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Kaleidoscopes, stereoscopes and desire machines: Revolutions in vision in Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*

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Introduction

A veritable cornucopia of visual delights, Angela Carter's body of work is saturated with references and allusions to the history of visual culture, from painterly motifs to Hollywood movie goddesses, and from pornographic tableaux to surveillance techniques. Much of the scholarly work on Carter has concentrated on her engagement with pornography and the politics of the male gaze. Some studies have examined her passion for twentieth-century popular visual culture, including Charlotte Crofts' (2003) analysis of Carter's interest in film and television and Sarah Gamble's examination of the influence of Jean-Luc Godard on Carter's novels from the 1960s (2006: 42–63). More recent work has begun to unpick the influence of various artistic traditions, from Anna Watz's (2017) comprehensive monograph on Carter and surrealism to Katie Garner's (2014) insightful chapter on the mingling of surrealist and pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artistic motifs and concerns in Carter's early fiction. However, in this chapter I want to contribute to this rich body of work by considering an aspect of Carter's interest in the visual that has thus far been little studied: the plentiful presence of pre-cinematic optical devices in her writing. Of all her literary works, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) contains the largest number of references and allusions to optical devices, including the daguerreotype, the kaleidoscope and the phantasmagoria. The titular desire machines themselves constitute a kind of visual technology, albeit a fantastical one, which transforms

unconscious desires into hologram-like beings, or 'mirages' as the narrator calls them, thereby fundamentally reorganizing visual experience. Furthermore, the structure of the narrative is reminiscent of a magic lantern show as Desiderio, the protagonist and narrator, travels from one seemingly self-contained and picturesque 'world' to another in search of the diabolical Doctor Hoffman. It is for these and other reasons that this chapter will focus on this particular novel. I will demonstrate that the plethora of optical devices in this text dramatizes a number of concerns about visuality, including the conventional patriarchal conception of woman as an object to be seen, the threats (imagined or real) to the male sovereign spectator triggered by a reorganization of vision and finally both the hopes and fears associated with a revolution in visual experience, such as was witnessed in the nineteenth century with the invention of mechanically reproduced images on a mass scale.

Kaleidoscopes, daguerreotypes and phantasmagoria

I want to begin by analysing a series of metaphors that appear early on in the text and which Desiderio as narrator uses to describe himself, the object of his desire, and his environment. All of these metaphors employ pre-cinematic optical devices invented in the nineteenth century and they serve several purposes: they reveal that in a patriarchal society woman exists to be seen by the male spectator but that her ephemerality is often experienced by men as troubling or threatening;[1] they also register an anxiety about the changes to visual experience in modernity, with the rise of new visual technologies; and finally they are evidence of Desiderio's efforts both to protect his status as a sovereign spectator and to contain the object of his desire by metaphorically turning her into an image.

The first of these metaphors appears in the opening section of the narrative, where Desiderio, now old and alone, wistfully recalls the days of the war with Doctor Hoffman and in particular the now lost object of his desire: Hoffman's marvellous and elusive daughter, Albertina. In a distinctly Proustian act of reminiscence, Desiderio sees Albertina through the lens of an optical device, picturing her in his memory as 'a series of marvellous shapes formed at random in the kaleidoscope of desire' (6).[2] The choice of visual instrument in this metaphor is significant given its frequent association with both femininity and the ephemeral epoch that is modernity. Charles Baudelaire, for example, famously described the modern, urban man, or *flâneur*, as like 'a kaleidoscope

gifted with consciousness', and noted that one of the most arresting sights for this kaleidoscopic-man was what he called 'the passing woman', a fugitive figure who catches his gaze for the briefest of moments only to disappear into the crowd (1964: 12). In this analogy, although a certain type of masculinity is being associated with an optical device, what is important here is that the figure of woman is positioned as a passive image while the kaleidoscopic-man is in the position of active spectator. Indeed, the women seen by the *flâneur* are lacking in terms of having ontological substance. As Rachel Bowlby puts it, the passing woman is not so much a real and autonomous being as 'a mere projection from the spectator' (1997: 202). This description fits the way in which Desiderio sees Albertina both in the opening chapter and at various points throughout his narrative. As he observes, 'if Albertina has become for me, now, such a woman as only memory and imagination could devise, well, such is always at least partially the case with the beloved' (6). Strengthening this is the fact that, after associating Albertina with the images in a kaleidoscope, Desiderio then adds that she was 'her father's daughter, no doubt about that!' Desiderio thus aligns his beloved not only with the figures of femininity contained in the male visual imagination but with Hoffman's desire machines, as if she were merely another of the strange mirages produced by this fictional device. This ephemeral figure of woman is thereby contained within both the tube of the kaleidoscope, with its many reflecting surfaces and male eye at the opposite end, and within Hoffman's desire machines which, appropriately, turn out to be fuelled by imprisoned lovers. Indeed, containing the figure of woman is imperative for this typically male voyeur and narrator. As Bowlby argues, whilst the *flâneur*'s gaze positions woman as part of the ephemera of modernity, the way that she is written about by figures such as Baudelaire and Proust, that is, as a beautiful object, 'substantialises her fragmentariness', which in turn 'keeps her, fits her to him, in the image of his imagination' (1997: 202). Similarly, Desiderio attempts to trap his beloved within the bounds of his narrative as a desperate ploy to assuage his anxiety at not possessing her body. At the end of his introduction, Desiderio also positions Albertina as a kind of muse, dedicating his memories to her – a flattering if further example of the masculine desire to assuage his anxiety about femininity.

