

VERTIGO OF EXCESS

ANGELA CARTER'S BAROQUE IN
PEEP-SHOW AND CINEMA

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RMA COMPARATIVE LITERARY STUDIES

THESIS

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Vertigo of Excess

Angela Carter's Baroque in Peep-shows¹ and Cinema

‘Looking is such a marvelous thing, of which we know but little; through it, we are turned absolutely towards the Outside, but when we are most of all so, things happen in us that have waited longingly to be observed, and while they reach completion in us, intact and curiously anonymous, *without our aid*, - their significance grows up in the object outside.’ (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Letters*, 1902-1926)²

The look will cut both ways, suggests Mary Ann Caws. Dalí and Buñuel cut the eye in their surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* – a female eye – while the eyes of the audience are glued to the screen. The surrealists wanted to interrupt that cinematic skewering, but the flickering image in the dark seductively beckons hordes of spectators into its warm womb. Especially in its early days, the theatre showed a ghostly, airy projection of images in deafening silence. Black shadows contour white forms emerging from the screen of dream visions. In 1926, Virginia Woolf sat in the film theatre and watched *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* when a speck of dirt on the film stock quivered and bulged enlarged on the screen. “The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself,” Woolf observed. After diagnosing early cinema with parasitic behaviour ransacking the treasures of literature, Woolf saw in the blemish on the film stock a potential to communicate ‘visual emotion’:

“We should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collision. The most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain; the dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened rooms, could be realized before our waking eyes.”

Woolf eulogises this cinematic potential to violently and passionately involve spectators by showing a reality within reality; by relying on its own devices of speed, suggestiveness, and the large screen. Cinema projects through its artificial lens dreams of desire in a blown-up

¹ In this thesis, the hyphenated form “peep-show” will be used, according to Carter’s spelling in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* that this thesis refers to.

² As quoted in English translation by Mary Ann Caws as the epigraph to her *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter*.

peep-show. The public space enlarges private cabinets. Woolf watched *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, in which delusion and illusion are projected, complicit with trauma and involuntary repetition. The asylum director and hypnotiser beckons the spectators behind the curtains of his circus-like cabinet. Woolf watched a horror film in which fear figured only accidentally: the tadpole rather than the acting. The visual emotion of fear is invoked by the transience of the immaterial – because projected - image. The thrill of cinematic performance lies with the curiosity towards what is waiting in the curtains, in the shadows, the spectacle that is waiting in the darkness. It is a continuation of the fascination with the invisible presence of the secret contents of wonder cabinets, peep-shows, and even the human mind. The attraction is an *elsewhere* that can be as visually allusive as Woolf's tadpole.

Comfortable seats of red, soft matter offer a warm welcome in the dark. As if the spectators collectively crawl back into the womb to see their deepest, darkest wishes come true. In an uncanny movement, the taboo desire to return to the mother is played out with every ticket bought at the box office, as Freud would have it, “the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence” (qtd in Royle 142). The desire for that dark, enclosed space, Nicholas Royle inferred from Freud, is uncannily related to live burial. Womb to tomb is temporarily interrupted by the phantasy of tomb to womb. Woolf looked at the tomb, at the “the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures” and saw film live on the repository of literary material available. Robert Coover paid cinema back and wrote in *Night at the Movies; Or, You Must Remember This* short stories about the projector, the pictures, the cinema, and looking itself: “‘What’s frightening,’ an on-screen detective says, is ‘discovering that what you think you see only because you want to see it . . . sees you’” (Evenson 182). Coover looked over his shoulder in the theatre when the credits rolled, and Angela Carter looked along, over his shoulder, as a double. See them, “all sitting stiffly in their seats with weird flattened-out faces, their dilated eyes locked onto the screen like they’re hypnotized or dead or something” (“Robert Coover: A Night at the Movies” 284). Emotionally transported, longing for catharsis and wish-fulfilment, perhaps the spectators bear in them more of western mythology than the ghosts on the screen.

“I’m in the demythologising business,” Angela Carter explains her work (“Notes from the Front Line” 38). That business is run by her pen and her research, producing fiction as “investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives” (38). In her novels, we are forced to look back into the dark theatre and watch the death masks of our culture. For example, the mask of gender is on display in Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*. The protagonist Evelyn

whimpers in the narrative when he is forced to become Eve. The Goddess in charge of his transformation smacks him and demands: “Is it such a bad thing to become like me?” (68). The transformation itself testifies of the constructability of gender. The surgically new Eve is locked up: “Now my cell was never silent” as on its walls femininity and motherhood are projected in her education to become a woman:

“every single Virgin and Child that had ever been painted in the entire history of Western European art, projecting upon my curving wall I real-life colours and blown up to larger than life size, accompanied by a sound track composed of the gurgling of babies and the murmuring of contented mothers.” (72)

Here is a social fiction torn apart: the discussion of ‘nature or nurture’ here shows that nature might need only a bit of nurturing. We follow Evelyn like Alice through the rabbit hole, “Down, down, down into the dark, down into a soft, still, warm, inter-uterine, symmetrical place hung with curtains of crimson plush, into a curtained cabinet” (69). Eve’s “psycho-surgery” is presented as a cinema, its images projected larger than life into that intra-uterine space (72). In this narrative, Carter presents two most female women of the world, both created by cinema, who both have been men all along. The private films, the surgery in the operating theatre – it takes the public and the private to construct gender. Piece by piece, Carter presents a fiction of social constructs: manners maketh a man, then Carter shifts the manners and makes him the perfect woman.

In baroque style, Carter exploits wilful excessiveness, the airy scene, the filling of empty space and the overall ornateness that figure in her prose. Carter enlarges myth, throws neighbouring images on a pile, so that – for example – *The Passion of New Eve* becomes both a tale of suffering and a tale of a female Messiah and, on top of that, a herald of a new age. All at once. The Baroque transports on its wings a new understanding of Carter’s fictions and her research method on social constructs. The construct, most of all, finding its way in the seductiveness of the artifice. Her first novel, *Shadow Dance*, opens with “The bar was a mock-up, a forgery, a fake; an ad-man’s crazy dream” (1) and ends with “Morris vanished into the shadows” (182), as if the fiction fools the reader by being, in a sense, a mock-up itself, a staged theatre play before our eyes. The power of excess through the lens of fiction projects upon the reading mind true iconoclasm: the clash of icons that then break from facts into constructs. Carter zooms in on the blemishes on the projected ideal, found in the past that has “important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based” (“Notes from the Front Line” 41). Her narratives are garbled,

gnarled interpretations of western mythology: dream visions, hallucinations, and folk stories such as the fairy tale updated to the twentieth century.

This research will analyse the Baroque as a productive entrance into the works of fiction of Angela Carter. This will be done through close analysis of the place of Surrealism, the peep-show, and cinema in Carter's works of fiction and journalism, for their themes of vision and performance so characteristic of the Baroque.

Baroque as a literary term is first and foremost borrowed from the art historians and describes a style of architecture, sculpture, and painting that emerged in Italy at the beginning of the seventeenth century. René Wellek traces the migration of the term throughout the continent: how in retrospect art historians, philosophers and literary critics found the term useful to describe literature produced during the late Renaissance, as a reaction against the repose of Antiquity. The most productive site for the Baroque turned out to be Germany. England was replete with style indications for the seventeenth century: late Renaissance, Cavalier, Puritan, metaphysical... There was simply no space for the Baroque at the time and back then it was still mostly a pejorative term. It meant 'bizarre', 'strange': nearly all sources say 'Baroque' comes from 'barrueco', which means an "oddly shaped pearl" (Wellek 77). Wellek, however, traces the word to 'baroco': "the name for the fourth mode of the second figure in the scholastic nomenclature of syllogisms" (Wellek 77). Dizzying vertigo so characteristic of the Baroque creeps on its definition. This syllogism was an outmoded, far-fetched one in 1519 already, an example: "Every fool is stubborn; some people are not stubborn, hence some people are not fools" (Wellek 77). Baroque was bizarre, strange, monstrous, asymmetrical, always already *slightly off*. However, the image of the oddly shaped pearl stuck to the Baroque, even after Wellek reasoned that this image must be abandoned. Baroque never stuck to reason faithfully, anyway. In everyday use, the Baroque is now paired with grandeur, splendour, pomposity and stunning greatness. More pearl than odd shape.

Baroque came after the Renaissance, after the appeal of antiquity for perfection, the ideal, the golden ratio. The image of the misshapen pearl stuck to the Baroque: it is something precious and beautiful but never pointing at the serene perfection Renaissance art sought. Rather, like Roy Daniells argues, the Baroque "may be regarded as the logical continuation and extension of High Renaissance art, with conscious accentuation and 'deformation' of the regular stock of techniques" (117). Daniells introduces the term 'significant darkness', because the Baroque, according to him, is not about the clear outlines but about the shadow that brings the form out. A change of aesthetics: beauty is no longer in the perfect symmetry,

but rather in “successful asymmetries”; a “change from absolute clarity, in which the artist aims at explicitness, to relative clarity where beauty is perceived in the very darkness which modifies the forms” (Daniells 117, 118). The elsewhere, the idea of shadows, of a behind the scenes, of the invisible, becomes part of the aesthetics of the Baroque. Daniells sees it as the production of the “seventeenth-century sense of fundamental mystery” (118). The Baroque reverses the stage, the curtains, the darkness, the illusion. Rather than a blinding limelight, the shadows are enjoyed as thrilling backdrop.

The Baroque is in complicity with trauma, the wound of the oddly shaped pearl. In the wake of World War II, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* published in 1946 a special issue on the Baroque as style in various arts. After two world wars of bombing, fighting, loss, and disgust with fascism, the journal points back to seventeenth century Italian architectural tradition. The journal takes on the task of disentangling notions of Baroque that have grown wild especially – as Wellek writes – in German academics. In the ashes of war, the scholars look at the reaction on Protestant reformation, the reaction on the rigidity of the Renaissance. They look, moreover, from their American headquarters to the English-language appreciation of the continental style. In telescopic view, Wellek accounts for the American halt on the blindly groping arms of vague definition: “Here in America, where we are unimpeded or uninspired by the sight of baroque buildings and even pseudo-baroque imitations and can think of baroque only as an episode in Colonial literature, nothing prevents the spread of the term. On the contrary, there is the danger (...) that it will be bandied about too freely and will soon lose any definite meaning” (85). The style that gives wings is apparently held to the ground by its buildings on the continent. In the wake of WWII, the journal turns away from the Renaissance, Enlightenment, humanism belief in progress – the projection straight into the future, and turns back on the monumental carnival of odd shapes in the Baroque.

Several scholars have pointed out that there are roughly two uses for the word Baroque. The first is its use in the historical sense, pointing at seventeenth century architecture, sculpture and painting. The second is to denote a baroque style, applicable on works of art in other periods than the historical Baroque. In its broadest sense, Jakob Burckhardt argued that “every style has its *rococo*³: a late, florid, decadent state” (Wellek 77). It was only in 1888 that the term ‘baroque’ was used in music and literature by Heinrich Wölfflin, who based the characteristics of the Baroque on those of typically baroque

³ Although rococo often refers to the late Baroque, Burckhardt was known to use ‘baroque’ and ‘rococo’ interchangeably (Wellek 77).

paintings, architecture and sculpture. The problem with the appreciation of especially literature as baroque was the lack of a unified movement in seventeenth century literature to base a theory on. Hence Thomas Munro's warning for resorting to abstract styles or types, not least in danger of oversimplification of the style. In accordance with Wolfgang Stechow⁴, Munro warns: to what extent is the ambiguous name 'Baroque' clarificatory if you mean something else? In Carter's case, the Baroque brings metaphors of air, lenses, time-lapses and the bricolage of the old-fashioned with the futuristic that tie together with the 'marvellous alone is beautiful' in the oddly shaped pearl. The Baroque as an aesthetics of wilful excess and visual emotion offers new insights into Carter's fiction.

Carter, who studied English, specialised in mediaeval studies. Carter's curriculum shows an interest in the history of the English language: her biographer lists literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, practical criticism, the growth of the English language, Old English, and Saxon art and civilisation (Gordon 68). Her choice at Bristol University was between the rigid school of F.R. Leavis under L.C. Knights (founding editor of *Scrutiny*, a journal led by F.R. Leavis) and the realm of imagination and raucousness found in the mediaeval department under A. B. Cottle, "a man of eclectic interests, ranging from etymology, archaeology and church history to the composition of limericks, literary spoofs and comic pantomimes" (Gordon 70). Carter's biographer points out that although Carter had several corresponding aesthetic opinions on literature as the Leavisite school, "she wouldn't have liked being told what to like, nor would she have approved of the idea that 'seriousness' was the ultimate literary virtue" (Gordon 69). It was the mediaeval department led by the eccentric A. B. Cottle in which Carter pursued her academic interests: "the bawdy, romantic, folklorish tradition of Chaucer, Langland and the Gawain poet" (Gordon 70). These studies were to Carter a "constant source of delight" (qtd in Gordon 70). Her biographer writes that Carter's academic interests shaped her way of looking at the world and found its way into her fiction (71).

