'No longer the "I" of my own story': Privacy, identity, and the inner self in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*

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Introduction and Literature Review

Sonya Andermahr argues that Angela Carter's work 'evinces a fascination with masks, masquerade, spectacle and dressing-up, and the final impossibility of defining a self'.[1] This assertion is informed by Carter's own discussion of the self, where 'one's personality is not a personal thing at all but an imaginative construct in the eye of the beholder'.[2] While performative identity is certainly an important aspect of Carter's fiction, there is a critical tendency to overstate its significance. This tendency overlooks whether theatricality is more about concealment than it is expression, wherein performance misdirects others' perceptions to preserve something that Carter's criticism, often influenced by postmodern thinking, typically disavows: the inner self. Critics such as Aidan Day have previously challenged postmodern readings of Carter, but there are still many perspectives that would add nuance to these readings that have been critically underutilised.[3] For example, the concept of privacy centres around preserving and not performing identity, thus undercutting and complicating critical dismissals of the inner self in Carter's work. This is in spite of the fact that privacy is a significant theme in many of Carter's novels and many of Carter's characters are motivated by privacy and its preservation or violation.

Recent theoretical positions on privacy offer useful perspectives for viewing the inner self versus performative personality dynamic in Carter's work. Privacy, or being unobserved and undisturbed, is categorised by Anita Allen into two subtypes: physical privacy, and informational privacy.[4] While physical privacy concerns the body, informational privacy

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[1] Sonya Andermahr, 'Contemporary Women's Writing: Carter's Literary Legacy' in *Angela Carter: New Critical Readings,* eds. Sonya Andermahr and Lawrence Phillips (Electronic Edition: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014) p. 25

[2] Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter: A Biography,* 2016 (UK: Vintage, 2017), p. xv

[3] Aidan Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (UK: Manchester University Press, 1998)

[4] Anita Allen *Unpopular Privacy: What Must We Hide?,* 2011 (Electronic Edition: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4

protects intimate information.[5] In Carter's work, bodily autonomy is often disrespected, and so physical privacy is more relevant. Privacy is considered a human right throughout the US and EU, yet explanations vary as to why privacy should be unquestionably protected.[6] John B. Young argues that it is human nature, claiming 'the desire for privacy is a natural one and the inclination to pursue it follows automatically'.[7] This argument is a little reductionist, and therefore somewhat unconvincing, but it demonstrates the urgency with which we protect privacy without necessarily understanding its significance. A more compelling argument for the importance of privacy is that it is interdependent on identity. As Allen argues, violation of privacy is violative because it accesses 'the unguarded self… managing and controlling identities is hard work; privacy invaders make the work for naught'.[8] This approach gives new insight into performative identity in Carter's work: when violation of privacy is such a common feature, it follows that the way in which identity is expressed would be altered.

It would be unreasonable, however, to argue that privacy is always desired. John McGrath argues that 'narcissistic desire… [is] likely to impact substantially on our lives under surveillance' and the validation of self that observation creates.[9] This complicates privacy: its violation is unbearable, yet necessary for projecting identity into the social sphere to be known by others. However, this does not mean that technological innovations which decrease privacy are welcomed. In a recent opinion piece, Alan Rusbridger reflected:

> 'Haven't we all become a bit more tuned in to some sort of right to
>
> privacy? Deep down, don't we all feel a bit uneasy at how much "big
>
> tech" knows about every detail of our lives? …Do we really want our

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[5] Allen, *Unpopular Privacy,* p. 4

[6] J.K. Petersen, *Introduction to Surveillance Studies,* (Online Edition: Taylor and Francis, 2019), p. 325

[7] John B. Young, 'Introduction: A Look at Privacy' in *Privacy,* ed. John B. Young, (Malta: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), pp. 1-12, p. 4

[8] Allen, *Unpopular Privacy,* p. 15

[9] John McGrath, 'Performing Surveillance' in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies,* eds. Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty and David Lyon (Electronic Edition: Routledge, 2012), pp. 83-90, p. 84

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medical records or private Instagram moments floating freely around

in the ether?[10]

These cultural anxieties make the question of privacy more urgent today than it has been

previously.[11] Larry Ellison, the sixth richest man in the world and CEO of Oracle Corporation

stated that 'privacy… is largely an illusion' as early as 2001.[12] This links to Carter's

speculative fiction, such as *The Infernal Desires Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and

The Passion of New Eve (1977) and their frequent depictions of militant authoritarianism and

rape, that also make privacy seem illusory. However, this is not to say that Carter's fiction

anachronistically parallels twenty-first-century reality, but that there are aspects of Carter's

work that anticipate current cultural anxieties when viewed retrospectively.