In a second metaphor, Desiderio pictures himself within the bounds of another optical device, though one markedly different to that which frames Albertina. Forever separated from her, Desiderio laments that he is 'condemned to live in a drab, colourless world, as though… living in a faded daguerreotype' (7). This contrast sets up an interesting divide between masculine and feminine

images, for whilst Albertina is associated with the multiple mirrors of the kaleidoscope, which produce a series of fluctuating, colourful images, Desiderio is linked with a static and colourless image produced by the single mirror of the daguerreotype.[3] Added to this is the difference in the position of the observer's eye with respect to each device: whereas the daguerreotype produces an image that can be regarded at a distance from the observer's eye and thus surveyed in its totality, the kaleidoscope requires the observer to place his/her eye close to the lens in order to see the images produced and prevents him/her from seeing the whole image. In the latter case, then, the optical device and the eye become, in Jonathan Crary's words, 'contiguous instruments on the same plane of operation' (1990: 129). The implication of this is that Albertina appears more strongly as a troubling emanation of Desiderio's desire and gaze, and hence his status as a detached and masterful observer is put in question. With this initial opposition then, Carter quickly establishes a set of gender differences which structure the visual, showing how the male desiring gaze is strongly implicated in the production of a version of femininity which signifies visual pleasure, proximity and flux, and which produces both pleasure and anxiety.

A world in flux is also an appropriate description of the war with Hoffman, which Desiderio recalls throughout his narrative. As he observes, during the time of the war 'the city was full of mirages' and 'nothing… was identical with itself' (3–4). Wandering through the streets, Desiderio says that he 'saw only reflections in broken mirrors', which, he goes on to explain, is 'only natural because all the mirrors had been broken' (4). As Hoffman's desire machines unleashed an army of mirages on the world, mirrors became dangerous portals: 'Since mirrors offer alternatives, the mirrors had all turned into fissures or crannies in the hitherto hard-edged world of here and now and through these fissures came slithering sideways all manner of amorphous spooks' (4). In another linking of gender and the visual, Desiderio suggests that the city before Hoffman's attack was a 'thickly, obtusely masculine' place, 'solid, drab' and unchanging (10).[4] By implication, Hoffman's invasion of mirages has feminized the city. In fact, Desiderio claims that cities are either 'women and must be loved' or 'men and can only be admired or bargained with' (10). In a third metaphor involving a popular pre-cinematic visual device, Hoffman's attack is also described by Desiderio as effecting a '*phantasmagoric* redefinition' of the city, turning it into 'the kingdom of the instantaneous' in which everything fluctuates endlessly (12; emphasis added). As Crary explains, '[p]hantasmagoria was a name for a specific type of magic-lantern performance in the 1790s and early 1800s, one that used back projection to keep an audience unaware of the

lanterns' (132).[5] On the one hand, Hoffman's phantasmagoric transformation is clearly an allusion to nineteenth-century Paris through the lens of Walter Benjamin's account. In Benjamin's Marxist-Freudian reading, modern Paris is a phantasmagoria of fetishized commodities, elaborate window displays and arcades (2006: 30–45). On the other hand, given that Carter wrote this novel in the early 1970s in Japan, Hoffman's reorganization of vision is also a convincing portrait of the postmodern metropolis, the latter characterized by, in David Harvey's words, '[f]iction, fragmentation, collage, and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos' (1990: 98).[6] In response to Hoffman's attack, the Minister, who rules the city 'single-handed', desperately attempts to maintain social order with his army of fascist-like Determination Police by destroying mirrors and incinerating any suspicious objects or people (11). His plan is thus associated with masculine, rational order, closer to the modernist ideals of urban planning than to those of the postmodernists. As potentially diverting as this might sound, Desiderio is unmoved by Hoffman's magic: 'I felt as if I was watching a film in which the Minister was the hero and the unseen Doctor certainly the villain; but it was an endless film and I found it boring for none of the characters engaged my sympathy' (21). Desiderio is here styled as the typical detached and angst-ridden spectator, seemingly unaffected by the spectacle surrounding him. Indeed, he even explains that he survived Hoffman's optical war because '[he] could not surrender to the flux of mirages' due to his being 'too sardonic' and 'disaffected' (4).