In the history of English literature, the seventeenth century period was long considered Late Renaissance and the realm of the metaphysical poets. The Baroque carried historically negative connotations of the bizarre and the grotesque. Increasingly, theory of English literature has opened to the idea that the Baroque and the metaphysical are close. J. W. van Hook considered the conceit and found Samuel Johnson's oft-quoted definition insufficient:

⁴ "Why speak of baroque when we mean pompous, bombastic, grandiloquent, grandiose, heroic, dynamic or deeply emotional?" (Stechow 113)

instead, “Baroque poetics [...] offers contemporary insights into both the metaphysical conceit and the world view it derives from and expresses” (24). Instead of emphasising on a difference between ‘continental Baroque’ and ‘English metaphysical poetry’, the metaphysical poetry is rather a version of baroque sensibility. R.A. Sayce deals with a similar problem, looking at the application of the Baroque to French literature. Although the conclusion insists on a difference between the broader Baroque as found in Germany and Italy and the seventeenth century literature in France, Sayce argues that “the baroque forms a division, a species, and such categories as metaphysical, *précieux*, burlesque, Gongorism, and so on may best be regarded as subdivisions or subspecies” (251). John Douglas Canfield reads in Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673) and Katherine Philips (1632-1664) metaphysical conceits deployed “in a baroque playfulness that is both blasphemous and subversive” (35, 41). In relation to Carter’s Baroque, it is interesting to note that the subversiveness Canfield alludes to is about female agency. In short, the metaphysical tradition in English literature is increasingly regarded as a subspecies of the Baroque.

Aside from studying sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature, Carter read Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* at the time: “The language of psychoanalysis thrilled her, unlocking as it did a dark tapestry of symbolism – not unlike the violent and suggestive imagery of medieval literature – in everyday discourse” (Gordon 70-1). Carter’s essay “The Alchemy of the Word” as well as her biography show an affinity with Surrealism, be it short-lived. The surrealists looked at reality *within* reality, the latent meaning under the manifest world. An insistence on dreams and hallucinations pervades Carter’s fictions and the surrealists’ experiments. Carter’s emphasis on looking and seeing that is inherently baroque, is, in a way, also surrealist. Mary Ann Caws investigated the surrealist look in relation to the Baroque and argues that “the baroque approach teaches us to think about reversals, upside-downness, and in-outness” with a “fascination with what is complex, multiple, clouded, and changeable” (4). The appreciation of mutability and transience she recognises in Surrealism: “In surrealism nothing stays where it should or used to” (Caws 4). The Baroque in its theatricality plays with the visible and the invisible, the onstage and the offstage, and allows for hallucinatory uncertainty. In relation to Surrealism, Caws argues, “The baroque sensibility and techniques have an urgent application in the world of surrealism and its reversal of words, thoughts and concepts and its exuberant ways of thinking and expressing in general” (8). Firstly, the Baroque is already inscribed into the history of Surrealism. In the first issue of the surrealist journal *Minotaure* the article “Remarque sur le baroque” appears (Caws 8). One of

the most prominent members of the surrealist group in Paris, Robert Desnos, was inspired by the baroque poet Luis de Góngora (Caws 9). The affection for Góngora, Caws writes, was namely for “his reversals, twists, and serpentine constructions (9). The aesthetics of the Baroque and Surrealism correspond in the idea that beauty is deeply emotional and not necessarily based on the rational laws of, for example, the Renaissance.

The deeply emotional in Carter’s fiction takes on a violent and passionate form: her novels investigate desire itself. Carter described her intentions in fiction as follows: “What I *really* like doing is writing fiction and trying to work things out *that way*” (“Notes from the Front Line” 43). Her fiction contains traces of ideas taken from Surrealism, psychoanalysis and feminism, rendered in a baroque carnival of images. For example, in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* – published in America under the title *The War of Dreams* – the narrative takes place in a fictional war between Reason and Imagination. Dreams are made flesh by machines that materialize each and everyone’s desires. A reference to Surrealism cannot be unseen: Carter wrote about Surrealism, a movement that concerns itself with “a world transformed by imagination and desire. [...] the dream made flesh” (“The Alchemy of the Word” 509). The collective load of desires conjures in *The Infernal Desire Machines* a city in which “everything that could possibly exist, did so” (4).

The protagonist is called Desiderio. The name echoes Monsú Desiderio, the French seventeenth-century painter most famous for the painting of a violent explosion in a cathedral in stark *clair-obscur*. Recently, Monsú Desiderio is discovered to be not one, but three or even four painters: François de Nomé, Didier Barra, both from Metz and living in Naples, and one or two still unidentified painters of dream-like architecture (Michel 576). Desiderio in Carter’s novel is also doubled: he claims to have only one desire “for everything to stop” and the other moment he claims his only desire is for Albertina (4). As in a dream, the two ‘only one’ desires overlap, like the special effect in film of seeing two things at once – or its dream equivalent of seeing two possibilities at once. Desiderio saves the city by killing his one desire, although the murder merely prolongs his desire for the Other he could never fully possess.

Desiderio’s problem in *The Infernal Desire Machines* is not that he could not have Albertina. He had a chance to have her – to love her forever in the perpetual coupling machines. However, when Albertina drops her dress, Desiderio discovers that Albertina is not his projected desire anymore. He is awed that she is “more savagely and triumphantly beautiful than any imagining, my Platonic other, my necessary extinction, my dream made

flesh” (263). The carnival that ensues is the chaos that cannot last, the passion that rages and subsides, until everything returns to the way it was, the City returns as if nothing happened.

The desire of Desiderio proposes the hypothesis ‘if you have the possibility to possess the desired Other forever you are compelled to continue to desire’ This proposition is based on the fundamental lack at the base of Lacanian theory of desire: “The subject – lacking in being – is thus seen to consist in relation to, or a stance adopted with respect to, the Other’s desire as fundamentally thrilling and yet unnerving, fascinating and yet overwhelming or revolting” (Fink 12). So far, Desiderio’s relationship with Albertina in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* follows the logic of existing in relation to the Other and its emotional impact that is both unnerving and elevating – a baroque overwhelming. Carter’s fiction works with the ideas but not to come to a universal conclusion in the form of theory. Likewise, when Linda Williams investigated surrealist film and compared its experiments with the Lacan’s development of his psychoanalytic theory, the theory served to highlight a search for something that is not there. Williams concluded that: “Both the aesthetic enterprise of surrealist film and the interpretive enterprise of Lacanian psychoanalysis isolate the phenomenon of an absence that is infinitely desirable because never attainable” (210). This comparison allowed Williams to draw a clear distinction between the aim of surrealist film to unmask the central emptiness and the cathartic wish fulfilment that commercial films promise. Similarly, Carter’s novel differs from romances by working out questions of desire, stability and love by working with hypotheses and theories rather than proving them or illustrating them.

Carter is not a surrealist writer: she wrote that “The Surrealists were not good with women” (“The Alchemy of the Word” 512), and Daniel Cottom chimes in that “surrealism as a cultural movement was both male and patriarchal” (5). Both Whitney Chadwick and Katherine Conley confirm that, but show that women continue to be attracted to the movement without necessarily contributing to the core activities of Surrealism. Conley shows that the surrealist appropriation of femininity paved the way for feminism, that automatic writing gave way to *écriture féminine*, and that from the essentialism of the poet and the muse the muse was able to break free and claim her own voice. A similar movement can be found in Carter’s attitude towards the surrealists: “I thought they were wonderful [but] I wanted by fair share of the imagination, too” (“The Alchemy of the Word 512). The surrealists thought that women possessed a highway to the unconscious, that they were muses, inspiration, but they were never truly part of the Breton-led surrealist group. André Breton’s major works are about his *amours foux* but Conley shows that the women he wrote his books about one by one

disappointed him by being themselves and not his ideal Woman. In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Desiderio is likewise disappointed that Albertina is not the emanation of his own desires. In Surrealism, women could only be a medium, a vehicle for the Freudian desire for live burial, the transfer from tomb to womb. A vehicle as fleeting as a projected image. However, the novel concludes with the end of Desiderio's memoir. He closes his eyes, and "Unbidden, she comes" (271). The desire machines may be destroyed, but the involuntary repetition, the eternal return of trauma and desire persists. Nicholas Royle investigated the death drive in the uncanny, and found in in the Oedipal complex and its prohibition on incest that: "The death drive has to do with the figure of woman" (87). Carter's novel is not the slaughter of a woman in a passionate crime but involuntarily returns to the woman. She cannot be overlooked. Carter will not be overlooked, she just wants "an equal share in the right to vision" ("The Alchemy of the Word" 512).

The look cuts both ways, suggests Mary Ann Caws; both the Baroque and Surrealism operate with looking and being looked at. Carter looked in between, at "the difference between *seeing* and *looking*, and how, in the gap between looking and seeing, truth might lie" ("The Draughtsman's Contract" 377). In the gap, the eye sliced open by a rupture of social constructs and revealing their fictional status, Carter refers to an elsewhere *within* reality much as the surrealists and baroque poets did. By delighting in the misshapen, emphasising on the presence of the invisible right beyond the frame or the stage, Carter warns that our eyes may have deceived us for long. Her novels become a gallery of *trompe l'oeil*, offering what is familiar in a strange configuration. It is then all in the eye: the dizzying vertigo of excess of Carter's Baroque compels you to either close your eyes or surrender to the flight.

Carter goes Baroque

Visual Pleasure: The Winged Woman and the Baroque Castrato

Or:

The importance of seventeenth century love of excess to Carter's fiction

“‘Lor’ love you, sir!’ Fevvers sang out in a voice that clanged like dustbin lids. ‘As to my place of birth, why, I first saw the light of day right here in smokey old London, didn’t I! Not billed the “Cockney Venus”, for nothing, sir, though they could just as well ’ave called me “Helen of the High Wire”, due to the unusual circumstances in which I some ashore – fore I never docked via what you might call the *normal channels*, sir, oh, dear me, no; but, just like Helen of Troy, was *hatched*.” (*Nights at the Circus* 7)

Carter blasts out a winged woman in her eighth novel: one who dares to compare herself to Helen of Troy without donning elegance, grace and meekness for female attire. In just three sentences, Fevvers defies the typical myths of womanhood: beauty, meekness, and motherhood. The star, the *aerialiste*, is a creature of the air that rips farts – “better out than in, sir” – and lives on airs (11). She earns her fame and living by blowing up the question whether she is fact or fiction. Well, she hints that she dyes her wings, because – you see – she is not a *real* exotic bird but her natural colour “more the colour of that on my private ahem parts” is covered “in order to simulate more perfectly the tropic bird” (25). Despite her wings, Fevvers is nothing close to the ‘angel in the house’: neither the one painted on baroque ceilings nor the one from Coventry Patmore’s poem. Fevver’s exotic wings underline her otherness, her strangeness, her reluctance to be tied down. Even the brothel that Fevvers grew up in poses a counternarrative to the world’s oldest profession in terms of winged creatures: “Does that seem strange to you? That the caged bird should want to see the end of cages, sir?” (*Nights at the Circus* 38). The wings are first and foremost a site for symbolic messages as little Fevvers goes from little Cupid to Winged Victory to adorn the brothel where she learns to spread her wings.

Not one moment can Carter give the reader peace: in a littered yet anonymous dressing-room we are buried underneath foul stockings (and Carter is not afraid to underline their odour), we are appalled by the frothing of champagne in open pots of rouge, we are trapped in a kaleidoscope of past and present, wavering between one of Fevver’s shows, her rumoured fame, and the observations of a young reporter, Jack Walser, who himself “was a

kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness” (10). Carter never sides with any of the characters, changing the point of view when the reader is just getting comfortable. Just when the narrative seems to side with Walser, Carter throws the reader off balance: “You’d never think she dreamed, at nights, of bank accounts, or that, to her, the music of the spheres was the jingling of cash registers. Even Walser did not guess that” (12). No matter the point of view, like the planets of the solar system all the points ellipse around the bright star in the centre, the star in the limelight. Fevvers cannot be unseen once she enters the stage in the first sentence. We are forced to look.

“She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen, not handled. Look! Hands off! LOOK AT ME!” (15)

Fevvers enters as a baroque figure, a baroque character, as her body is the site in which the dynamic of time is inscribed.

“For we are at the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history. It is the final, waning, season of the year of Our Lord, eighteen hundred and ninety nine. And Fevvers has all the *éclat* of a new era about to take off.” (11)

Carter’s biographer Edmund Gordon describes her style as “Victorian bric-a-brac”, but the Victorian era was one of peace, prosperity, refined sensibilities and national self-confidence for the United Kingdom. Gordon may refer to the remnants of the era throughout Carter’s earlier novels in the form of old buildings and furniture, but the emphasis should be on ‘bric-a-brac’ before ‘Victorian’. The fragments, the remnants of grandeur in the setting of Carter’s fiction are rather frozen elements of the past in the present, like flies caught in amber, the inscription of time in space – the chaos of the Baroque rather than the stature of the Victorian. Carter’s novels are anything but peaceful and self-confident. Her stories are filled with grotesque characters, high passions, low hatred, ever growing desire. Carter’s novels pile up fragments, intertextuality, intermediality, myths and folk tales, so that a miracle might happen. Walter Benjamin diagnosed the Baroque with this tendency, “it is common practice in the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, and in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification” (qtd in Timothy Murray 7). The Baroque carries with it “the

process of storing and schemata to which the emergent libraries of the seventeenth century were a monument” (Murray 7). In fact, Carter’s fiction may be better described by ‘Baroque bric-a-brac’: extravagant, visual, grotesque, misshapen, attractive, seductive, passionate.