Critical theories applied to privacy have also been used to explore Carter's work. The

most overt example of this is Foucault's panopticon in Carter's novel, *Nights at the Circus*

(1984)*.* The panopticon is a prison with a single guard tower surrounded by inmates' cells,

and Foucault viewed it as demonstrating 'visible and unverifiable' power, with prisoners in 'a

state of conscious and permanent visibility'.[13] Essentially, Foucault argues that unverifiable

surveillance promotes obedience within prisoners, and within wider society. More recently,

William Bogard has argued that 'the panoptic model cannot account for all the decentralised

and non-hierarchical modes of surveillance operative today'.[14] While it is true that

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[10] Alan Rusbridger, 'It will come as a surprise to some, but even Meghan has a right to her privacy', *The Guardian,* 14 February 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/feb/14/it-will-come-as-a-surprise-to-some-but-even-meghan-has-a-right-to-her-privacy, [accessed March 2021]

[11] Petersen, *Introduction to Surveillance Studies,* p. 325

[12] Ian Kerr and Jennifer Barrigar, 'Privacy, Identity and Anonymity' in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies,* eds. Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty and David Lyon (Electronic Edition: Routledge, 2012), pp. 386-394 p. 388

[13] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977 (USA: Vintage, 1995), p. 201

[14] William Bogard, 'Simulation and post-panopticism' in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies,* eds. Kirstie Ball, Kevin D. Haggerty and David Lyon (Electronic Edition: Routledge, 2012), pp. 30-37, p.30

technological developments give anyone the ability to violate privacy, Bogard fails to acknowledge that violations of privacy still tend to follow traditional hierarchical structures. More often than not, it is the state, or big businesses, that violate informational privacy of common people, and men who violate the physical privacy of women. This is also the case in Carter, where the more victimised characters, such as Ghislaine in *Shadow Dance* (1966) Annabel in *Love* (1971) and Eve in *The Passion of New Eve,* are women without authority.

Jean Baudrillard's work has also been applied to Carter, particularly her novel *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and its correspondence to hyperreality, a simulation 'that produces a reality of its own without being based on any particular bit of the real world'.[15] Given that present technology makes hyperreality an everyday occurrence, such as virtual reality, *Hoffman* retrospectively resembles present-day circumstances. This is especially true of privacy, as *Hoffman's* hyperreality (and online hyperreality) is often invasive and inescapable, making it difficult to exist undisturbed and without the pressure of observation. Baudrillard also discusses 'TV verité', where the presence of a camera can 'affect the behaviour of those being filmed'.[16] This raises questions surrounding public identity construction, especially of performers and other public figures. This links to Carter's exploration of selfhood, especially in her works that contain celebrity characters, such as Tristessa in *The Passion of New Eve* and Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*.

The idea that being seen is an essential part of identity construction also links to Lacan's mirror stage of development. The mirror stage begins when a child sees their reflection, 'the would-be autonomy and mastery of the individual in their earliest draft forms', becoming fascinated with this new self-image.[17] Perhaps then, being seen by others, including when privacy is violated, is formative to self-identification. However, alienation

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[15] Richard J. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard: 2nd Edition* (Online Edition: Routledge, 2009) p. 30

[16] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, 1981 (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1994) p. 28; Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?,* (Online Edition: O Books, 2009) p. 37

[17] Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan,* 1991 (USA: Harvard University Press, 1993) p. 22