Desiderio's first encounters with Albertina take place amidst Hoffman's phantasmagoric spectacle and so she is aligned with this optical device too. She is, to use Christina Britzolakis's words, the 'chief emblem and embodiment of this phantasmagoric landscape' (1997: 47).[7] She initially appears to him as a 'curious, persistent hallucination' on the 'borders of … sleep', making her a troublingly liminal figure poised between Hoffman's surreal world of mirages and the imaginary world of dreams (22). Whilst the daytime mirages are the work of 'an inefficient phantasist' and bore Desiderio, Albertina's appearances unsettle him 'obscurely' because 'nothing about [them] was familiar' (21–2). At first, Albertina appears before Desiderio in 'flesh [made] of glass', the 'exquisite filigree of her skeleton' visible beneath this 'transparent' body – a morbid parody of male voyeurism (22). On another occasion, she comes to him in the form of a black swan, evoking in him the 'fear of the unknown' and making him '[shudder] with dread' (27).[8] In addition to these nightly apparitions, Albertina makes a physical appearance, but one which is much more ambiguously gendered. Playing an ambassador role to her 'phantasist' father, Albertina appropriately

appears as a strange mixture of costumes, cosmetics and adornments, and is thus 'extravagantly oversignified' in Maggie Tonkin's helpful phrase (2012: 82).[9] Albertina is described as having 'skin like polished brass', 'glossy hair so black it was purplish', a 'blunt-lipped, sensual mouth', eyes like those painted on Ancient Egyptian sarcophagi, and dark crimson finger nails (30). Furthermore, she is dressed flamboyantly in 'gold thongs', 'flared trousers of purple suede' with a belt consisting of 'several ropes of pearls' (30). Albertina's eclectic style is reminiscent of 1960s fashion, which Carter once described as 'superdrag' and 'a fragment of a kaleidoscope' ([1967] 2013: 113).[10] This gender ambiguity is compounded by Albertina's bestial-like qualities for, as Desiderio notes, her gestures are 'all instinct with a self-conscious but extraordinary reptilian liquidity', and she 'move[s] in soft coils' (30). In this last image, Albertina appears in the guise of the *femme fatale* and Desiderio responds with a combination of desire and fear: while she is 'the most beautiful human being [he has] ever seen', Desiderio gushes, Albertina's appearance also hints at a kind of 'savagery' that both frightens and excites him (30).

Albertina's performance of gender mutability is also significant because it produces 'a fine tracery of cracks' in the 'surface of [Desiderio's] indifference' (38). Her enigmatic appearances arouse in Desiderio a desire to gaze at her sexually (scopophilia) and a desire to know the truth about her identity (epistemophilia).[11] In a final metaphor that appears in the early part of his narrative, Desiderio aligns Albertina with the trickery and deception of magic shows and phantasmagoria: she is, he suggests, like a magic trick which disguises 'a living being beneath' because 'such tricks imply the presence of a conjurer' (40). His ultimate ambition, he confesses, is 'to rip away the ruffled shirt and find out whether the breasts of an authentic woman swelled beneath it' (40). Relevant here is Peter Brooks' observation that '[w]hen the body becomes more secret, hidden, covered, it becomes all the more intensely the object of curiosity' (1993: 15). However, what I want to emphasize here is that this entire introduction to Albertina is, in the terms of my argument, an attempt to contain her enigmatic and arousing identity. Desiderio associates her with the images produced by pre-cinematic devices such as the kaleidoscope and phantasmagoria not just because he finds her bewildering and ephemeral but because it functions, wittingly or not, as an attempt to contain her within the technology of these optical devices, in this case aligned with a male gaze. As troubling as the ever-changing and potentially deceptive images of the kaleidoscope and phantasmagoria respectively might be, images can be (at least potentially) surveyed, possessed and manipulated by the spectator at will.

Towards the end of the text, Desiderio receives confirmation from Albertina herself that her existence is purely visual and that she is indeed one of the mirages produced by her father's desire machines. After encountering her in a number of different guises, including the Madame of a brothel and a Count's valet, she explains to him that she 'projected herself upon the available flesh' of the various people, describing one role in particular as 'a real but ephemeral show' (197). Albertina is thus able to shift and change her appearance at will, like some kind of holographic figure. Through Albertina, then, Carter literalizes the idea of woman as image for the male gaze. Indeed, Albertina even tells Desiderio that all the time he has known her, she has been '"maintained in [her] various appearances only by the power of [his] desire"' (243). In the final chapter, Albertina tells Desiderio that they are two 'disseminating mirrors' reflecting images which are 'multiplied without end' (241). Furthermore, she explains that her father has discovered that enormous amounts of energy could be harnessed from their 'supreme encounter' (241). In this final association between femininity and an optical device, this time a simple mirror, Albertina is not so much pictured as a visual object but as a mirror-image of Desiderio. The radical suggestion here is that the male spectator is himself a part of the spectacle rather than surveying it from above in a detached and masterful manner.