But what, exactly, is ‘Baroque’? A misshapen pearl, ‘*barrueco*’, the bizarre, the extravagant, the strange, the shocking, the freak – the monstrous and grotesque. Rudimentary art history in school teaches ‘Baroque’ as an architectural style in seventeenth century Europa, that which stands for the excessive grandeur of Italy, a climactic coda to the heights of Renaissance. Emblematic are the oval shape of the Piazza San Pietro, lined with columns for a cunning *trompe l’oeil*, and the twisted columns around the grave of the apostle himself. The twisting, gnarled lines lead the eye towards the heavens, the *oculus*, or the round aperture that offers an escape from the visual ecstasy. Yet René Wellek, who researched the use of baroque in literary scholarship, exhibits the diverse appearance of ‘Baroque’ in several European countries around the seventeenth century and after, and finds it has never precisely been a *universal* mode of ecstasy. The Baroque, it seems, imminently carries diversity, the idea that there is always too much, always more, always an elsewhere. Always an elsewhere was a popular feat: the Church could point to the heavens – *memento mori!* –, and the avid reader delighted in a genre that came from Spain a century earlier, the picaresque.

The roguish journey from the picaresque could transport its reader from scene to scene, its episodic nature and realistic low-life depictions shows how the ‘picaroon’ goes from employer to employer. There is always an elsewhere – and the roguish character will go there, without being the centre of attention. The Baroque curiosity towards the monstrous, grotesque and bizarre could find its way in the fantastical journeys of the picaroon. The rogue allows the reader to tag along and gaze into the far and wide territories presented in every scene. The baroque and the picaresque offer Carter a neutral space, a basic experimental ground that is both “gender-and-class-neutral” and has “structural affinity with the language of dream”, something her biographer found in her novels from *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* onwards (Gordon 176).

Baroque as a stylistic term was appropriated differently in European countries in and after the seventeenth century. The multiple stories of Baroque in different nations shows the place of the time. Baroque comes from a time before globalism and interconnectedness around the world. This fascinated Carter, whose picaresque journeys often lead to tribes that live outside of the time zones, outside of patriarchy, outside the Law yet inside their own

Law. Her picaresques allow for visits to possible worlds, such as the Siberian tribe in *Nights at the Circus* who live on the verge of the modern age:

“Yet, even then, even in these remote regions, in those days, those last, bewildering days before history, that is, history as we know it, that is, white history, that is, European history, that is, Yanqui history – in that final little breathing space before history *as such* extended its tentacles to grasp the entire globe, the tribespeople were already addicted to tea and handy with imported firearms and axes which they could not make themselves, being essentially Stone Age people. They knew more than they said. The future was more present to them than they were prepared to admit; every day they drank it and they handled it.” (265)

Baroque in its historical sense shows the division, the sense of nationality of a bygone age in which separate histories lived parallel, and that tumultuous time of excess is applied differently to different nations. Some nations needed the idea of the Baroque badly, and other nations were appalled by its underlying idea of the grotesque. Baroque, Wellek argues, is adopted in Germany because it found a vacuum, rejected in France because ‘bizarre’ did not match their ‘rule over passion’- mentality, was not welcomed by the English for its pejorative connotations and its clash with the ‘metaphysical’, and, lastly, was applied too freely by the Americans with the danger of losing any definite meaning (Wellek 85). Scholars tried to construct a duality between the Renaissance (including Classical Antiquity and Neo-Classicism) and the Baroque (paired with Gothic, Romanticism), drawn to extremity by saying that the Baroque is that which is “not flooded by the dry light of the intellect” (Wellek 86). An arbitrary line between the two architectural styles does not suffice when one is defined by negation only: Wellek presents in his essay the problem of defining a “baroque soul” (92). This soul is neither bound to any nation, religion, nor social class. Wellek offers the attempts of several scholars to define this ‘soul’, for example the idea that the Baroque is “feeling that life is a dream, an illusion or a mere spectacle” (93). A definition like this seems to befall the philosophy of Plato on life as a spectacle of shadows, and Surrealism in its experiments to tap into the unconsciousness in waking state, so that the Baroque as specific to the seventeenth century is emptied of any meaning. Wellek finally arrives at the conclusion that “it is a term which prepares for synthesis, draws our minds away from the mere accumulation of observations and facts” (97). One could even say that the Baroque, instead of drawing attention to itself or to the fragments, would seduce the eye to keep looking, far

beyond the oculus. It leads to something always elsewhere, not to itself. Drop the curtains, lights on: a wonderful performance.

Let's turn to Fevvers again, our winged woman who defies the angel in the house. Is she not a misshapen pearl, the Cockney Venus? Does she not defy nationality in her journey from Paris to London to St Petersburg to Siberia? She lives on her blonde appearance, her exotically coloured wings in bright red and purple – when her colours begin to fade in the Siberian tundra, we look not at a Wonder of the World but a misshapen pearl/girl. Only when the spotlights and the gazes in awe caress her singularity her shine resurrects. The freak as the quintessential baroque figure thrives on looking, the spectacle, ostentatiousness. 'Look at me,' Fevvers demands, and on we look.

Wellek struggles with the Baroque, with its problems of definition, yet we are haunted today by the spectacle of the Baroque in buildings on the continent. Like the Gothic mode and style are modelled on its buildings – the dark castles bearing connotations of a dark unconscious, an uneasy conscious even – so Baroque is burdened by its spatial representation frozen in time. Consider Versailles. Situated in a historical context of the absolute power of the Sun King, this French palace balances on a tension between the Classical and the Baroque. Louis Marin researched the place and space that constituted both Versailles and its Subject to arrive at the conclusion that

“Versailles is the result of a production, of a construction at once real, imaginary, and symbolic. Real, in that the palace exists: one can still visit it today. Imaginary, in that it reveals ‘baroque’ desire, the fantastic, the phantasmatic desire to show (oneself) as absolute power. Symbolic – since in some manner it is the sovereign Norm, the ‘classic’ Law of universal subjection to signs constituting a transcendent cultural and political universe devoid of civil and natural exteriority.” (168)

This interpretation shows that the ‘classic’ and the ‘baroque’ are not necessarily opposed, as many scholars tended to prove (Wellek). However, the function of both concepts is radically different: whereas the ‘classic’ lends itself for the production of law, for subjection, and the ideal of the static and stable, the ‘baroque’ is about desire, power, and intensity – movement and imminent desire. The static versus the flux.

The Baroque has place for passion and excess, while the classic is a mode of organization and order. Marin further investigates the difference between space and place, in that “*place* is determined by ‘beings-there,’ by presences (the dead body as the foundation of

a place, for example), as opposed to *space* which would be determined by the operations which specify it, that is by the actions of subjects, of historical subjects” (170-1). A space like Versailles creates Law, hierarchy, history, while a place like Versailles is the fertile ground for dreams and desire. Baroque architecture at its core is representation in action, “no longer a façade, but a machine for producing effects” (Marin 173). Versailles, the desire machine that materialized the Sun King’s desire for absolute power, became prosthesis to his monarchic body: “The one represents the other, the second performs the first, and the monarch in his palace, visited by his subjects, is like an Argus with a hundred eyes that no gaze can escape; he is at one and the same time the castle that continually expands in space and time, and that castle’s center, the heart which gives it its meaning admitting structures that punctuate and articulate this space and this time, and legitimate its symbolic reality” (Marin 181). An early panopticon, the palace embodies the Baroque ‘look at me!’ while maintaining the passions in a classic structuring. Classic architecture is complemented by that of the baroque to come to its powerful climax.

Wellek failed to find a baroque style or ‘soul’ in 1946; it is the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze who unearths Leibniz’s philosophy and consequently wrote in 1991: “The Baroque does not refer to an essence, but rather to an operative function, to a characteristic. It endlessly creates folds” (227). Like the curtains of theatre, like veiled dancers, the Baroque then seduces by the eternal promise of more, of elsewhere, of behind, because “what is on view is inside” (232). Consider the *trompe l’oeil* that refers to what is not there, what relies on the illusion, on the workings of the eye of the beholder for its *effect*. Deleuze writes of a Baroque that is always double, folded, “organized according to two vectors: a sinking downward and an upward pull” (234), but also the presence of double narrative, “the world of two stories, separated by a fold which reverberates on both sides in accordance with different orders” (235). The productivity of the Baroque then lies in its allowance for more, the hope for a miracle by stacking fragment upon fragment, only separated by that fold that is never a definitive border. “The fold is inseparable from the wind,” Deleuze writes, the air being the element of Baroque, of desire, the whirlwind (237). Wellek found difficulty in defining a characteristic proper to Baroque, and through the fold Deleuze completes the work: “in all other cases the fold remains limited while in the Baroque it experiences a limitless release” (241). The Baroque is excess and limitless release: “The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, make it go through the roof, take it to infinity” (242). Enter Carter’s baroque character: the winged woman who cannot be stopped, who is pulled upward by her

wings and sinks downward in her humanity. Carter's creature of the wind is no longer baroque in her static state, when she traverses Siberia on the Siberian Express, but upon freedom her airiness returns. There is always more, Carter hints, as off-hand remarks propel the reader into the folds behind the folds, alternately following Walser, then Fevvers, then Walser, then the ladies of the panopticon, then back, then back. The baroque fold, Deleuze concludes, has a "corresponding status as power of thought and political force" (247). An intellectual game as well as a powerful device, the Baroque is a desire machine: both a machine produced from desire as well as a machine producing desire in the beholder.

Further into the device that is Baroque, its pulleys and strings are made of theatricality. The Baroque is a mode of artificiality and theatre. The fold is in the importance of onstage and offstage, as John D. Lyons researched. The baroque mode that demands to be seen is based largely on that which is *unseen*. Lyons writes that "external space is frequently associated with illusion and the fantastic, not only the illusion of the visual artistry or distortion which points towards such space – like the 'fake windows for symmetry' which Pascal ridicules in his *Pensées* – but also the illusions of uncontrolled imagination which populate that space" (75). The external becomes a site of creation, a space continually under construction, something closely related to the primordial energies of the *id*. Hence, "the baroque seems to require that a space be maintained for the uncertain. What is onstage cannot be doubted; therefore not only must the offstage exist, but rules for preventing the collapse of the offstage into the onstage must be observed" (89). This allows for the artificiality that is observed in an otherwise 'free' Baroque: the precise details in what is seen in baroque art and literature provide for a space unseen, uncertain, invisible. In theatre, the unity of place becomes a method for providing through speech and language a world *outside*: "the multiplicity of unseen places is protected from our eyes and made available to language" (89). The fold appears in a new disguise in its importance to the Baroque, "an aesthetic and an epistemology of the border; of frames, mirrors, galleries, and gardens" (90). The border, the fold, implies an outside that both sinks and pulls in the dual vectors of movement in Baroque.

Let us return to Fevvers journey, her picaresque: Carter plays with the onstage and offstage, with borders and mirrors, always framed and hinting at the world beyond that is always referred to but never reached. The artfulness of Fevvers's performance is always part of the desire provoked: thus only, can the promise for more be eternally fulfilled.

Performance is the trope of the Baroque: its love of excess wants to be seen and promises that there is always yet more to see. Its form in art and architecture is that of time inscribed on spatiality, of space formed into a dynamic illusion of time passing – yet in possession of an uncanny frozen moment. The Baroque seduces the onlooker to visual transportation, an emotional trip, in which the eyes guide the heart relentlessly. The Baroque is a mode that requires a body to experience its intensity. The Baroque lives on the importance of seeing and looking and elaborately constructed artificiality. The quintessential baroque figure is the one body in which time is arrested surgically, the one who exalted his spectators by divine beauty and virtuosity, and most of all the one on the most intense stage of exaggeration possible: that of opera. This figure is the castrato.

The castrato is an uneasy figure in the twenty-first century, the man without his masculinity. The discomfort inherent to the figure of the castrato, Roger Freitas argues, stems from contemporary predispositions about gender. After Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) developed his theory on desire as power flowing between Subject and Object and the problem of Lack, the phallus became “the ultimate – and ultimately unattainable – symbol of desire fulfilled” (Freitas 199). Add to that the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) whose interpretation of dreams and theory of the unconscious modelled the figure of Woman as hysteric, who suffered from problems situated in her uterus, whose dreams always contained condensations, displacements and distortions latently expressing the wish for the phallus. As for the castrato, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) interpreted *Sarrasine* by Honoré de Balzac, casting the castrate outside of the dynamics of erotic appeal. In *S/Z* he composes what Freitas calls “perhaps the most radical statement of voice over body: ... *sexual density were obliged to abandon the rest of the body and lodge in the throat ... Music...can effect orgasm*” (199-200). From the modern point of view, imbued by ideas on the phallus as desire and all other forms as lack, the castrato is an enigma with an invaluable voice. The curtains close, the argument is made: cultural myth and psychoanalysis paved the way for the disregard of the castrated body and in a way, froze the mapping of gender at two poles. The modern reaction to “the potentially disturbing castrato body” is radically different from the reception of the castrato by Italian baroque audiences (201-2).