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exists between the mirror-self and the real-self, as the mirror is an 'epistemological void'.[18] This suggests that being seen and its identity construction can be at the expense of an inner self, as found in Carter. Lacan has been used in literary criticism on Carter before, particularly in Scott Dimovitz's *Angela Carter: Surrealist, Psychologist, Moral Pornographer*, although the main focus there is gender and sexuality. However, by focussing on privacy, identity, and the inner self instead, a more nuanced perspective on Carter's engagement with psychoanalytical concepts can be achieved.[19]

Laura Mulvey's male gaze, which was influenced by Lacan's mirror stage, emphasises the female body's '*to-be-looked-at-ness'*.[20] Mulvey has also incorporated the male gaze when writing on Carter with a particular emphasis on performance and celebrity in *The Passion of New Eve* and *Nights at the Circus.*[21] Considering the male gaze requires observation to occur, the concept is also relevant to privacy*.* Thus, the male gaze informs the relationship between privacy and public female figures, wherein there is always an audience that will participate in identification on behalf of the subject. Therefore, in Carter, *to-be-looked-at-ness* challenges and degrades the inner self, because others have already ascribed an identity that can be internalised.

Using these critical viewpoints in combination with one another, a distinct and new perspective can be used to explore privacy and the inner self in Carter. This viewpoint does not necessarily dismiss postmodern thought such as Foucault, Baudrillard, Lacan and Mulvey outright, but instead adds nuance to the conclusion that an inner self cannot exist while much of society and human behaviour is dependent on the perceptions of others. Instead, one should account for the desire to preserve privacy, and by extension, an inner

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[18] Bowie, *Lacan,* p. 24

[19] Scott Dimovitz, *Angela Carter: Surrealist, Psychologist, Moral Pornographer,* (Online Edition: Taylor and Francis, 2016)

[20] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures,* (Great Britain: Palgrave, 1989) p. 19

[21] Laura Mulvey, 'Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema' in *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter,* ed. Lorna Sage, 1994 (Great Britain: Virago, 2007)

self. Therefore, the inner self must exist whilst privacy is preserved, but repeated violations of privacy may degrade the inner self, as informed by postmodern thought. Furthermore, the second significant aspect of this perspective is to incorporate twenty-first century anxieties surrounding privacy into readings of Carter's speculative fiction as a means of placing her work into a new cultural understanding that was not possible in older literary criticism or in postmodern thought. As previously mentioned, this perspective is not anachronistic, but instead demonstrative of the ways in which speculative fiction, including Carter's, can help to frame current real-life cultural tensions.

With this in mind, many of Carter's novels are relevant to privacy. *Love* is the first to explore the theme at length, as the three main characters, Annabel, Lee, and Buzz, are primarily motivated by privacy. For example, Annabel thinks that 'privacy [is] her exclusive property', and thus sabotages her husband's, Lee's, attempts to lead a private life separate from her own.[22] There has been some subtle critical acknowledgement of privacy by Sue Roe, who links Buzz's voyeuristic and violative tendencies and photography to Mulvey's male gaze.[23] While not the focus of this dissertation, it would be an oversight not to acknowledge that many ideas developed in Carter's later works surrounding privacy were established in *Love.*

In short, *Love* initially expressed the way in which privacy is difficult to understand or maintain, which then continues in the texts that I will explore: *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus.* In *Hoffman*, Carter's experimentation pushes privacy to extremes, anticipating current concerns. *Nights at the Circus,* on the other hand, partially resolves Carter's question of privacy and identity, as the character Fevvers occasionally balances the necessity of observation and the desire to preserve privacy.

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[22] Angela Carter, *Love,* 1971, (UK: Vintage, 2006) p. 32

[23] Sue Roe, 'The Disorder of Love: Angela Carter's Surrealist Collage' in *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter,* ed. Lorna Sage, 1994 (Great Britain: Virago, 2007)

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'Neither privacy nor distraction': Hyperreality, Pornography and Voyeurism in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*