Peep-shows, stereoscopes and the sovereign subject of vision

I want to turn now to another optical device that appears in the text, but one that appears not as a metaphor in Desiderio's narrative but as an actual device that he encounters on his journey: the pornographic peep-show. This optical device is significant because it functions as both a precursor to Hoffman's desire machines and as a tool in his arsenal, for much of what Desiderio encounters in the so-called real world appears to exist first in nascent form in the peep-show. It is for this reason that Ali Smith argues that each of the novel's chapters 'functions as its own seductive and terrifying peep-show "desire machine"' (2010: x).[12] Furthermore, Beate Neumeier argues that the parallels between the images in the peep-show and Desiderio's experiences in the so-called real world suggest that '[i]mage and experience' are 'inseparable' (1996: 143).

Given all of this, it is essential to understand how the peep-show functions.[13] At the level of representation, the peep-show pictures the gendered body in what Carter refers to in *The Sadeian Woman* as the 'elementary iconography' of pornography, whereby identity is reduced to the body's 'formal elements'. Woman,

for example, is reduced to the image of the 'fringed hole', signifying that she is 'open, an inert space, like a mouth waiting to be filled' ([1979] 2011: 4). Carter concludes that '[f]rom this elementary iconography may be derived the whole metaphysic of sexual differences – man aspires; woman has no other function but to exist, waiting' ([1979] 2011: 4). Most of the exhibits inside the peep-show feature highly sexualized and mutilated wax figures of women. However, rather than addressing the pornographic iconography of these exhibits, which has been discussed in the vast majority of critical assessments of this novel, I want to focus on the peep-show as optical device and, more specifically, how it functions in relation to Desiderio's embodied gaze. Early on we learn that a prototype of the peep-show 'offered moving views in three dimensions' and that instead of projecting images onto a screen held at a distance from the audience, it featured 'slots … in which [the latter] could insert themselves and so become part of the shadow show they witnessed' (24). As with the kaleidoscope, this optical device requires that the body of the spectator be contiguous with its operation, thereby removing the distance separating spectator from spectacle. This operation therefore threatens '[t]he pleasure of watching the spectacle', which 'derives from the knowledge one is dissociated from [it]' ([1979] 2011: 162). In a similar fashion to its prototype, the peep-show that Desiderio visits consists of 'a pair of glass eye-pieces [which jut] out on long, hollow stalks' through which the spectator observes each exhibit (44). Once again, the observer inserts him or herself into the spectacle through the stalks which connect the body to it like nodes or corporeal appendages.[14]

This mode of observation is partly an allusion to Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, which, as Susan Rubin Suleiman notes, not only displays a similarly mutilated female figure but also 'requires that the viewer glue an eye to a peephole in order to see the scene' (130). However, Carter takes things further and creates a distinctively surreal picture of the notion of woman *as* optical device. In one exhibit, uncannily entitled 'I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE', a woman's vagina acts as 'a frame for a perfectly round hole through which the viewer glimpsed the moist, luxuriant landscape of the interior', including a model of Hoffman's castle (44). Here, woman is not (only) seen through the visual device but acts as part of its mechanism, her genital hole acting as a mechanical aperture.[15] Additionally, the peep-show also challenges Desiderio's position as a sovereign and voyeuristic spectator – Desiderio's official job title is 'Inspector of Veracity' – through another exhibit, which consists of 'two eyes looking back' at him (30, 45). The eyes function as mirrors, reflecting '[his] own eyes, very greatly magnified by the lenses of the machine' (46). This produces a *mise-en-abyme* effect as each

pair of eyes reflects the other, creating 'a model of eternal regression' (46). By thus returning and fracturing his gaze, this exhibit problematizes the opposition between spectator and spectacle, the dizzying mirror effect undoing the stability of the subject as spectator.

When Desiderio visits the peep-show on a second occasion, the models inside each exhibit have been replaced by 'actual pictures painted with luscious oils on rectangular plates in such a way that the twin eye-pieces of the machine created a *stereoscopic* effect' (62, emphasis added). Another significant optical device invented in the nineteenth century, the stereoscope, according to Crary, emerged from 'research … on *subjective* vision' and contributed to the transformation of the idea and function of the observer (1990: 118; emphasis added). The stereoscope created the illusion of a three-dimensional image by 'reconciling disparity, [by] making two distinct views appear as one', for it featured the same image but seen from slightly different angles so that the combination created the illusion of depth (1990: 120). Significantly, the 'desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent *tangibility*. However, it is a tangibility that has been transformed into a purely visual experience' (1990: 122–4; emphasis in the original). As Crary puts it, '[n]o other form of representation in the nineteenth century had so conflated the real with the optical' (1990: 124), a phrase that captures succinctly Hoffman's manipulation of reality, for whom 'matter was an optical toy', as Desiderio puts it (250).

