularity and doubleness of everyday life was its secret”(227-8). As a result, “Poe’s old man is less the type of the *flâneur* than of the democrat: The crowd is both object and subject of his desire, the form of both his pleasure and his need”(229).

55. Richard P. Benton points out that this tale has been interpreted critically as a “fable” on the depravity of mob mentality, as “farce..” as “moral fantasy” and “political allegory” on the dangers of Jacksonian “mobocracy” (118).

56. For the purposes of this study, though, I would stop short of Irwin’s suggestion that “in effect, [this project] presents the problem of man’s knowing his metaphysical ‘place’ in the scheme of things as that of knowing his physical location in the natural world. (160)

57. Benton calls “MS” a “parody” that “mocks the popular fictional sea voyages of the time and makes fun of the outlandish speculations of Captain John Symmes” (119). He points to the link between Poe’s tale and Symmes’ science fiction novel *Symzonia— A Voyage of Discovery* in the narrator’s unintentional daubing of the word “DISCOVERY” on the sail. If this is a parody, though, I would suggest it is so in the same way that Benton suggests “The Assigination” is: one that is not necessarily “destructive in aim,” one of those that “have been written in order to honor a style or a work”; “such parodies tend to be not only creative but personal”(120).

58. In *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery*, William H. Goetzmann describes how Dr. Symmes and Jeremiah N. Reynolds “made an eastern tour, with Reynolds doing most of the lecturing, using beautifully made wooden models of the globe to illustrate Symmes’ point. Many times they were laughed out of the hall, and Symmes, fatigued by the tour, went back home to Cincinnati to die.” Reynolds continued, but only “gained more credibility and more allies among knowledgeable seafaring men” once he “partially abandoned or soft-pedaled the Symmes theory... in favor of hardheaded conversations with sea captains and experienced naval officers” (260).

59. The vortex is also a fundamental element in the cosmological “guesses” of René Descartes. In Part III of his *Principles of Philosophy*, entitled “Of the Visible Universe,”

Descartes speculates that “the matter of heaven, in which the Planets are situated, unceasingly revolves, like a vortex having the Sun as its center... and that all the Planets... always remain suspended among the same parts of this heavenly matter”(96). Within this larger vortex are also smaller ones (97), which are “arranged in harmony with one another so that each one is carried along in the direction in which the movements of all the remaining surrounding ones least oppose it”(118).

60. Budick also points with great insight to the connection between this tension and Gothic horror: “Poe recognizes that what is to the mind a purely ideal, metaphorical process is to the body the peril of physical dissolution. Matter may be fallen Idea, but it is the only available form of the Ideal left in the universe. Idealism flames to Gothic terror when Poe acknowledges the material, human implications of an otherwise impersonal philosophy” (79). Thus, “Poe’s interpretation of Idealist philosophy indeed has its positive, optimistic aspects.... But in order to capture the full range of emotions created by the cosmic condition, Poe had to convey not only the positive side of cosmic Idealism, but its Gothic aspects as well” (83).

61. Grace Farrell provides a useful overview of the critical response to *Pym* in “Dream Texts.” She argues that the bulk of *Pym* criticism moves between the poles of “two divergent perspectives— one positing a redemptive affirmation, the other emphasizing its loss,” one underscoring the “transcendence and wholeness” at the novel’s end, the other focusing on its “irony” and tendency towards “hoaxing and indeterminacy”(220-1). My reading of the novel mediates these approaches, though it certainly has affinities to the “indeterminate” school of thought. Some critics take an alternate approach, such as Kent Ljungquist, who suggests that the mysterious white figure at the end of *Pym* is a mythic Titan; Charles O’Donnell and Richard Kopley argue that this apparition should be read literally, as the sail of an approaching ship. Others, like Harry Levin and Leslie Fiedler, cast the novel’s meanings in terms of cultural and racial conflicts, between black and white, between natives and colonizing outsiders (Farrell 220-229).

62. Pollin also suggests that Poe was actually performing an act of self-inscription in these gorges, carving fissures that resemble his initials, “E A P”.

63. This is in opposition to Irwin’s reading that “What the ending of *Pym* acts out... is ‘a certain tendency of the human intellect’... to try to survive death by projecting an image of itself (the self as image) into the infinite void of the abyss”(205). Irwin argues that the figure at the novel’s end is “a shadowy character in the sense of being unrecognizedly self-projected. It exhibits the uncertainty of the boundary between observer and phenomenon, that condition of indeterminacy in which the observer in part creates the phenomenon he observes and thus ends by observing his own presence in a kind of veiled narcissism”(213). This suggests “the impossibility of the self’s breaking through the surface of language and the recognition that ‘God’ is an idealized self-projection upon that surface”(230). To this I would respond by pointing to Poe’s closing note in *Eureka*, that the universal “Heart Divine” is “our own,” as not implying *solely our* existence, but

“Life within Life– the less within the greater, and all within the *Spirit Divine*”(1357-9).

64. And, as Rosenheim suggests, our status within that text and our relation to it are equivocal: “the gorges they explore are versions of a hieroglyph, images that are also signs, but they are also cryptographs, interior spaces that may be either tomb or haven”(60).

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