     The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman often depicts privacy in a way that echoes and anticipates our current relationship with the concept. As real-life technology advances, the surreal elements of *Hoffman* can be used to interpret current issues surrounding privacy that would not have been possible at the time of the text's publication. As previously mentioned, *Love* is one of the first of Carter's novels to discuss privacy at length, but *Hoffman* is the novel that experiments with the concept and therefore pushes it to more overt, explicit extremes. This links to critical discussions of *Hoffman* and Carter's residency in Japan whilst writing the novel as a sort of turning point in her career, wherein her more experimental approach to writing came into fruition. Although Linden Peach takes care to note that *Hoffman* and Japan only 'encouraged… aspects of her work' that existed prior to its publication, there is still a distinct increase in ambition between *Love* and *Hoffman* that makes *Hoffman's* portrayal of privacy more comprehensive and relevant in anticipating present-day anxieties on the subject.[24]

     This is particularly evident when exploring the ideological tension between Doctor Hoffman and the Minister. While Hoffman argues for the liberation of unconscious desires and pluralist realities, the minister pushes for objective truth. Carter emphasises the commonality of these perspectives, associating the Minister's categorisation of subjective and objective reality with 'an electronic harem', which links his endeavours to the often-sexual nature of Hoffman's simulations.[25] Conversely, when the protagonist, Desiderio, meets Hoffman, he notices Hoffman's 'faded weariness and a depressing ennui' (*DH;* p. 257) linking to the Minister's emotionless and bureaucratic rationality. These linguistic parallels indicate political parallels: Sarah Bernstein observes that their ideologies are

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[24] Linden Peach, *Angela Carter,* (Malaysia: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 4

[25] Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman,* 1972 (UK: Penguin Classics, 2011), p. 36. All subsequent quotes will be to this edition and noted in text thus: (*DH;* p. *n*)

ultimately 'both modes of organisation', but it is more accurate to say that the two approaches are both modes of acquiring power via organisation.[26] This mirrors and unknowingly anticipates the way in which informational privacy is violated through collection and organisation of online data as a means to acquire financial or political power in present-day reality.

Additionally, Hoffman's externalisation of desires unknowingly replicates the inescapable stream of personal and private information found online when considered in retrospect. When Desiderio recalls the day Hoffman's machines became active, he states that 'there was no longer any way of guessing what one would see when one opened one's eyes in the morning for other people's dreams insidiously invaded the bedroom' (*DH*; p. 14). The fact that it is not 'if' but 'what' one would see unintentionally mirrors the current nature of online content, wherein millions of people upload information about their life each day. Furthermore, Hoffman's simulations are framed as instances where 'desires… had achieved their day of independence' (*DH*; p. 226), particularly as the novel grows increasingly sexual. Similarly, much of digital content is sexual, encapsulated by the online adage: 'if it exists… there is Internet porn of it'.[27] This, given the temporal distance between *Hoffman* and present-day, could not have been Carter's intention, yet the ceaseless access to other people's personal lives found in Hoffman's desire machines are now a part of twenty-first-century reality.

The peep-show simulations in *Hoffman* are a particularly significant depiction of privacy in the novel. The peep-show explicitly links observation with voyeurism, or the erotic appeal of watching others without being seen. For example, the peep-show advertises its

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[26] Sarah Bernstein, 'Free Market of Desire: Libidinal Economy and the Rationalisation of Sex in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman'*, *Contemporary Woman's Writing,* 9:3 (2015), pp. 348-365, p. 360

[27] Dewey, Caitlin 'Is Rule 34 actually true?: An investigation into the internet's most risqué law', *Washington Post,* April 6 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/04/06/is-rule-34-actually-true-an-investigation-into-the-internets-most-risque-law/ [accessed April 2021]

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possibility to 'SEE A YOUNG GIRL'S MOST SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE WITH LIFELIKE COLOURS', (*DH*; p. 64) and frequently depicts the naked female body. These voyeuristic simulations are linked to the male gaze by emphasising the peep-show models' *to-be-looked-at-ness* for erotic purposes. Furthermore, this portrayal promotes the idea that there is pleasure in violating privacy- voyeurism hinges on the ability to view a part of a figure's life intended to be unseen, and the peep-show capitalises on this desire. However, Carter criticises and challenges the pleasure gained from these simulations via the peep-show's inclusion of a simulacral pair of eyes:

> 'in the pupils I could see, reflected in two discs of mirror, my
>
> own eyes, very greatly magnified by the lenses of the machine.
>
> Since my own pupils, in turn, reflected the false eyes before me
>
> while these reflections again reflected those reflections, I soon
>
> realised I was watching a model of eternal regression.' (*DH*; p.
>
> 47)