By understanding how stereoscopic images are produced, we can better understand the politics of visuality presented in Carter's text. Firstly, the stereoscopic image cannot be seen in its totality and thus surveyed from a position of visual mastery. As Crary explains, the eyes 'never traverse the image in a full apprehension of the three-dimensionality of the entire field, but in terms of a localized experience of separate areas' (125). The stereoscopic eye-stalks of the peep-show do just this, preventing Desiderio from adopting a position of visual mastery.[16] This is in marked contrast with other visual devices, such as the daguerreotype, the photograph and the cinematograph, which give the impression at least of visual mastery as the spectator can survey the entire image at a glance. Secondly, the stereoscope spectator is an active participant, for the effect produced depends upon the physiology of the human eyes and brain. In Crary's words, such a spectator is a 'producer of forms of verisimilitude' (131). The peep-show not only works in this fashion but Carter in a way literalizes this notion of the spectator as a producer of images by having the very world that Desiderio travels through exist as an emanation of his (unconscious) desires. Lastly, it is not accidental that the stereoscopic peep-show displays pornographic

images for as Crary points out, shortly after its popularization in the nineteenth century 'the stereoscope became increasingly synonymous with erotic and pornographic imagery' because the 'very effects of tangibility' sought by the inventors of the stereoscope could be 'quickly turned into a mass form of ocular possession' (127). Given that Albertina appears in the peep-show exhibit, this strengthens the idea of containment that I introduced at the beginning, for it is clear that Desiderio desires to possess her.

Two scopic regimes

I want to turn now from an analysis of real optical devices like the kaleidoscope to a consideration of the one fictional, and arguably most important, optical instrument in the text: the desire machines. In particular, I want to ask whether or not this fictional optical device challenges what Martin Jay (1992) calls the dominant scopic regime of Western culture, a concept that I will briefly outline. I also want to look at the Minister's criticisms of Hoffman's proposal as well as his own opposing model of vision. I will conclude by briefly considering Desiderio's decision to destroy the desire machines and opt for the Minister's world view.

The first explicit outline of Hoffman's project as well as the Minister's opposing world view occurs in the discussions between the latter and Albertina. It quickly becomes apparent that Hoffman and the Minister hold opposing ideological beliefs, including differing views on the nature of vision. The Minister attacks Albertina over her father's destruction of his beloved cathedral, that 'masterpiece of sobriety' which was 'given the most vulgar funeral pyre' by being dissolved 'in a display of fireworks', an example of Carter's pyrotechnics at play (32). In a remark that indicates the kind of scopic regime that he subscribes to, the Minister adds that the cathedral was 'like the most conventional of stone angels' and that 'its symmetry expressed the symmetry of the society which had produced it' (33). By contrast, Hoffman's perspective is revealed by Albertina's linguistic playfulness when she completes the Minister's sentence 'It was an artifice-' with '-and so we burned it down with *feux d'artifice*-' (33).[17] Hoffman's actions here literalize Carter's observation in 'Notes for a Theory of Sixties Style' about the 1960s: '[i]n the pursuit of magnificence, nothing is sacred. Hitherto sacrosanct imagery is desecrated' ([1967] 2013: 134). Albertina and the Minister also argue directly over the metaphysics of the visual: in another clearly gendered example, the Minister likens Hoffman's mirages to the 'early days of cinema' because 'all the citizens are jumping through the screen to lay

their hands on the naked lady in the bathtub!'[18] Albertina counters with the idea that 'their fingers [actually] touch flesh' (35). Whilst the Minister insists that these mirages are merely 'substantial shadow', Albertina retorts that this is instead 'a beautiful definition of flesh!' (35). The Minister nevertheless doggedly persists in his argument, likening Hoffman to a 'forger' who has palmed off 'an entire currency of counterfeit phenomena', but Albertina again responds pragmatically: 'You cannot destroy our imagery' (36). What this early discussion reveals is a disagreement about the relationship between social structures and the visual: whilst the Minister desires a society in which vision is clear and distinct, and both constitutes and reflects hierarchical order, Hoffman's project aims to disrupt this (visual) order by undoing social hierarchies in favour of greater democracy and individual freedom – his free-floating mirages are (or should be) in a sense a reflection of the free citizens.

I want to refer to this clash of world views between Hoffman and the Minister as a clash of two scopic regimes.[19] To better understand this, I want to briefly recount Jay's discussion of what he refers to as the dominant Western scopic regime and then examine two historical examples of challenges to this regime (1992). According to Jay, Western culture has tended to privilege a rational conception of sight in which the subject is able to survey the world from a safe distance. From the ancient Greek philosophers' conception of knowledge as the state of having seen to Rene Descartes' emphasis on clear and distinct ideas, the dominant conception of knowledge and truth is closely related to, if not premised on, a rational model of vision (see Jay 1992, 1994). This model of vision is also intimately tied up with forms of social control, as the work of Michel Foucault (1977), for example, has shown. From the Minister's remarks in the discussion cited above, it is clear that he adheres to the dominant Western model of vision. Later in the text, Desiderio hears a recording of the Minister in which the latter vociferously deplores the explosion of images created by the desire machines, referring to them as 'deceitful images' and likening Hoffman's transformation of the city to a plague. He affirms the association between vision and rationality when he tells his citizens that 'although unreason has run rampant through our streets' thanks to Hoffman's mirages, 'nevertheless, reason can – will – must! restore order in the end. For light to guide us, we have nothing but our reason' (246).[20] The Minister's adherence to this model of (visual) order is so strong that he employs extreme measures for trying to differentiate real objects and people from Hoffman's mirages: his fascist Determination Police round up suspicious objects or persons and incinerate them to test their reality status.[21] In order to maintain a world in which visual deception is impossible, the Minister

is willing to destroy potentially real objects and people – no (visual) ambiguity or uncertainty can be tolerated.[22]