Instead of the straitjacket of binary gender roles, the baroque audience knew a one-sex system in which plenty of middle ground can be found in between the modern sexes of Male and Female. In the seventeenth century, men and women were believed to inhabit different stages in a vertical axis of gender: men were ‘simply’ considered “the more perfect manifestation of the single body that both men and women shared” (203). In this concept of

gender, the pinnacle of humanity consisted of extremely masculine men: those undistracted by earthly pleasures and focused on politics and duty. Dabbling in desire was considered the youth's pastime: the young boy inhabited a lower position on the vertical axis of gender and was less threatened by the distance between himself and the 'lower' women because the final burst of the necessary 'vital heat' to become a real man was yet to come. While the twenty-first century sees an assertion of masculinity measured by the number of women a man can seduce, in early modern times this was considered too great a taste of women. 'Effeminate' men were thus thought to be rather too fond of women; homosexual acts were regarded a safe option to preserve one's masculinity. Although the inequality between men and women and the assignment of 'perfection' in this system is problematic, the system offers ample room for 'middle ground': "Tales abounded, many treated by physicians as factual case studies, of weak men who began to lactate and strong women who suddenly grew a penis" (204). The castrato, instead of defying the power relationship between men and women, was arrested in his development. By arresting his development, he was sexually equivalent to the boy (204). The boy could be desired by those on top of the axis as well as those on the bottom: men did not lower their masculine status by desiring a boy as much as they would by desiring a woman, and women were considered to be attracted to youth. The seventeenth century boy was "associated with sensual charm and sexual desire" (214).

Against this background, Freitas further considered the roles of castrati on the stage of baroque opera compared to the roles played by tenor and bass voices. The conclusion is striking:

"the castrato regularly played the amorous male lead in Italian baroque operas at least in part because his special sexual status – his boyish suspension between the poles of masculinity and femininity – was found alluring and wholly appropriate to men in love. He was an extravagant embodiment of the seductive boy and presumed devotee of sensuality: That he was also considered (probably rightly) to be sexually active, only added to his appeal." (233)

Further analysis of specific roles played by castrati on baroque stages reveals the use of these effeminate men to play the counterparts to exceptionally strong women, to prevent the idea of victorious masculinity to be attacked. The gender construction of the time is thus staged in drama: the drama must be enjoyed, not a threatening alienation, and it must involve its spectators emotionally. The castrato, the figure of desire, could well fall into the claws of a *femme fatale* without scratching the ideal of Masculinity. In a sense, a tendency towards femininity indicated susceptibility to love: a clearly recognizable trope on baroque stages. The

castrato is the meeting of the Baroque's love of exaggeration and the youthful masculine ideal desired object.

“In that culture of hyperbole – a culture that lingered longest on the Italian operatic stage – [the castrato] represented not a blank, asexual source of vocal virtuosity, but rather the spectacular exaggeration of the ‘beardless boy,’ the idealized lover.” (248)

Here we have a seventeenth century figure, according to Freitas the quintessential figure of the Baroque, that threatened Masculinity by a ‘lack’. The castrato's bodily adaptation, so to speak, is an extreme form of prosthesis, a technological enhancement of the human body for pleasure. The operation is an early technological enhancement to arrest the boy's body in a moment in time to preserve his voice. His body thus reduced to instrument became, next to a vocal tool, an object of desire of the Other. Casanova's memoirs recount the presence of eunuchs and castrati in orgies. The Pope forbade marriage between women and castrati in its threat towards men: when sexual intercourse is no longer a site of reproduction and women solely find pleasure with these men with underdeveloped masculinity – what happens to the dominance of the male? Bodily castration in the seventeenth century threatened masculinity propagated by the law and the church. Although the castrato went out of fashion, its symbolic power found a new outlet in the Seventies, when repression, willed slavery to the other's desire, and the inequality of the sexes were thrown into the limelight for debate. In pure theoretical surgery, the 1970s saw the rise of a Female Eunuch.

In *The Female Eunuch* Germaine Greer dug up the castrato for its symbolism of castration and, even more, the anxiety for it. Greer's Woman returns to a hairless, prepubescent state to increase the desire that keeps her safely locked in domesticity. Again, youth is the object of desire, but in three centuries the gender has changed. The message is also radically different, in a shout for liberation: the female eunuch has been brought on stage as a bad example for women. The female eunuch asks to be seen and desired and do nothing besides. Unconsciously, Greer seems to draw on the sexual history that traces back to the Baroque and its sexless-thus-sexual figure of the castrato. The castrato, instead of a celebrated and idealized figure, becomes the flagship of emancipation. Greer writes in the introductory summary that “The characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate – timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and preciousity” (15). Although Greer refers to the castrate, the figure has been disfigured by the view of the time: the characteristics enumerated here seem far away from the sensual figure of excessive desire that sang the highest pitch on baroque opera stages. In a sense, the difference in gender mapping plays a role in the turn of

the kaleidoscope: “The castration of women has been carried out in terms of a masculine-feminine polarity, in which men have commandeered all the energy and streamlined it into an aggressive conquistatorial power, reducing all heterosexual contact to a sado-masochistic pattern” (16). Partly, Greer seems to draw on the baroque one-sex-system that Freitas described, in which men are merely granted more ‘vital heat’ to rise to the top of the gender axis. However, the polarity has gone lopsided, like an imbalanced scale in which the woman strives for weight in compensation. In both cases the castrato and the female eunuch are like flies caught in the amber of their time: the quintessential figure of the seventeenth century Baroque versus the quintessential flagship of the feminist movement of the Seventies.

The female eunuch of the Seventies is now on stage, next to the castrato, to show how Carter is entranced by the Baroque more than by the feminist movement. Although Carter found the artificiality in masculinity and femininity when she observed Japanese culture, her characters are never defined along a binary polarity of the Male versus the Female. Rather, her Albertina from *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is first a male Ambassador and then a Generalissimo, her Evelyn from *The Passion of New Eve* is castrated and turned into a woman, her Fevvers is financially independent and so are her showgirl twins Dora and Nora in *Wise Children*. It seems that mainly Carter’s men are not so much exemplary for the ones Greer makes into conquistators. Also, Carter’s women are more often than not quite cunning themselves. In *The Sadeian Woman* she even explores the works of the Marquis de Sade as moral pornography in which women are granted an active choice and role. Under a hail of criticism from the feminists of her time, Carter never busied herself with the imaginary figure of the female eunuch, but rather put on characters that artificially ask to be seen, to be looked at. Her characters are truly castrated, gender-fluent, but mostly take responsibility for their own desires. There are few households with trapped angels in her pages. Carter’s biographer writes that she was “bored by the contemporary novels that came her way” that dealt with social realism; instead, she was attracted to D.H. Lawrence whose prose could “quicken the pulse” with its sexiness and obscenity (Gordon 49). Carter did not put a female eunuch on her stage, one who wants to be seen and desired and nothing besides, but rather a symbolic castrato who would, aside from arousing sensual attraction and desire, sing the virtuoso pitch and truly sweep the readers of their feet.

Gradually the Baroque takes shape; its entangled excess can only be defined by limitlessness, infinity, more excess, the idea that its full potential is always hidden. An excess of definition to arrive at a spectre to work with. The more the Baroque materializes, the more

the importance of the beholder comes to the fore. Fevvers demands “Look at me!”, King Louis XIV and his Versailles subject the onlooker to the myriads of Argus eyes: “Look at me!”. Enter the beholder, the one who makes sense of the attention-seeking of the Baroque. Orest Ranum zoomed in on the onlooker of the Baroque, the beholder caught in the demand of the excess, the one enveloped by the fold. In detail, Ranum describes the baroque movement as experienced by the beholder:

A single object such as a geometrically shaped pool, a crystal with its facets ‘carved’ by nature, a mirror, a grotto of shell-covered walls, a public execution, the Place Royale or the funeral bier of the Grand Condé, might release a range of emotions in the beholder. Beautiful despite its oddity (for example, the dark, funereal paintings of exotic and imaginary plants), or geometrical although it had never been carved by human hands, or simply an emptiness framed by mirrors and natural objects such as polished tortoise shells or mother of pearl, the Baroque place brought tears to the eyes, chills, fevers, sexual arousal, lethargy, slow heart beat [sic], rapid heart beat [sic], dizziness, or sweating. As emotions welled up and the body responded to the place, the beholder had to choose whether to stay before it or in it, or to withdraw in order to calm down. (206)

The baroque beholder is respondent, responsive, emotionally involved. Not only towards an *oculus* for divine grace as in Italian religious Baroque, but towards a choice to be “in it, or to withdraw” in the French baroque culture of Ranum (206). Is it coincidence that Baroque brings on fevers and Carter brought us Fevvers? The Baroque is both the slow heart beat and the rapid, the sexual arousal and the lethargy, the sinking down and upward pull. Hence no angel in the house: our Fevvers is both repulsive and enchanting, both angelic and utterly human. The fold is not only a production, something to look at, but rather an entangling movement that transports and drops, seduces and repulses. Ranum then chooses an uncomfortable word, “encrustation”, to describe the baroque place, a “layering and framing of the place by the beholder” (207). The production of the Baroque invites a giving back: “the beholder who experienced speechlessness, emotional upset, or bodily excitement wished to give something of himself in return” (207). A near religiosity enters the stage, while Ranum suggests a primordial impulse to do so. Here we are in Carter’s novel *The Passion of New Eve*, in which the protagonist Evelyn is thus moved and enchanted by his beloved star on the screen Tristessa, that he pays her – who is in fact a man in drag – a tribute through the girl between his legs in the dark communal space. The Baroque invites a response – prepares for synthesis, Wellek wrote. The beholder becomes part of the baroque work of art.

The beholder in the historical Baroque of the seventeenth century provided a market for the circulation of baroque toys. That time of folding, the hint at elsewhere and illusions, had a fascination for what is out of sight but believed in firmly. The baroque toys, for example, are the peep-shows and their perpetual homage to elsewhere, as described in the next chapter. On the other hand, the Baroque toy plays with the contemplation and re-appropriation of the human body. The *Cogito ergo sum* by Descartes was formulated around the time of the historical Baroque: the idea that the human is a machine was played out in the constructions of machines that approached humans as closely as possible. Anatomical studies of the human body produced automata the public could gaze at in awe. When in Neuchâtel Monsieur Jaquet-Droz made his boy-automata write “I think therefore I am” and after that “I do not think... do I therefore not exist?” posed questions as philosophical games (Gaby Wood 7). Philosophy invited philosophical toys, anatomical studies invited humanoid automata, and however intently the public gazed upon these human-made constructs, the gaze was mirrored towards themselves.

Meet a child of the baroque age: Jacques de Vaucanson (1709-1782), inventor and artist, today best known for both the invention of the first completely automated loom and of an automaton that is best described as a defecating duck. Gaby Wood describes Vaucanson as “the producer of a high-society spectacle” whose “magnificent creations were admired by audiences all over Europe; they were praised by kings and applauded by scientists” (15). In an age keen on spectatorship and peeping, Vaucanson created artificial life by combining the idea of the statue with that of the clock: his clockwork automata seemed to move of their own accord. Reception was double-sided and Vaucanson may be one of the first who experienced the workings of the Uncanny Valley centuries before Masahiro Mori identified the concept in 1970. The concept is as follows: humans are rarely emotionally involved with inanimate objects such as chairs, tables, or – in the twentieth century – industrial robots. Emotional involvement increases both when the object moves of its own accord, and when the object looks human. Mori spelled out the process in a diagram (see Figure 1) with the level of familiarity on the y-axis and the percental human likeness on the x-axis. Around seventy-five percent human likeness in the diagram, the line of familiarity suddenly dips well into negative familiarity. Mori calls this the ‘uncanny valley’: the designer of prostheses and humanoid robots should that into account that the approximation of human likeness in robots is liable to arouse fear in the spectator. It is Linda He Liu who spells out in *The Freudian Robot* that humans suffer from death instinct or entropy in the face of these robots or prostheses: the confrontation of a human-looking object that fails to be completely human is a direct

confrontation with mortality. No wonder that Mori placed the corpse and the zombie at the bottom of the Uncanny Valley.