The 'eternal regression' of eyes watching eyes emphasises the simulated voyeurism present in peep-shows, and forces the voyeur to become self-aware of the discomfort in being observed. By doing this, Carter presents the way in which voyeurism shapes the sense of self: an object of voyeurism loses their sense of self because they are no longer in control of how they are perceived. Equally, however, the voyeur's sense of self is also degraded, as they are reduced to nothing more than a pair of eyes that can watch, but not influence, the object. This is reinforced by the fragmentation involved in the peep-show's display: the pair of eyes are disembodied, and are therefore disassociated with any sort of self.

Carter takes this exploration of voyeurism to extremes by introducing parallels between the peep-show's models and the novel's events. The models can depict 'all the possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations' (*DH*; p. 111), but it is unclear if this is a mere representation of possible real-world events, a prediction of what is going to happen, or even that the peep-show causes future events to occur. This

means that the peep-show acts as an example of Baudrillard's hyperreality, where it is impossible to tell what is simulated and what is reality, because the 'sovereign difference, between one and the other' has disappeared.[28] With regards to Carter's depiction of voyeurism, the peep-show's hyperreality forces the distance between sexual fantasy and reality to close. In *Hoffman's* peep-show, there is no difference between observing a peep-show model of a teenage girl losing her virginity, and observing a real teenage girl in the same act. This foregrounds the ethical questions surrounding voyeurism and the desire to violate privacy: if the voyeur has received pleasure from the thought of violating a teenage girl's privacy, then there's a possibility that that is just as questionable in theory as it is in reality. This links to Carter's critical exploration of the concept of 'moral' pornography, where she argues that sexual desire and pornography can be moral should it promote 'the sexual licence for all the genders' and 'critique… current relations between the sexes'.[29] With this in mind, the peep-show achieves moral pornography because it critiques and challenges the normative erotic appeal in violating privacy.

This critique remains relevant to present-day concerns regarding digital hyperreality and its pornography, where, instead of peep-show models, pornographic photography and videos of real people cater to voyeuristic fantasies. This hyperreality is exacerbated through the very clear and direct link between the fantasised and objectified figures online and real people, unseen but affected by others' voyeuristic perceptions of them. Also, unlike the peep-show, online content typically does nothing to redirect or challenge the voyeur's objectification. In summary, the peep-show demonstrates the way in which erotic fantasy does not exist in a vacuum, emphasising the interchangeability of reality and hyperreal fantasy in the novel as it corresponds to Carter's ideas of moral pornography. In doing so, Carter deconstructs and degrades the idea of an inner self and of privacy: voyeuristic desire cannot co-exist with privacy when the existence of one necessitates the violation of the

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[28] Baudrillard, *Simulations and Simulacra,* p. 2
[29] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography,* (Great Britain: Virago, 1979), p. 22

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other. Furthermore, Hoffman's machines allow sexual desire to shape the novel's world, unknowingly anticipating certain parts of our own online world today.

A clear example of the way in which violations of privacy can degrade the inner self occurs when the Minister is exposed to his own reflection:

> 'The Ambassador produced a small mirror from his pocket and
>
> presented it to the Minister, so that he saw his own face. The Minister
>
> covered his eyes and screamed but almost at once regained his
>
> composure and went on paring the skin from his apple' (*DH*; p. 38)

The fact that the Minister's primal reaction to seeing his reflection is one of extreme distress encapsulates the way in which being seen alters self-image. The Minister momentarily cannot continue his established composure and rationality when faced with the fact that others can perceive him, and may not view him in the way he would like to be viewed. This is similar to the alienation involved in Lacan's mirror stage, where a reflection is an 'epistemological void', and yet influences self-concept in a very drastic way.[30] However, while Lacan's mirror-stage provokes fascination with the ideal self-image, the Minister's horrified reaction to his reflection suggests that it is one he would disavow. It also links to Mulvey's related work on gaze, specifically where 'the male figure cannot bear the burden' of lacking control in how they are perceived (such as objectification).[31] This then contextualises the Minister's distress as gendered, where Minister's self-image of rationality and objectivity is hegemonically masculine. Finally, the excerpt demonstrates a contrast between the Minister's screaming, volatile initial reaction and the then corrected, calm, demeanour. This indicates an inner self that the Minister would like to keep private, which is separate from his outward persona. This suggests that the Ambassador violates the Minister's privacy by revealing his reflection, and so the Minister briefly has his more vulnerable inner self taken away from him and displayed to any onlooker. Furthermore, the fact that the Minister 'almost