Given that Hoffman's mirages are often indistinguishable from the real thing, and thus trouble the rational subject of vision, the Doctor's war of images can be read as challenging the dominant scopic regime of Western modernity. There are historical examples of just such a challenge. Jay draws on the work of Christine Buci-Glucksmann to argue that the baroque offered such a challenge by celebrating the 'disorienting, ecstatic, dazzling implications of the age's visual practices' (1994: 46). A much-cited example of this is Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), with its distorted skull which, Jay argues, functions as 'a reminder of an alternative visual order' (1994: 48). As he explains: 'By combining two visual orders in one planar space, Holbein subverted and decentered the unified subject of vision painstakingly constructed by the dominant scopic regime' (1994: 48). Hoffman's desire machines function in a similar way, challenging the visual order of the Minister's totalitarian-like city by unleashing phantoms and mirages drawn from the unconscious minds and memories of its citizens. Desiderio recounts that his city was filled with mirages of all kinds, from the resurrected dead to an 'Auditorium … full of peacocks in full spread' (11). He goes on to explain that '[w]hether the apparitions were shades of the dead, synthetic reconstructions of the living or in no way replicas of anything we knew, they inhabited the same dimension as the living' (12). Like Holbein's painting, then, Hoffman has subverted and decentred the ordinary world of vision by overlaying an alternative visual order onto the dominant one – mirages and real people mingle freely in the same plane of reality, sometimes at odds with one another but also occasionally indistinguishable from the point of view of the subject.

Hoffman's new scopic regime can also be usefully read in the light of a significant historical transformation of vision, namely, that which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. During this period, the 'ocularcentric spectacle of desire', writes Jay, 'was removed from the aristocratic court and given its bourgeois equivalent in the massive sheet glass windows displaying a wealth of commodities to be coveted', as well as the 'explosion of advertising images in newspapers and journals' (1994: 120). This age of mechanical reproduction of images, to use Benjamin's well-known phrase (1999), created two broad reactions. On the one hand, some commentators saw this flood of images as a form of 'visual pollution' and indeed the word 'kitsch' appeared around this time (1994: 122). One of the most significant new optical devices was the aforementioned daguerreotype, and as the market quickly became saturated with

images, Baudelaire characterized this phenomenon as a 'cult of images' (cited in Jay 1994: 122). On the other hand, Jay suggests that this visual explosion could be 'interpreted as the democratization of visual experience, the extending down into the general population of those opportunities hitherto reserved for only the elite' (1994: 125). Indeed, by contrast with Baudelaire, the general reaction to this 'daguerreotype-mania' was 'overwhelmingly positive' (1994: 125).

Whilst this reading might suggest that Hoffman's aims are largely positive – a democratization of vision certainly sounds like an admirable political project – Desiderio eventually discovers that the Doctor betrayed the spirit of his endeavour by becoming a dictator of the visual. At the end of the text, Desiderio locates Hoffman in a 'Wagnerian castle' with stained glass windows that 'open eyes of many beautiful colours' (234). Appropriately, the Doctor's laboratory is described in cinematic terms – it is 'half Rottwang's laboratory in Lang's *Metropolis* but it was also the cabinet of Dr Caligari' – and Desiderio spots 'a curious collection of optical toys, a thaumatrope, a Chinese pacing horse lamp and several others, all of types which worked on the principle of persistence of vision' (245). As he leads Desiderio on a tour of the basement in which the desire machines are housed, the Doctor tells him that by bombarding the world with mirages, his new optical device will liberate 'man' by liberating his 'unconscious' (248–9). His ultimate aim, he explains, is to initiate the creation of 'autonomous, free-form, self-promulgation of concretized desires' (253). However, after encountering resistance from the Minister, Hoffman felt coerced into a 'military campaign' that he had 'certainly not bargained for' (252). As a result, 'an element of attrition entered the deployment of [his] imagery' and he began to 'control the evolution of the phantoms' (252–3). Like a communist dictator, then, Hoffman betrayed his own project of liberation by taking control of a process which he tells Desiderio should have been completely free-form and democratic. Rather than facilitating a world of autonomous images, Hoffman has bombarded the world with images directed by him in order to manipulate people's desires rather than setting those desires free.[23] After hearing Hoffman's confession, Desiderio opts for the Minister's world of reason and looks on the Doctor as a 'totalitarian' (247) and a 'hypocrite' for 'penn[ing] desire in a cage' while claiming to be a liberator of desire (248). While matter might be 'an optical toy' for Hoffman, Desiderio finds it hard to believe that he has any interest in liberation and assumes instead that the Doctor 'only wanted power' (250).