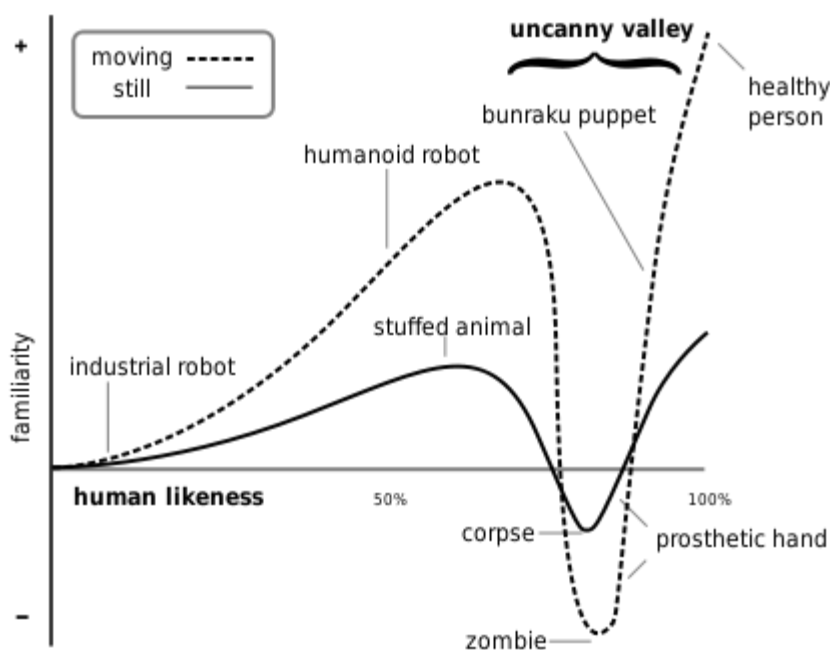


Figure 1 The Uncanny Valley by Misho Mori

Although Vaucanson lived well before the age that Mori writes about, his inventions were also met with both curiosity and repulsion. His fully automated loom deprived many of their profession, arousing protest and hate – the robotic invention truly endangered their living. His automata, on the other hand, were curiously looked at by the attraction of their grotesqueness. The grotesque of these machines is the typically baroque illustration of the upward pull of curiosity and the downward sinking of fear, the elevation by what is bizarre and the adrenaline of being on the brink. Like a tightrope walker, an inventor such as Vaucanson needed to orchestrate his spectacles. His Flute Player could breathe and used leather fingers – like skin – to play the instrument much like human beings would, but mechanically, tirelessly, too perfectly. Wood relates in her history of living dolls how Vaucanson’s work infringed on the sense of humanity of his spectators with his automata and that his works, though a tribute to the ingenuity of the human body, were met by resistance. As if he understood what Mori’s article on “The Uncanny Valley” is about, Vaucanson decided to execute his imitation of the most basic bodily function in the form of a duck: the digestive tract. The Baroque dances with the Uncanny *avant la lettre*, the aesthetic appreciation of what is not pleasing, angelic, soothing, but rather the adrenalin and movement that only the grotesque could bring in.

The attraction of the freak, the misshapen pearl, then relies on the othering of the object – however human-like and agile. That which makes Carter’s Fevvers an attraction is the uncertainty to whether she is fact or fiction. To keep up the illusion that she *is*, in fact, an illusion makes her soothingly human. Throughout *Nights at the Circus* Fevvers experiences life in different contexts that show the consequences of myth. In the brothel, she occupied a symbolic place, from Cupid to Winged Victory. In hard times, Fevvers had to sell herself to Madame Shreck to whom she played the Angel of Death in the darkness of a mansion of freak prostitution. The myth of the beholder changes Fevvers in every scene into what she could *stand for* rather than *is*. Carter uses the idea of the baroque toy when Fevvers is invited by the Grand Duke: “You must know I am a great collector of all kinds of *objets d’art* and marvels. Of all things, I love best toys – marvellous and unnatural artefacts” (187). The appropriation of the winged woman as part of the cabinet of curiosities denies Fevvers humanity: he introduces her to his collection of automata and miniatures of herself, next to a giant life-sized ice sculpture the very likeness of his feathery guest that already starts to melt. The possession of the Other that Fevvers represents to so many disturbed aristocratic characters is a power play from which she can only escape time and time again by her wits and her wings. This winged woman then reads a rumour in the newspaper that “Fevvers is not a woman at all but a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone, india-rubber and springs” (147). It delights the circus director, “The bigger the humbug, the better the public likes it” because a rumour invites them to see it with their own eyes (147). The high-wire dancers of the circus, too, expect she is aided by “mechanical contrivances” as her very anatomy endangers their skills (158). While the world in *Nights at the Circus* tries to categorise the winged woman through myth, fraud, and cheat, Fevvers herself, however, is proud of her human side. “I hate to be where the hand of Man has badly wrought,” Fevvers sighs on the train that leads her from the inhabited world into the tundra of Siberia (197). Fevvers’s body is appropriated differently by anyone who beholds her: one interprets her as an angel to be sacrificed, another as a toy to collect, yet another as a lucrative circus act – and neither of those labels reaches the essence of Fevvers. Indeed: the ‘essence of Fevvers’ appears on the first pages of the novels, emanating from her drawers. The essence of Fevvers is in her stockings, her disguise, her dreams overflowing with cash, her love of humanity, while others feed off her looks, her illusion, her indefinite appearance to fill the lack in their personal mythology of the world.

Carter’s Fevvers combines the baroque airiness and ostentatiousness: she needs a beholder in awe to be her radiant and shiny self. The shadow of doubt as to her miraculous

wings highlights these extra limbs that would otherwise render her a freak. In *Nights at the Circus* Carter explores the agency of a misshapen girl and her near-magical companion. The look perhaps exploits, as Fevvers's fans try to use her to complete their own mythologies, but that look can be exploited, too. Like Vaucanson, Fevvers knew that a marvel alone was not marvellous enough. Vaucanson was, above all, a skilled inventor more than an illusionist, yet put his automata on display. His intellectual and philosophical pursuits needed the disguise of the spectacle to find financing. Fevvers had taught herself to fly, but flying did not suffice: by imitating the *aerialists* but moving extremely slow the actual flight was perpetually postponed. Her love for luxuries and cash, however, made her work the spectacle.

One of Carter's major themes throughout her fictional works is the spectacle and the power of the gaze, which is especially prominent in *Nights at the Circus*. The settings are key: the brothel, a female panopticon *in extremis*, a house of female freaks, the circus, the conjurer of the dead girl. In all these settings, Carter posits the vulgar setting next to the personal objectives of the girls: binding contracts, searching for safety, food, warmth, moral obligation... The gaze, however, falters time and time again, and the power of the gaze is not as successful as the theories and philosophies ordained. When the reporter Jack Walser is robbed of his memory in a train crash and resides among a Shamanistic tribe in Siberia, insight and blindness are continually mistaken. On a comic note, Carter shows that clairvoyance, dreams, illusions, and hallucinations bear truth in a way logic could never do – because logic is a human construct and disregards the unknown. To see and not to see – we look at Fevvers, but miss her chaperone's communist activities as they take place under our noses. Like the baroque inventors, Carter puts her investigation of societal anatomy on display while attracting gazes to enjoy the spectacle. In the mould of the grotesque, bizarre distortions, especially in the abnormal depiction of human features, Carter's fiction is an exaggeration of the workings of human desire: is it fact or fiction? And maybe, it is both.

Carter's Peep-shows

Baroque Toys and a Sense of Projection
Or
See You on the Other Side

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920) is about framing. Not only does a criminal appear to convict a murder in order to frame Cesare, the somnambulist, but the visual design of the film turns its spectators into peepers. At the fair, a black cloaked man beckons spectators into his tent to behold the spectacle of the somnambulist. Doctor Caligari, the hypnotiser, alone can bring the sleeping man to life: Cesare will then answer all the questions of the public because he knows everything about the past and the future. The crowd shuffles into the tent to look at the mystery emerging from the shadows. The 1920 film relates the mysterious events like a slideshow, a peep-show even. From the black shadows the moving image emerges and fades out in circular shapes as if the spectator walks from peephole to peephole. From the film theatre, Virginia Woolf saw a blemish on the film stock, quivering, bulging, showing visual fear rather than acted out fear. The film about framing is famous for its accidental power in Woolf's "On Cinema". The frame, the peephole is always mediated and mediates. When the shadows start to quiver, it affects the beholder rather than the display itself. The peeping is significant to the peeper.

Carter plays with the frame, too. The safely contained marvels of cinema, peep-shows and the circus are blasted into the world by the desire machines in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*: the machines project everyone's desires onto reality as tangible hallucinations. At the heart of the projection lies voyeurism: the machines are miraculously controlled by a travelling peep-show that invites the visitor (or the reader, for that matter) to peep into a set of machines hidden in a carnivalesque tent. The boxes offer changing tableaux of temptation, violence, and sex which can be appreciated at leisure. The contents of the boxes move or shimmer, without revealing pulleys, strings or clockwork in motion. The peep-show is a baroque toy that plays with the first steps of technology towards cinema: with devices of illusion and projection. William Fleming argues that "[t]he machine is the symbol which distinguishes our modern civilization from all others" but most notably, "it was the Baroque period which first began to think in terms of machines and the various mechanical aspects of motion" (Fleming 122). One of the most baroque machines is then the peep-show: its reliance on visual emotion, the theatrical presentation, the play with the invisible and elsewhere, and – in Carter's exhibits especially – the climactic perpetual motion.

However, Fleming points at the mechanical clock as the ultimate baroque device, which is capable of “translating the movements of time into spatial dimensions” (122). Mary Ann Caws argues that the surrealists experimented with the baroque experiment, resulting in a metronome with a cut out eye pasted on its pendulum (11). The look, the visual, the clockwork and the promise of *perpetuum mobile* combine in the baroque fascination with movement: Look! The peep-show itself is mostly baroque in its promise to offer something to look at, and Carter placed in the boxes eternally moving machines and marvels. Everything moves, in “motional and emotional expression” in the Baroque (Fleming 127). The ultimate reflection in baroque architecture, Fleming argues, is that in the fountains and pools in which grandeur is “reflected in wavy movement” (125). Carter’s peep-shows reflect Desiderio’s desire in that same wavy movement, offering tableaux of repetitive movement.

The peep-show is a set of exhibits in a tattered circus tent, each machine “the size and shape of an old-fashioned oven and, at the front, a pair of glass eye-pieces juttied out on long, hollow stalks” (*The Infernal Desire Machines* 45). The machines are of a bygone age; they form a stark contrast in their heavy opacity and immovability with the nomadic tent that contains them. The boxes bear a history of peeping and voyeurism. Erkki Huhtamo investigated the ‘culture of peeping’ over the past five centuries, including the peep-show as one of many ‘vision machines’ created to exploit “both the desire to peep and the curiosity towards technology”. The culmination of these vision machines is cinema: a ticket for a film allows for both the experience of looking in the dark theatre and seeing the latest technology projected before our eyes. Vision machines, Huhtamo argues, are based on mediated and mediating peeping. It is not only about *what* is on display, but also about *how* it is seen. This makes the most precious part of the peep-show its lenses: the wonders of perspective in the box create in complicity with the lens an image on the spectator’s retina that cannot have the same effect outside of the box (Huhtamo).

Peeping is about control. At its most extreme, peeping becomes surveillance as in Michel Foucault’s Panopticon⁵. On the other side of the spectrum, the thing that is looked at is in control of the peeping experience. The peep-show offers a ready-made view. The box and the lenses are set up, “merely waiting for the peeper’s eyes to enjoy it” (Huhtamo). The agency of the box lies therefore with the creator of the box, and the peepers – although

⁵ In *Nights at the Circus* Carter refers to the idea of the Panopticon. In this novel, a panopticon is presented in which the central position is occupied by a murderess. She took the task upon her to look incessantly at other murderesses in their cells until everyone is absolved from their crime. In Carter’s fiction, the peeper is always also looked at.

powerful in their gaze – are only subjected to the view presented to them. Carter’s novel plays out this scene, as the peep-show infringes on the poise of Desiderio. In one of the machines he recognizes Albertina for the first time as she is the object of violent and passionate scenes. The eye-pieces from Doctor Hoffman’s peeping-machines bear a literary relation to a short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, “The Sand-Man”. This story recounts the tale of corrupting ‘eye-pieces’, too. Coppelius, a German lawyer, is doubled with Coppola, an Italian barometer seller, both complicit in the murder of Nathaniel’s father. Coppola, however, is a friend of Nathaniel’s physics Professor⁶. When Nathaniel looks through Coppola’s binocular, his desires distort. First, he falls in love with the automaton Olympia as he peeps through his looking glass at her. The gadget is used a second time: Nathaniel looks through the eyeglass down from a tower and recognises the instigator of his nervous breakdowns. His passions overtake him and he hurtles himself into the deep.

A disastrous and uncanny story, Freud used it as a literary example of castration anxiety. Freud saw a link between a fear of becoming blind and castration anxiety in the following: Nathaniel had been warned for the Sand-Man who could steal his eyes, his father’s murderer Coppola made Olympia’s eyes, and the binocular that was fatal to Nathaniel’s sanity. The story is epistolary so that we only ever look at reflections of reflections. The sight prosthesis in “The Sand-Man” emphasises how mediation by a gadget is far from neutral. The means stain the end. Like in the story of mythological Narcissus, for example, who looked not at the mirror but at himself. The mirror as prehistoric machine corrupted his desires through vision (McLuhan). Peeping is the curiosity for what lies behind the lens, inside the black box, but once we recognise our own distorted desires the grotesque is frightening and maddening, as we behold “what ought to remain hidden but has come to light” (Freud “The Uncanny”). The peep-show in Carter’s novel raises suspicions: what is it that we see? Who is in control of the images?