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[30] Bowie, *Lacan,* p. 23

[31] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* p. 20

at once' reverts to his previous demeanour displays the way in which a violation of privacy can repress and degrade an inner self: the discomfort and humiliation involved in his exposed reflection reaffirms to the Minister that the only palatable personality is the rational, composed, and objective one that he chooses to express to others.

Excluding the Minister's reflection, most violations of privacy in *Hoffman* are sexual. In fact, Hoffman's desire machines are generated by many couples having sex, 'paired in these mesh cubicles so that they can all see one another- if they bother to look, of course, and hear one another, if they can hear, that is; and so, if necessary, receive a constant refreshment from the visual and audial stimuli' (*DH*; p. 261). This very public sexual display is a violation of privacy- not only is sex itself literally violative, but the possibility of observation is also violative. However, the couples appear unbothered by their exposed state, which corresponds to Carter's views in *The Sadeian Woman*, where she argues that sex causes its participants to 'cease to be themselves'.[32] In line with this, the lovers in *Hoffman* do not appear conscious of their lack of privacy because they participate in the ultimate degradation of the self: sex anonymises, and this anonymisation is exacerbated by the fact that each individual is viewed as a part of a nameless crowd of lovers. While this suggests that, ironically, anonymity is created from the violation of privacy, the degradation of the inner self resolves this initial contradiction: if people 'cease to be themselves' during sex, then that demonstrates the loss of a self. This means that anonymity serves no purpose when privacy is continually violated to the point where there is no self to regain- hence the lovers' lack of shame or awareness of their public indiscretion. Further clarifying this interpretation, the lovers are viewed as generators for Hoffman's desire machines, objectifying and reducing them to their generative functionality and lacking any sort of humanisation within the text.

Overall, Carter experiments with ideas of privacy in *Hoffman*, often in ways that can be used to reflect on our present-day relationship with privacy. This is due to the underlying

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[32] Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* p. 9

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similarity that privacy is 'largely… an illusion' in both *Hoffman* and present-day reality.[33] As a result of this lack of privacy, the inner self is continually degraded, shown by the Minster, until there is no inner self at all, as with Hoffman's generators. However, Carter does not envision a way to preserve an inner self in *Hoffman*: by the end of the novel, Desiderio survives Hoffman's unreality, but is consequentially 'no longer the "I" of my own story' (*DH*; p. 7), exemplifying the loss of an inner self. Evidently, in *Hoffman*, the continual violation of privacy degrades the inner self to the point where self-concept is reliant on the perceptions of others.

'Our work is their pleasure': Performance, Audience, and the Panoptic Arena in *Nights at the Circus*

Returning to Andermahr's assertion that Carter's novels possess 'a fascination with… spectacle', *Nights at the Circus* very overtly links to this argument.[34] The novel also associates spectacle and performance with privacy and the inner self and identity. In doing so, *Nights at the Circus* focuses on the power dynamics of performance. This includes the way in which power is performed and therefore made visually tangible. For example, as previously mentioned, the novel makes use of the panopticon, a significant concept when discussing the relationship between privacy and authority. The panopticon is found in a women's prison in Siberia, where:

> during the hours of darkness, the cells were lit up like so many small
>
> theatres in which each actor sat by herself in the trap of her visibility
>
> in those cells shaped like servings of baba au rhum. The Countess,
>
> in the observatory, sat in a swivelling chair whose speed she could
>
> regulate at will. Round and round she went, sometimes at a great

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[33] Kerr and Barrigar, 'Privacy, Identity and Anonymity' in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies,* p.388