Desiderio decides to opt for the Minister's world of rational vision, but he confesses that his actions in stopping Hoffman are far from heroic and he often refers to his sense of passivity at the end of his narrative. Desiderio explains that

he was placed in the 'unhappy position' of making the 'casting vote' between these two scopic regimes and only chose the 'barren yet harmonious calm' of the Minister's world out of a sense of disgust at the Doctor's scientific devices and anxiety concerning Albertina (247). Hoffman shows Desiderio the insides of the desire machines – a mixture of 'glowing screens', mirrors that cover every surface and caged lovers – and offers him a central role in his project as well as a 'night of perfect ecstasy' with Albertina in exchange for his freedom (251, 247). However, amidst the so-called 'love pens', which form 'a pictorial lexicon of all the things a man and a woman might do together within the confines of a bed', Desiderio declines the offer and murders both the Doctor and his daughter (255). Although momentarily tempted by the promise of a long-desired sexual union with the elusive Albertina, the idea of being a cog in the desire machines frightens him and he refers to her as his 'necessary extinction' (257). There are also hints that Desiderio feels his status as sovereign spectator threatened, as he notices in horror that the love slaves feeding the desire machines possess 'vacant eyes' (258) and, at the moment of Albertina's death, he says, almost reassuringly, that her eyes will now remain 'silent forever' (259).[24] Even the castle is described as 'clos[ing] its coloured eyes' as Desiderio turns his back on it and heads home (262). Finally, Desiderio concludes his narrative with the image of him 'clos[ing] [his] eyes' only to be greeted with Albertina's haunting image: '[u]nbidden, she comes' (265).

What is clear from these observations and remarks is that Desiderio, as detached and masterful spectator, feels threatened by Hoffman's reorganization of vision, embodied partly in the figure of Albertina, because his place as observer would necessarily change as a result. As both a typically male spectator within a patriarchal world and as an 'Inspector of Veracity' (30), Desiderio's position is threatened by Hoffman's new scopic regime because it would both trouble his ability to discern the real from the fantastic using the light of rational observation and undo the patriarchal construction of gendered vision which centres on an opposition between male spectator and female spectacle (and from which Desiderio benefits). Carter's frequent references to pre-cinematic devices embody this troubling and loosening of the conventional relationships between gender and visuality (and between desire and ways of seeing) because they gesture to a period in European culture when a historical transformation of vision, embodied in the production of a plethora of new optical devices, new media and ways of seeing, was contributing to a whole series of changes in society. Desiderio's decision to murder Hoffman and his daughter, and to destroy the desire machines, stems from both his rejection of the Doctor's

totalitarianism and from his anxious reaction to Albertina as a troubling figure of femininity because they are two sides of the same coin: Albertina embodies Hoffman's reorganization of vision because the relationship between gender and the visual is one thing that would fundamentally change in this new scopic regime. Unlike the passive images of femininity produced for and consumed by male spectators, and the women who are treated as objects to be looked at, Albertina challenges Desiderio's masterful male gaze and has autonomy and agency. This is one reason that Desiderio associates her with so many optical devices that suggest multiple ways of seeing that trouble the sovereign spectator.[25] The novel's somewhat ambiguous conclusion suggests that challenges to the dominant scopic regime are likely to be either fought against by defenders of the status quo or will themselves devolve into reactionary and totalitarian forms that appear worse than the status quo. Furthermore, the text also makes clear that what is at stake in this is not technology per se; instead, it is desire, including the desire to see in its various forms (including scopophilia), which is the driving force behind both efforts to maintain the status quo and attempts to bring about radical change. As Carter makes clear in the title of this novel, optical devices are not just abstract ways of seeing but ways of desiring through seeing and seeing through desiring. The abundance of optical devices in Carter's text thus gestures towards the possibility of other ways of seeing-desiring, but without offering any guarantees of change to the dominant scopic regime of Western culture.

Notes

1 As argued most famously by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*.

2 For more on the connections between *Desire Machines* and Marcel Proust, see Tonkin (2012).

3 Although the daguerreotype employed a copper plate rather than an actual mirror, this plate was polished so that it functioned like a mirror.

4 Indeed, as he goes on to say, '[i]t seemed it would never change' (9). Desiderio's emphasis on stasis and the lack of change appears to locate the city in a kind of pre-modern or pre-industrial period. Hoffman's transformation of the city is akin to industrialization or perhaps better yet the culmination of industrialization in the early twentieth century – mechanical reproduction, technological spectacles and the like. This is not the only occasion on which Carter genders a city: in 'Envoi: Bloomsday', she writes 'Cities have sexes: London is a man, Paris a woman, and New York a well-adjusted transsexual' ([1982] 2013: 655).

5 Marina Warner has also written about the phantasmagoria in her book of the same name. There, she argues that Etienne-Gaspard Robertson's '[g]othic moving picture show […] turned any spectator from a cool observer into a willing, excitable victim' (2006:147–8).