Peeping is a form of isolation in which the visitor experiences a vision on his own, in contrast to the collective aspect of magic lantern shows and cinema viewings (Huhtamo). While the magic lantern with its flickering qualities was associated with the uncanny, the peep-show mostly served as a matter-of-fact machine, one even vulgar, “concentrating on existing geographical locations and events of the world”. Despite the wide availability of images of peepers and peep-shows, the precise contents of historical peep-shows remain

⁶ Coincidentally, the peep-show proprietor in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is also a physics professor.

obscure. Huhtamo suggests that it mostly “provided evidence about human-made marvels”, made with images, dolls, and three-dimensional scenes. The peeping itself, however, is based on the belief that these boxes revealed a secret: although many boxes were used to demonstrate natural phenomena, other shows played with the audience’s superstition and belief in the occult, its main audience being “the ignorant and uncultured” (Huhtamo). This accounts for why technology that thrives on the curiosity of peeping became an object of curiosity itself. The withdrawal from the public space to be alone with that seductive secret was both the source of income of the peep-show proprietor as well as fertile grounds for moral suspicion. This “liminal zone between ‘closedness’ and ‘openness’” of the box that wants to be seen gave rise to suspicions to what was hidden in the machines. The suspicions eroticised the image of travelling peep-shows, which in turn obscured the phenomenon from traditional historical overviews. The peep-show has turned into a public medium that remains under the radar of propriety. Carter’s novel takes its readers exactly there: into the obscurity of the tent with its exhibitions, into the realm of the shady business of desire.

The dark tent is guarded by a blind man, so that peepers are invited to look by someone who cannot see. The first impression of the proprietor is that “the upper part [of his face] was hidden by a pair of wire-rimmed, green-tinted glasses, the left lens of which was cracked clean across” (44). When he speaks at first, the uselessness of his prosthesis is emphasised: “‘Though by no means Gaza, yet I am eyeless,’ he said and I knew for certain he was blind” (44). Like the mythological Tiresias, the blind man is the one with insight into the larger scheme of things. Desiderio discovers the workings of the desire machines by talking to the guardian. First, he learns the purpose of the show, which is “to demonstrate the difference between saying and showing. Signs speak. Pictures show” (50). The insistence on the visual is seen in the discrepancy between an exhibit titled “This is what the night is for” and the violent scene that the voyeur is exposed to in the peeping machine. Huhtamo asserts that “the showman’s skills of persuasion became crucial” in the advertising of the secret boxes; clearly, Carter’s guardian has ulterior motives as he dozes off in the shade after the exhibition is set up. After preparing the show, he accompanies the machines with “a sign, clumsily lettered by hand, giving a title” (45). A stark contrast is presented between the signs, ‘clumsily lettered by hand’, and the contents of the machines, revealing a precision of hand: “A bristling pubic growth rose to form a kind of coat of arms above the circular proscenium it contained at either side but, although the hairs had been inserted one by one in order to achieve the maximal degree of verisimilitude, the overall effect was one of stunning artifice” (45). The proprietor

does not convince crowds of people to look into his machines, but once Desiderio takes a peep he is seduced by ‘stunning artifice’ – a baroque overwhelming; a dip in the uncanny valley.

The peep-show is situated in a seaside resort, entirely desolate. Upon entering, the Doctor’s peep-show is a “warm, dim cave” (*The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* 44), affirming Huhtamo’s argument that the peep-show might be characterized as feminine; the enclosed space. Inside the cave, Desiderio stumbles upon “the first living thing” that resembles mostly “verminous flotsam” (44). The peep-show proprietor is reduced to a combination of decaying organic material as well as decaying technological material: the vermin as well as the ‘flotsam’, which is, according to the OED, “Such part of the wreckage of a ship or its cargo as is found floating on the surface of the sea”. The wreckage of a human being is stripped of all his teeth, but meanwhile “his blackened toenails had grown into claws” (44). The machines in the tent are the only objects keeping him in the narrative, “he gained a handhold on one of the curious machines which filled the tent and, clinging to it, steadied himself sufficiently to rise again” (44). As a guardian, the proprietor seems hardly to live up to his function: the watchman without eyes drowning in drink.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman depicts three exhibits on display. The first is “Seven Wonders of the World in Three Lifelike Dimensions” (44), the second “See a Young Girl’s Most Significant Experience in Lifelike Colours” (64) and the third is “Everybody’s Special Xmas Present” (107). Carter elaborately wrote about the contents of the peep-shows thrice, while historically the contents of the peep-shows have remained largely obscure. Apparently, there is something to see.

Seven Wonders of the World in Three Lifelike Dimensions

The exhibition is an upgraded version of the traditional peep-shows as researched by Huhtamo. Later inventions such as stereoscopy and photography that accompanied the decline of the popularity of peep-shows as Huhtamo describes, provide in the narrative the possibility to create “life-like” scenes: “the stereoscopic illusion was highly artificial”. The Doctor has combined the vulgar image of the peep-show with the artificial life-likeness of later technology by using models, slides, and clockwork mechanisms. The peep-show is a ready-made theatre, but the stereoscope offers an image which has to be “actuated [...] in the peeper’s mind” (Huhtamo). The image solely exists in the peeper’s mind. The locus of control

is established: the manipulative potential of optical illusion is activated once the spectator peeps in.

Each of the exhibitions in the ‘Seven Wonders’ Series features an element of eroticism. Carter has chosen to start the description of the exhibits with the title, followed by a description of what Desiderio sees. All the samples in the machines mirror an aspect of Desiderio’s experiences. In the comfortable cave, Desiderio peeps into the machines to look for clues about Doctor Hoffman. In fact, Desiderio looks for origins in a uterine space, underlined by the first exhibit:

Exhibit One: I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

The legs of a woman, raised and open as if ready to admit a lover, formed a curvilinear arch.[...] The dark red and purple crenellations surrounding the vagina acted as a frame for a perfectly round hole through which the viewer glimpsed the moist, luxurious landscape of the interior. (*The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* 45-46)

A cave in a cave, Desiderio discerns in the tableau the direction towards the castle of the Doctor, both through the legs of the exhibit and through the conversations with the peep-show proprietor. In the first exhibition, Carter plays with the theme of the vagina as the road to innocence, paradise, and symbiotic existence. The way back to the source, illustrated by how “the eye of the beholder followed the course of this river upwards towards the source, and so it saw [...] the misty battlements of a castle” (46). However, the paradisiac source is described as “sinister”, “as though its granite viscera housed as many torture chambers as the Château of Silling” (46). Desiderio recognises in the castle the one that figures in Marquis de Sade’s *The 120 Days of Sodom*.

Carter’s image of the lower part of a female body to represent Biblical paradise or the innocent origins of the world is yet another play on cultural myth. The peep-show that starts with an image of a spread-legged woman reminds most strongly of Marcel Duchamp’s *Étant Données* (1946-1966)⁷. Duchamp’s art work lacks the nomadic quality inherent to peep-shows, but rather serves as an elaborate variation on the genre. The installation allows the spectator to peep into a pair of peepholes in a wooden fence to see what the title indicates “Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas”, but on the grass in the front lies a naked woman spread-legged, her head and limbs falling outside the frame except for her left hand holding a gas lamp. Carter cannot have been inspired by Duchamp’s work and did not put Duchamp’s paradise between the woman’s legs, but rather worked with the same imagery.

⁷ Although Duchamp has worked on *Étant Données* between 1946 and 1965, the work has only been displayed in 1991, right after his death.

Jean Clair argues through close analysis of Duchamp's sketches leading up to his final work that *Étant Données* was, among others, based on Gustav Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*. According to Clair, the most striking resemblance is Duchamp's choice to show the abdomen and genitals of a woman whose head, hands, and feet fall outside the frame. However, Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* was infamous for its realism, while Duchamp's tableau is one of artifice, a play on framing and peeping. Carter seems to have inverted Duchamp's scene, putting the paradisiac scene inside her legs, perhaps hinting at the title of Courbet's work, showing the origin of the world in the form of paradise. Both Duchamp and Carter's play with artifice in a tradition of peeping at the sexualised female body⁸. Could one even go further, to the realism not only of Courbet but also that of Édouard Manet and his 1863 *Olympia*? Manet's *Olympia* portrays one of the first realistic naked women looking straight at the spectator in an upright manner. *Olympia*, the realistic unmoving woman, then seems to link with E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Olympia*, the female automaton that caught Nathaniel's gaze in deadlock. The female bodies are caught in art and frames, and their eyes are hidden from the gaze by Courbet and Duchamp – but in the form of *Olympia* they stare directly at the peeper, fixed, unmoveable, and silent, like Hoffmann's automatic woman. Carter was aware of the doubles and ghosts in her work, as she titled the first of the exhibits "I have been here before", heralding a set of déjà vu. However, Carter's insertion of the sinister castle at the source of the river that will be the destination of Desiderio's quest evokes the idea of involuntary repetition: Desiderio will, upon seeing the castle, repeat this utterance.

The first exhibition situates Carter in a tradition that plays with psychoanalytic terms: the involuntary repetition, the uncanny, the female genitals as the origin of the world or paradise – her novel is full of plays with, but distortions of, these myths. The voyeuristic entrance of Desiderio and the reader's gaze into the private parts of a non-yielding woman whose identity (her face, her fingerprints) is outside the frame would only be slightly more disturbing were the woman not artificially created. The entrance of an unconscious woman is a myth of folklore that was first recorded in the first half of the seventeenth century. Giambattista Basile's "Sun, Moon, and Talia" tells the first recorded version of the Sleeping Beauty-myth in the collection of folk-tales *Il Pentamerone*, which is a set of stories collected before 1637. Basile's story features the fifteen- or sixteen-year-old Talia who fell into a deep sleep. Her father then laid her into one of his country estates to rest in peace. When a King

⁸ One art critic even goes as far as to suggest that Duchamp's *Étant Données* was partly derived from the Black Dahlia case in 1947. C.f. Jonathan Wallis.

rode by, he followed his hawk into the window of the estate where Talia was sleeping. Basile is quite clear as to what happens next:

As he looked at her, and tried to wake her, she seemed so incredibly lovely to him that he could not help desiring her, and he began to grow hot with lust. He gathered her in his arms and carried her to a bed, where he made love to her. Leaving her on the bed, he left the palace and returned to his own city, where pressing business for a long time made him think no more about the incident. (Basile)

Talia gives birth to a boy and a girl, and wakes when the baby girl couldn't find her nipple and sucked her finger where a splinter of flax was stuck in. The unconscious girl was raped, and gave birth in an unconscious state, but the fairy tale ends with the King marrying Talia after witnessing his earlier wife committing suicide.

A modern version of the ancient, uncensored, fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* is Pedro Almodóvar's 2002 film *Talk to Her*. Almodóvar actualised Basile's Talia by setting the scene of a young dancer in coma, Alicia, and her stalking nurse Benigno. Before Alicia's coma, Benigno used to look at her at dance practice, from behind the curtains at his mother's apartment. As she no longer showed up at dance school, he tracked her down and started to take meticulous care of her. Voyeurism continued as he found unlimited access to the woman of his dreams. Projecting what is to come, Almodóvar put a film in the film, as we look over Benigno's shoulder at "Shrinking Lover". This silent film is about a man who shrinks after drinking a potion. One night, the tiny protagonist crawls underneath the covers of his lover's bed and crawls in between her legs. The film displays in black and white part of a giant vagina and a small guy stripping off all his cloths and entering the warm, moist cave. Benigno tells the unconscious Alicia about the film, and repeats "Alfredo remains inside her, forever" while massaging her legs and stomach, looking at Alicia's genitals. Like Basile's king, Benigno takes advantage of the dancer's unconscious state and her subsequent pregnancy soon outs his secret desire.

Gilles Deleuze wrote about the Baroque that it "invents the infinite work or operation. The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, make it go through the rood, take it to infinity" (242). The echoes – intertextuality if you will – in Carter's fiction bounce off and off to new images. First, her peephole-vagina on display in the peep-show. Desiderio peeps through the machine to find another peephole – "a perfectly round hole" – that shows him the way to the Doctor's castle (46). Carter's nameless woman is posed as a vehicle of transportation. To what? The giant vagina in Almodóvar's fictional film stages the symbolic desire to return to the womb: the longing for symbiosis. The female genitals form enlarged,

artificial, baroque folds that refer to an elsewhere, in Almodóvar obscure and in Carter spelled out with a spring and a castle included. The castle itself, however, reminds the peeper of De Sade's castle of *120 Days of Sodom*, a fictional castle of desire and sadism. On the other hand, the position of the female body itself – its head and limbs severed – both in Almodóvar's film and in Carter's box renders them public entrances for readers, peepers, and spectators to behold. From Duchamp to a seventeenth century folk tale, the baroque fold of Carter's cultural references is best appreciated by looking yet further and further, to see the project that makes mythology go through the roof.