[34] Andermahr, 'Carter's Literary Legacy', p. 25

> rate, sometimes slowly, raking her ice-blue eyes- she was of
>
> Prussian extraction-the tier of unfortunate women surrounding her.
>
> She varied her speeds so that the inmates were never able to guess
>
> beforehand at just what moment they would come under
>
> surveillance.[35]

This surveillance centres the power structures involved in the ability to preserve one's own privacy whilst violating others'. While the prisoners are subject to the observation and violation of the Countess, she remains unseen, and her privacy remains secure. Furthermore, the Countess is also a convicted criminal, and is therefore just as socially undesirable as the other prisoners, yet she is in charge of them. This reveals the way in which the panopticon's power dynamic relates to privacy, where *because* it is more private, the observatory is the prison's seat of power.

Significantly, the panopticon-prison's cells are likened to 'small theatres' containing a single actor, which links to the theme of performance and theatricality. For example, the association between prisoners and performers highlights the way in which a circus arena acts as a kind of inverse panopticon, where the performers on stage are surrounded by potential observers, but do not know which audience members are observing them at any given time. Given the way in which a panopticon gives power to those who are able to preserve their own privacy whilst violating others', the audience in their anonymity possess power over the circus's performers. An example of this in application, and how the inverse panoptic circus arena relates to questions of identity, is through the characterisation and breakdown of Buffo the clown. Linden Peach notes that 'the clowns occupy a particularly ex-centric position, they are outside the privilege of established culture and as masks they are also outside themselves'.[36] In relation to my argument, the clowns are outside the privilege of established culture because their privacy is continually violated in the circus arena, and

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[35] Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus,* 1984 (UK: Vintage, 2006), p. 248. All subsequent quotations will be to this edition and noted in text thus: (*NC*; p. *n*)

[36] Peach, *Angela Carter,* p. 140

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that violation is also why a clown becomes, as Peach puts it, outside himself. Buffo acknowledges this, claiming that without his clown makeup, he is 'nobody at all… merely not-Buffo. An absence. A vacancy' (*NC*; p. 142). Essentially, the powerlessness involved in the violation of privacy strips away Buffo's sense of self, leaving him as 'not-Buffo'. This is to the point of having an on-stage nervous breakdown, exemplifying an increasingly destabilised and degraded inner self. Furthermore, the publicity and loss of dignity during the breakdown is a huge violation of privacy in its own right. Carter further emphasises the power relations involved in this through the behaviour of Buffo's clown co-stars during the breakdown, who are 'concerned only to give the illusion of intentional Bedlam, for the show must go on' (*NC*; p. 208). Even during what could easily be considered a medical emergency, the observing audience must be catered to first and foremost, as that is the nature of the power dynamic in the panoptic arena.

While Buffo's privacy and inner self falls victim to the power dynamic associated with the panoptic arena, Carter uses the character of Fevvers to illuminate the possibilities available to the performer to preserve their privacy where they can. As a winged woman 'twice as large as life' (*NC*; p. 13*)*, Fevvers's size and form already make it difficult to pursue a private life. As a result, Fevvers must utilise the public nature of her appearance to her advantage, maintaining control over her identity. She therefore incorporates performance as a tool to reshape others' perceptions of her and becomes an *aerialiste*. Walser, the focalised perspective of much of the novel, notes that if Fevvers were not famous:

> 'she would no longer be an extraordinary woman, no more the
>
> Greatest *Aerialiste* in the world but- a freak. Marvellous, indeed, but a
>
> marvellous monster, an exemplary being denied the human privilege
>
> of flesh and blood, always the object of the observer, never the
>
> subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged. (*NC;* p.
>
> 188)

Carter heavily ties this problem to the fact that it would prevent privacy, emphasising that Fevvers would exist as 'the object of the observer' even if she were not a public figure. This demonstrates that, as privacy is not an easily available option for Fevvers, it is better to make that a part of a chosen lifestyle, such as a circus performer. Paulina Palmer notes that Fevvers 'strives- often precariously- to elude male control, and remains in general, triumphantly in charge of her own production'.[37] However, by saying this, Palmer reduces Fevvers's predicament to her womanhood, ignoring other intersectional factors: it is not just male control, but any control, that Fevvers eludes, because by conventional standards, anyone, male or female, would typically view Fevvers as a freakish oddity for having wings.