6 Alternatively, Hoffman's phantasmagoric redefinition could be read in terms of Benjamin's analysis of nineteenth-century Paris as what he calls the capital of modernity.

7 Britzolakis argues that Carter's early novel *Love* makes a 'fetishized femininity serve as the figure for, and displacement of, socio-historical crisis, at the level both of figurative language and of narrative perspective' (47). My reading is similar to that of Britzolakis's insofar as I too see a close relationship between the female figure and the large socio-historical crisis in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*.

8 These nightly apparitions bear a striking similarity to many of the most popular magic lantern shows which employed typical Gothic tropes such as ghosts and played on the macabre and the uncanny.

9 Despite this high level of ambiguity, Desiderio refers to Albertina in this guise as a man and uses the masculine pronoun.

10 In this essay ([1967] 2013), at least, Carter links the kaleidoscope with drag rather than with either a patriarchal version of femininity or an image of masculinity as in Baudelaire's use of the metaphor – modern man as a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness.

11 Although these terms come from the work of Sigmund Freud, they were made more famous in academic discussions through Laura Mulvey's seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) which appears in the early 1970s.

12 On a related note, Lorna Sage once suggested that the plots of Carter's early texts move 'from one tableau to another, "still" after "still", quickened into movement by a kind of optical illusion – as in a flicker book, or of course a film' (1992:169).

13 There are also important allusions to cinema in this section of the text. As Susan Rubin Suleiman has observed, the chapter that introduces the peep-show as well as its proprietor is modelled on the German Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1994: 115–32).

14 In Carter's short story entitled 'The Merchant of Shadows', the narrator describes the eyes of Americans as 'lenses on stalks that go flicker, flicker, and give you the truth twenty-four times a second' (1996: 364).

15 This is a distinctively Bataillean image as in the overlapping and exchange of eyes and testicles in *The Story of the Eye* ([1928] 2001).

16 As Crary writes, the stereoscope 'require[s] the corporeal adjacency and immobility of the observer' (1990: 129). Cavallaro also notes the importance of the stereoscope for its commentary on Desiderio's position as a detached, controlling eye, writing

that 'in foregrounding the binocularity attendant upon her hero's perceptions [Carter] subtly refuses to pander to the myth of unitary vision which Western ocular centrism has so often and so uncritically espoused' (2011: 65).

17 For more on Carter's interest in fireworks, see her first collection of short stories, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), in particular 'A Souvenir of Japan', in which she explains how the Japanese call fireworks *hannabi*, meaning 'flower fire' (1996: 27).

18 This reference to early film spectators who were supposedly overwhelmed by the spectacle on screen and who responded to the image as if it were real suggests a more potent image of cinema than Desiderio's earlier reference to his life as a boring film. Here the film spectacle unsettles the spectator rather than provides pleasurable viewing at a safe distance.

19 David Punter has offered a different and equally interesting reading of this clash between Hoffman and the Minister, arguing that this novel can be read as 'a series of figures for the defeat of the political aspirations of the 1960s, and in particular of the father-figures of liberation, Reich and Marcuse' (1984: 211).

20 Hoffman's phantasmagoric redefinition of the Minister's city clearly subverts the power of reason. As Michael W. Jennings explains, for Benjamin 'the term "phantasmagoria" simply emphasizes the powerfully illusory quality of [the modern] environment, a quality that has a debilitating effect upon the human ability to come to rational decisions – and in fact to understand our own world' (2006: 14).

21 An alternative way to read this opposition would be along the lines of Foucault's discussion in *Discipline and Punish* of the contrast between what he calls the 'literary fiction of the festival', in which laws are suspended, prohibitions lifted and bodies mingle freely, and the 'political dream of the plague', which sees 'the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power' (1977: 197–8). Carter herself drew on Foucault's work on vision and power in her novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984), and this connection has been examined by Joanne M. Gass (1994: 71–6).

22 Of course, there is a complex question here of the meaning of the term 'real' but this is the very point of disagreement between the Minister and Hoffman. While the former considers images to be unreal, the latter wants to collapse the distinction between object and image.

23 Seemingly, the only time when Hoffman is not in control of his mirages is after the peep-show samples, which are 'symbolic constituents of representations of the basic constituents of the universe' (109), are lost. As Albertina explains, '[a]ll hell has been let loose since we lost the set of samples' (160). Hoffman himself later confesses to Desiderio that 'once the set of samples was accidentally destroyed, my

calculations went awry' (253). Hoffman's control of his new visual order is only ever temporary.

24 For more on how Albertina's female gaze unsettles Desiderio's position as masterful, male spectator, see my chapter '"I resented it, it fascinated me": Carter's ambivalent cinematic fiction and the problem of proximity' (2019).

25 As he says towards the end of his narrative, 'I felt the uneasy sense of perfect freedom. Freedom, yes. I thought I was free of her, you see' (p. 260).

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