The following exhibit, titled "The Eternal Vistas of Love" (46), takes the peeper himself to infinity. On display are two blown-up eyes looking back at the spectator, executed in the same precise manner as the last exhibit: "the lashes had been scrupulously set one by one in narrow hems of rosy wax but this time the craftsmen had achieved a disturbing degree of life-likeness which uncannily added to the synthetic quality of the image" (47). The display emphasises the close links between the uncanny, eyes, and doubles, especially when Desiderio upon closer inspection of the eyes discovers that his own eyes are reflected by magnifying lenses into two mirrors that are placed in the exhibit's pupils. The mirroring of his own eyes then cooperates with the artificial eye-pieces in a "model of eternal regression" (47). While the feminine genitals already offered a view of regression and receding back into the womb, the 'eternal vistas of love' herald a different kind of regression in which the mirroring distorts the spectator's view. Desiderio no longer looks at an exhibit, but rather looks at himself looking at the exhibit – or rather looking at himself looking at himself looking at... The looker's presence is crucial to the regression. The Baroque needs a beholder to complement the eternal regression of heightened emotion. The eternal vistas of love form a device in which the human being becomes prosthetic. Like Narcissus in the pond, Desiderio continues to look at himself. Marshall McLuhan⁹ saw the mirror as one of the earliest devices and diagnosed humanity's relation to machines as the fulfilment of a narcissist desire. The human being becomes the sex organ of the machine world. Instead of offering Desiderio

⁹ At least Angela Carter was familiar with Marshall McLuhan: in *Shaking A Leg*, McLuhan features in "Travelling: My Maugham Award" (1970) and in "The Art of Horrorzines" (1975). In the former, Carter writes how "Tokyo blazes at night like a neon version of the collected works of Marshall McLuhan and the taxi-drivers wear white gloves" (203) The second article features McLuhan's idea of the "post-literate man". Both texts give little information of Carter's view on McLuhan's thought, but evidently his style and ideas were in her toolbox of associations at least from the time she wrote *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*.

wealth, the peep-show involves Desiderio's emotions and desires, however unconsciously. Most of all, in a narcissist twist, he is offered himself through the eternal vistas of love.

Carter possessed a copy of Roger Cardinal and Robert Stuart Short's 1970 *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, which title she referred to in her article "The Alchemy of the Word" mentioning the title of Cardinal and Short's introduction as well: "Surrealism: Permanent Revolution". From this very copy she also took the title for her second exhibit, as Cardinal and Short caption a picture of Barbara Steele with "Eternal Vistas of Love": "The eyes of Barbara Steele transcend all appearances of reality: they reveal the eternal vistas of love" (Ado Kyrou qtd Cardinal and Short 73). Carter referred to Steele in her article "Femmes Fatales" of 1978. Steele is fatal in that she "typifies the subversive violence inherent in beauty and a light heart. She is the not at all obscure but positively radiant and explicit object of desire – living proof, preserved in the fragile eternity of the film stock, that the most mysterious of all is, as Octavio Paz said, the absolutely transparent" (Carter). In the second exhibit that Desiderio watches, the absolutely transparent of the eyes returns his gaze upon his own gaze, which immediately makes him turn to the next exhibit.

The third exhibit, "The Meeting Place of Love and Hunger", plays with the imagery of food used in descriptions of love and lust. Instead of stunning artifice, this exhibit portrays in a single sentence that "Upon a cut-glass dish of the kind in which desserts are served lay two perfectly spherical portions of vanilla ice-cream, each topped with a single cherry so that the resemblance to a pair of female breasts was almost perfect" (47). The edible representation of female breasts is described in terms of perfection, offering an aesthetic rather than violent image, although the invitation to take a bite and destroy that which is presented rather than yielded echoes the myth of Talia. Moreover, the food modelled as female breasts echoes the Futurist Cookbook (1932) by Filippo Marinetti. In *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art*, Cecilia Novero researches the several cookbooks brought out by avant-garde groups, among which the Futurists. One of their recipes, "Strawberry Breasts", bears a close resemblance to Carter's third exhibit: "A pink plate with two erect feminine breasts made of ricotta dyed pink with Campari with nipples of candied strawberries. More fresh strawberries under the covering of ricotta making it possible to bite into an ideal multiplication of imaginary breasts" (Moretti qtd Novero 75). Novero further analyses that the transformation of the female breast into food is done to "express both the liberation of male erotic desire and the artist's mastery over the desired object" (75). In a sense, the edible breast offers a fantasy of drinking the mother's milk without being dependent on the mother's will. Breasts are severed from the female body and presented upon a dessert dish, food that visually

excites the onlooker. The source of food in infancy “can now be internalized as the good, ideal breast, over which the subject has total control, for he has deprived the maternal of its symbolic authority” (Novero 75). The severed female abdomen, the severed female eyes, followed by the severed edible breasts lay out an exhibition of mutilation towards women, as each body part is appreciated and desired in itself. The female body is dissected into a gate to paradise, a mirror to see oneself, and a site of nourishment. In the dark, psychoanalytic symbols are on display in lifelike colours; despite the grotesque on display, Desiderio continues looking.

The fourth exhibit is titled “Everyone Knows What the Night is For” (47) and features another female body without a head; however, this time her head has been violently severed from her torso. The remains of her clothes imply a sexual situation preceding her end, with “the remains of a pair of black stockings and a ripped suspender belt of shiny black rubber” (47). Her body is fetishized as it is both heavily mutilated but also prepared with “loving care” that can be seen in the preparation of her underarm hair (47). Echoing the last exhibit with the edible breasts, this tableau refers to the ravenous hunger of desire as the woman’s “right breast had been partially segmented and hung open” (47). The violent act has reduced her from flesh to “meat as bright and false as the plaster sirloins which hang in toy butcher’s shops” (47-8). Not only is her body objectified, but also soothingly false. The reference to the toy butcher’s shop introduces playfulness, as if her death was a game. The last sentence draws the eye to “an enormous knife which was kept always a-quiver by the action (probably) of a spring” (48). In the still picture of the crime scene, motion is inscribed to freeze the moment of stabbing into her belly, already *after* her head was severed. Carter continues without pause to the next exhibit, while the knife quivers at the back of the reader’s mind.

The fifth exhibition’s title “Trophy of a Hunter in the Forests of the Night” (48) recalls William Blake’s “Tiger” (“TIGER, tiger, burning bright | In the forests of the night” (l. 1-2, repeated l. 21-22)). Through the looking glass, the tableau on display is a severed head, presumably the missing piece from the fourth exhibition, “hung in the air” (*The Infernal Desire Machines* 48). The head as ‘trophy of a hunter’ on display reduces another body part of the woman to an object to possess: one to flaunt as property. The reference to Blake’s Tiger, however, draws attention to the hunter: do we look at the trophy of a wild beast or do we look at a caged wild animal? In the second reading of the title, that of the woman compared to Blake’s tiger, emphasis lies on the loving yet artful representation of the Other. When Blake writes in wonder about the Tiger “And what shoulder and what art | Could twist

the sinews of thy heart?” (l. 9-10), the image of the careful maker is doubled in the loving care with which the peep-show proprietor constructed the female figures. Blake’s Tiger is aside from being a beautiful creature also one that incites increasing fear, as the slight change in tone attests to: “What immortal hand or eye | Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” (l. 3-4) is later turned into “Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?” (l. 24). Notice the word ‘frame’ that takes on a different meaning when the woman’s head is on display, framed by a peep-show. Fearful, however, hardly applies to the scene at hand: the suspended head is far from fearful, rather pitying when it is described to wear “a hideous expression of resignation” (*The Infernal Desire Machines* 48). Perhaps the other reading of the title is more appropriate, and the fearful sight is framed on the other side of the peeping lens. Perhaps the exhibits, the “Seven Wonders of the World”, display a narrative of the trophies of the beast of raucous desire that devours meat. After all, Blake located the burning of the tiger in the eyes (“Burnt the fire of thine eyes?” (l.6)), while the severed head’s eyes are closed as if she is bereft of her power, and the only one looking is the voyeur (*The Infernal Desire Machines* 48).

The hypothesis of the burning eyes and its psychoanalytic symbolism is strengthened by the sixth exhibition, “The Key to the City” (48). In the narrative, Desiderio describes the scene as the first direct attack on the Minister – the leader of the side of Reason in the war on dreams. The box contains a “candle in the shape of a penis of excessive size, with scrotum attached, in a state of pronounced tumescence” (48). Desiderio quickly grasps the relationship between the title and the burning phallic symbol, adding “this was supposed to represent the Minister’s penis” (48). Quickly, the image is reduced to an accusation of the Minister, although the image itself points at masculinity in arousal, ‘burning’ with desire. Upon closer reading, the candle points “towards one accusingly” – again, the only one looking is Desiderio. Although he is looking, he does not see that “the grossly swollen, sunset-coloured tip” in which the wick is already invisible, points at him personally (48). The burning eyes of the Tiger implied in the last exhibit are blind to their own representation, and the image represents nothing less than a phallic symbol burning up with desire from within.

The last exhibition, the seventh, is titled “Perpetual Motion” and recalls the legend of alchemy about the machine that keeps itself in motion without loss of energy (48). Desiderio starts his observation with “As I expected” (48), as we look through his eyes at a clockwork couple conducting sexual intercourse. In contrast with the lovingly executed other exhibits, the portrayal of the act of love is done in formal terms with a hint of anti-climax; it is sexual “congress” – playing on the eternal regression – and “This coupling had a fated, inevitable

quality” (48-49). There is no togetherness in the represented relationship, as the figures “looked as though they might have been modelled in one piece” and their reason for coupling is “a clockwork mechanism hidden in their couch” (48). With the prosthesis of their couch, the two of one kind continually move without further aim. Due to the predictability of the deed, desire is stripped of its essential future expectations. Neither can the couple be pictured to part, nor can any beginning be conceived. Desiderio quickly realizes the lack of excitement, as “They were not so much erotic as pathetic” (49). Carter describes the pathology in pitying terms “poor palmers” – mediaeval European pilgrims to the Holy Land – “of desire who never budged as much as an inch on their endless pilgrimage” (49). In this exhibit, the difference between motion and movement is displayed, questioning the use of motion when the process fails to entail proceeding. In their continuous state of excitement, the couple climaxes forever, as Desiderio sees “the tormented snarl of orgasm” which seems to lead back to the torture chambers of the castle in the first exhibit (49). The perpetual motion seems to hypnotise Desiderio for a while, as he “remained staring at it for some time” (49). The baroque element in this exhibition is not so much the clockwork couch nor the display of sexual intercourse, but rather the repeated recognition of the woman’s face, tolling from side to side in the act. Desiderio is halted by the sudden recognition of Albertina, his one desire, for the first time desired after the set of exhibits of violent passion.

The peep-show allows the protagonist to peep in, but the peeper is on display himself in Carter’s narrative. The first set of exhibitions models desire based on hunger and hunting in which reciprocity exists only with one’s self. However, Desiderio’s overall response to the violent scenes is reverie. His response is distant from the violence; the last scene even arouses him to dream. This apathy allowed Desiderio to resist the hallucinations in the war on dreams but raises suspicions. The entire city panicked at the onset of the wild desires, but Desiderio remarks coldly: “Boredom was my first reaction to incipient delirium” (11). In a novel that blazes with baroque desire, a plot that cannot stand still, the protagonist is a foil to the shape-shifting settings by being consistently bored.

Desiderio’s empathy is soon awakened. After his first visit to the peep-show, Desiderio investigates the mysterious disappearance of the Mayor by speaking to his daughter. In expectation of a strange girl (54), Desiderio hurries to the home of the Mayor’s daughter, driven by his engine that “ceased to throb” after turning it off (54). Immediately sexual energy seems to fuel the ride, merging technology and sexuality. Before meeting the girl, Desiderio “peered through” (55) a window through the foliage that covered it to see a

pastoral home with the girl in it, “that slender figure whose face I could not see” (56). When he meets the daughter, he describes her “waxen delicacy” and the notion that “She did not look as if blood flowed through her veins but instead some other, less emphatic fluid infinitely less red” (57). The daughter is made into a reference, a literary figure, as “She looked like drowning Ophelia; [...] I could not know how soon she would really drown, for she was so forlorn and desperate” with which her fate is quickly sealed (57). The Ophelia-like girl is a “beautiful somnambulist” who by night enters Desiderio’s room and offers him a rose (60). He takes advantage of the girl, “all this time [...] perfectly well aware she was asleep” (60). Desiderio acts out the myth of Talia, *Sleeping Beauty*, and Almodóvar’s dancer in coma. The first exhibition echoes through the visit to the Mayor’s house. The morning after, the daughter tells she “dreamed about a love suicide”, apparently unaware of the events of the night (61). Desiderio, however, misses the clue and sees only himself. Via a dressing mirror he speaks to her, “It is always disquieting to talk with a person in a mirror. Besides, the mirror was contraband” (61). Suddenly, the mirror becomes a deceiving device: “for a moment, I saw another person glance briefly out of her eyes for I was not looking at her in the mirror, only myself” (62). As he leaves the house and the girl dreaming of love suicide, he retells his own narrative. Instead of raping a sleepwalking girl, he speaks of “the beauty in the dreaming wood, who slept too deeply to be wakened by anything as gentle as a kiss” (62). Desiderio’s new version of the events leaves out that he took advantage of a fifteen-year-old girl, and instead offers a fairy tale version.

See a Young Girl’s Most Significant Experience in Lifelike Colours

When Desiderio arrives at the exhibition, his response is radically different from the last time he peeped. This time, Desiderio admits to be “unaccountably disturbed by the things I saw there” (64). While the last set of exhibit exposed grotesque three-dimensional models, this time the peep-show makes use of pictures. The machines are filled with slides that give the impression of “stilted movement in the figures” (64). Instead of waxwork clockwork, this exhibit is more cinematic than automatic. Instead of stunning artifice, this set of works offers “Platonic perfection” that is “far more luxuriously pure than everyday moonlight” (64). The first machine, titled, “THE MANSION OF MIDNIGHT”, recalls the moonlit scenery of Desiderio’s visit to the Mayor’s house. The machine that follows, titled “HUSH ! SHE IS SLEEPING!” further disturbingly hints at last night’s events. Desiderio immediately discerns the resemblance, “She was as white as my last night’s anaemic lover” (64). The pictured girl is even dressed in the same colour, though in a fairy tale medieval velvet robe, and sleeping in

an armchair. Through a thorny fence a princeling comes through and utters the unmistakably sexually connotated “I COME!” The next machine in line, titled “A KISS CAN WAKE HER”, shows a kiss bringing back colour in the girl’s face (65).