With this in mind, Fevvers does not only become a public figure to reframe her lack of privacy as a lifestyle choice, but she also utilises branding and persona to manipulate the way in which the audience will view her. Firstly, her slogan, 'is she fact or is she fiction' (*NC*; p. 3) transforms her wings from a freakish difference into a potential gimmick, protecting her against being seen as 'a marvellous monster'. Secondly, she also brands herself as renowned for 'her inaccessibility' (*NC*; p. 18), to the point where even her London dressing room is virtually anonymous, as 'a reminder to the visitor of that part of herself which, off-stage, she kept concealed' (NC; p. 11). This redefines her as an enigma, where the audience, even in the panoptic arena, is compelled to acknowledge that Fevvers exists outside of her performances, and that they do not know that part of her life. This counteracts the possible dehumanisation involved in being both a performer and a winged woman, as her branding makes it clear that she has a full private life and inner self in the same way that any audience member (or person) does. By design of this branding, however, the audience is not given any indication of what Fevvers's life and personality outside of performance may be like. As a result, while Fevvers avoids dehumanisation, she is not humanised. Instead, she is viewed as a symbol of hope for the turn of the century. The emergent effect of

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[37] Paulina Palmer, 'Gender as performance in the fiction of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood' in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism,* 1997, eds. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (Online Edition: Routledge, 2014) p. 73

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dehumanisation paired with symbolisation means that Fevvers's inner self cannot be degraded through a violation of privacy, because the general public does not know enough about the inner self to degrade it. Instead, she is incomprehensible, either fact or fiction.

Carter is careful to note that Fevvers' approach is flawed: Fevvers's attempts to preserve privacy are somewhat too dependent on an audience, as without one, her protective branding serves no purpose. When the circus train is derailed, and thus the audience and panoptic arena are removed, Carter changes the form of *Nights at the Circus* so that the final part of the novel is told from Fevvers's first-person perspective. This means that the reader is finally given access to her inner consciousness, a violation of privacy on a meta-fictional level. As a result, the work undertaken by Fevvers to preserve privacy is undone the moment there is no possibility of an available audience for whom to perform, undermining the idea that privacy can be preserved entirely.   Furthermore, while violations of privacy degrade the inner self, preserving privacy prevents self-expression: when the inner self is continually hidden to avoid its degradation, then the endeavour is arguably pointless, because the self exists to be expressed. Fevvers is noted to 'grow more and more like [her] own publicity' (*NC;* p. 232) as the novel progresses, indicating that, if the self is not expressed, and privacy is preserved too consistently, then performative branding will encroach on the inner self's integrity. Carter brings these two weaknesses together when Fevvers observes that, throughout her life, she has perceived herself 'in the third person as though… I watched … but did not live' (*NC;* p. 348). Essentially, Fevvers caters to an audience, so can only view herself through the eyes of an audience member, preventing natural self-expression. This ultimately suggests that preserving privacy as a singular goal can be counter-productive, as it prevents the ability to 'live'. In writing this, Carter makes it clear that there is no easy solution to balancing the preservation of privacy and self-expression- instead, the relationship between privacy and identity is a complex one that is often contradictory and impossible to resolve conclusively.

Conclusion

Overall, *Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus* present privacy in different contexts. *Hoffman* presents the effects of decentralised and uncontrollable privacy and violations thereof, anticipatory of our present-day concerns with the topic. Conversely, *Nights at the Circus*'s privacy tends to correspond to pre-existing power structures, where the more powerful are able to be more private as a direct result of their power. The result of these contexts remains the same, wherein a violation of privacy degrades the inner self, and it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a self-concept that is not reduced to the perceptions of others. Fevvers is the only character of either text to manage to preserve an inner self to any degree, but even this comes at the expense of the ability to engage with her own identity. In short, *Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus* can demonstrate that privacy challenges the stability of the inner self without, as postmodern literary criticism on Carter has often done, dismissing its existence entirely. Ultimately, privacy and the self in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus* are closely connected, where power and authority (and who possesses these things) influence the nature of that connection from character to character.

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