So far, the exhibitions offer a ghostly Disney version of *Sleeping Beauty*. The fifth machine breaks the pastoral moonlit scene, in which “Deformed flowers thrust monstrous horned tusks and trumpets ending in blaring teeth through the crimson walls, rending them” bearing all the connotations of a violent rape (65). Instead of a happy ending, the girl is shown to be “clasped in the arms of a lover from whom all the flesh had fallen. He was a grinning skeleton” (65). The lover is shown to “squeeze a ripe breast from the girl’s bodice” as if ripping a ripe fruit from a branch, and “nudg[ing] apart her thighs” (65). The machine offers an image of the fairy tale of the kiss turning into a scene of rape, “DEATH AND THE MAIDEN”, echoing Franz Schubert’s “Der Tod und das Mädchen” (1817), which in turn is named after a poem by the German poet Matthias Claudius in which a young girl begs Death to let her live, while Death inevitably approaches her. The box foreshadows nothing but darkness and a definitive end. Especially since “The remaining two machines were empty” (66). The uncanny surfaces: Desiderio is more disturbed by recognising himself and silence, than the technicoloured grotesque scenes of the last exhibit. Without actual mirrors, Narcissus saw himself.

Outside the peep-show tent, disturbed by the images, Desiderio roams the beach. He stumbles upon the corpse of the daughter: “She was dead. But I still tried to revive her” (67). The lifeless form becomes a “sea-gone wet doll” and in panic, Desiderio runs away with the daughter’s corpse as if her were “carrying a huge fish” (68). Stumbling upon something fishy, the doll that feels like a fish is reverted in the next chapter. His next minor sexual partner carries a fish for a doll, in which a sword destined to kill Desiderio is hidden. The doll, the fish and death: the images are closely linked in a logic that seems to stem from dreams. The fish might easily be a wink at the surrealist work *Poisson Soluble* by André Breton, a poetic novel of dreams. A red herring, maybe, because upon discovery, Desiderio presses his lips on hers to kiss her awake. Her lack of reaction is familiar rather than strange because “her kiss was like a draught of cold water” while she had been asleep (60): “for her sleep had been a death” (67). Desiderio had recognised her as Ophelia and now Hamlet’s famous speech echoes eerily:

To die, -- to sleep, --

No more; -- and, by sleep, to say we end

The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, -- 't is a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die; -- to sleep: --
 To sleep! Perchance to dream" (Act 3, Scene I)

While the first peep-show offered tableaux in which the 'stunning artifice' mainly satisfied the peeper's curiosity, the second set of scenes evoke an intense emotional reaction in its looker. The cinematic quality of the images renders in the legend of *Sleeping Beauty* what Desiderio experiences, and the two remaining dark machines hint at a dark future that is yet to come. This significant darkness differs radically from the toy-like colours of the butcher-scenes in the first exhibits. Disturbed by the death of the maiden, Desiderio runs for his life and returns to his ancestral roots: the peeping did not leave the peeper unchanged.

Everybody's Special Xmas Present

One last time, the contents of a peep-show exhibition are revealed. Desiderio arrives at the familiar tent, the sign indicating "Everybody's Special Xmas Present" (107). This time, the peep-show is a safe haven to Desiderio, the "entrance held open by a rope, as if someone inside were waiting for me" (107). The peep-show proprietor welcomes Desiderio, and peeping into the first machine, he recognises the head of his beloved Albertina. The machine is titled "Precarious Glimmering, A Head Suspended from Infinity", but this time the head on a pole presses "its forefinger against her lips as if to tell me she was keeping a delicious secret while the other was extended as if to joyfully greet my return to her" (107). This note of sentimentality, Christmas, the return to the image of the one desired and the familiar tent that harbours Desiderio to save his life, shows the other side of the seductive peep-show. The baroque peep-show thrived on curiosity and invites Desiderio to look further, to see the 'delicious secret' yet to be revealed. The peeper is looked at, welcomed, promised more in the advent of wish-fulfilling cinema.

Carter at the Cinema

Mass projection

Or:

The power of collective peeping

The Baroque wants to be beheld: in curiosity peeping answers the call. The culture of peep-media stems from a “newly stimulated curiosity towards the visible reality”, that incubated in Europe between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century, Erkki Huhtamo observes (5). Europe crawled out of the Middle Ages and opened its eyes to new forms of politics, other religions, the adventurous discovery of far territories and the progress of science (5). The earliest peep-devices were used for scientific purpose, to awe the public, and to please the powerful aristocrats – and the public became the main audience (8). Gaby Wood describes the nineteenth-century race for the invention of cinema, as the moving picture was first invented and rapidly after combined with Edison’s phonograph. However, the resulting Kinetoscope remained largely a peep-show device, allowing a single person to look into the machine and behold its secret contents. Only when the Lumière brothers on Christmas Eve in 1895 showed a performance of their Cinematograph, “The assembled audience experienced what was probably the most extraordinary collective sense of the Uncanny for centuries” (Wood 174). As the spectators jumped from their seats at the sight of an incoming train, the new technology could truly “[bring] tears to the eyes, chills, fevers, sexual arousal, lethargy, slow heart beat, rapid heart beat, dizziness, or sweating” (Ranum 206). Cinema became a Baroque space.

The footage of trains and passers-by was quickly replaced with visual, moving stories. These were first borrowed from the arts of theatre and literature to feed the new-born technology: the classics of literature were quickly adapted to film. When Virginia Woolf watched *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* before 1926, she saw in the art of cinema mere primordial matter, “All is hubble-bubble, swarm and chaos. We are peering over the edge of a cauldron in which fragments of all shapes and savours seem to simmer; now and again some vast form heaves itself up and seems about to haul itself out of chaos.” Woolf sees in cinema a simple art, “even stupid”, as it was no mere than a parasite on other arts projecting tricks. It was the tadpole on the screen that made Woolf realize that “a shadow at a certain moment can suggest so much more than the actual gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear” so that film art had yet to develop itself into an art on its own terms. In the Sixties and

Seventies, cinema had radically changed. Woolf's speck is increasingly carefully brushed off the film stock to present the perfect picture. Enlarged on the screen, the cinematic factory churns out stars, close-ups, and fade-outs, with Hollywood as the Holy Land of fame and glamour. Film made stars instead of stories, look at what happens in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*: "I myself had loved Tristessa [...] when I was a little boy [...]. The wall of my cubicle had been plated with her photographs. I even wrote to MGM and received, in return for my ink-stained, ill-spelt love-letter, a still from *The Fall of the House of Usher*" (6). This Hollywood-picture made Evelyn a fan of the main actress, not of the original story. Rather, the literary title indicates the kind of film that is made, but its relevance in literary history has become undone. It merely dates the ideal woman on display: the same goes for *Wuthering Heights* in the novel, of course Tristessa plays Catherine. The fictional films starring Tristessa projected in *The Passion of New Eve* are shot in the late forties, and rerun when the romantic ideal of the suffering woman went out of fashion to make place for stars beaming with "health and efficiency" (7). Carter's narrative speaks about a cinematic age in which publicity departments deal with fan mail and marketing, far removed from the first screening of the Lumière brothers. Life summoned on the big screen seemed to Woolf "more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life." With the advent of Hollywood, stars in close-up seemed more real, too, and were revered with religious fervour: Carter argues that "Star worship wasn't a perversion but a genuine manifestation of the religious instinct" ("Hollywood" 385). The film makers seem to have learned from the speck that was fear itself; Carter's Tristessa is not just an actress, but always 'stands for'. In the novel, her specialty is suffering: "She suffered exquisitely until suffering became demoded" (8). Instead of the power of a tadpole to *be* fear, Tristessa's stardom is based in that her appearance *is* suffering.

The dream factory that is Hollywood, "the place where the United States perpetrated itself as a universal dream and put the dream into mass production" ("Hollywood" 385) thrived on the magic of the cinematic theatre. After all, the affect in the Baroque is in the visual and architectural, and likewise cinema combines the two. The overwhelming quality of the Baroque was attractive to the church, as well as to Surrealism. Cinema worked well with mysticism. The large room in which appearances are projected onto a screen invited a new form of religion. Carter marvelled at "the religious that possessed the audiences, those communities of strangers crowded together in the dark" ("Hollywood" 384-5). The religion that Carter refers to goes further back than the idea of the church: instead, it raises the image of Plato's cave analogy, and the gathering of philosophers in the dark: "Strangers used to

gather together at the cinema and sit together in the dark, like Ancient Greeks participating in the mysteries, dreaming the same dream in unison” (“Robert Coover: A Night at the Movies” 382). Cinema, however, offers the larger-than-life image of the star, the one to desire in his or her absence. Tristessa’s example shows that the godhead thus created only lasts as long as the current fashion.

Tristessa’s stardom lasted until her specialty became outmoded. She symbolizes the ideal of suffering that was afterwards replaced by the ideal of strength. Cinema becomes a device that records these fashion changes and thus preserves the pressing experience of time passing by. An old fan of Tristessa appreciates her in retrospect and nostalgia:

“The film stock was old and scratched, as if the desolating passage of time were made visible in the rain upon the screen, audible in the worn stuttering of the sound track, yet these erosions of temporality only enhanced your luminous presence since they made it all the more forlorn, the more precarious your specious triumph over time. For you were just as beautiful as you had been twenty years before, would always be so beautiful as long as celluloid remained in complicity with the phenomenon of persistence of vision but that triumph would die of duration in the end, and the surfaces that preserved your appearance were already wearing away.” (*The Passion of New Eve* 5).

Film offers not the preservation but the prolongation of an image, the ultimate persistence of vision, to be repeatedly played until the material wears off. Time inscribed on the film stock becomes part of the dream on display, and kindles a strong form of desire connected with memory: nostalgia. The protagonist of *The Passion of New Eve* looks at Tristessa on the screen as described in the citation above, and utters: “I abandoned myself to nostalgia, to the ironic appreciation of the revisited excesses of her beauty” (8). Svetlana Boym distinguished two types of nostalgia as longing for a different home, restorative and reflective, in which the first one emphasises the home and the second one the longing. Within this typology, Evelyn clearly experiences the reflective kind: a revelling in yearning. Boym further describes that reflective nostalgia “does not follow a single plot but explores ways on inhabiting many places at once” (454). Reflective nostalgia suits the Baroque, in creating endless folds throughout time and space, all at once. Film invites spectators to be in many other places at once, a projected presence, away from the now but mainly feeding longing itself rather than urging an actual move. Reflective nostalgia defers coming home, and Boym demonstrates it with Proust, as “Place names open up mental maps and space folds into time” (455). The nostalgia offered by cinema opens up a mental process of folding: an intense baroque longing.

Film in Carter's fiction works with that intense longing, and how the screen can fill the void of the spectator. When Evelyn undergoes the surgery of his transformation into a woman, images of femininity and motherhood are projected onto the walls of his cells. The images are offered so that in 'psychosurgery' Evelyn can start to create the myth of femininity about himself (*The Passion of New Eve* 71). The scene shows both the power of the image, as the new Eve later is seen as 'too much like a woman' (101), but also its corrupting nature. When the screen invites the spectator to imagine other places, other identities even, what have we been looking at so far? Much like the Surrealists, Carter saw in cinema a potential to wake up and fall asleep at once. Her fiction experiments with cinema as a site of identity-construction and nostalgia. However, Carter never shows a film in full. Seeing a film in Carter's fiction is continually interrupted, questioned, and set in relation to the life of the spectator. Fiction is used to question the power of cinema. Like the surrealists, Carter disrupts the full suspense of disbelief.

From its very beginning, cinema and its allusive language of visual symbols attracted the surrealists. Especially early black-and-white films offered an unprecedented possibility to experiment with collective dreaming. Huhtamo saw that the surrealists were interested in peep-media as devices to tap into the unconscious, as they "conceiv[ed] absurd 'bachelor machines', metaphorical contraptions reflecting suppressed mental processes" (1). However, cinema's development bothered the surrealists, Linda Williams argues: instead of recognizing film as dream, the spectators believed the projections and longed for it. Hence, André Breton, Jacques Vaché and Robert Desnos bodily disrupted the cinema experience of Parisian moviegoers. Back then, cinema was still a continuous showing of films like a newsreel. Breton and his friends would walk in and leave at the first signs of boredom, to step into another film-viewing immediately after. They would talk loudly to make the public aware of the unreality of the projection, although it is hard to imagine the spectators would be thankful for it. Imagine that this group started to make films themselves. The most typical surrealist films, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'Or* (1930), were made by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. Their films split and ruptured any sense of unity and identification with the projected illusion by presenting not a plot, but a series of images in dream-sequence. Williams looked at their films and saw that what they were trying to do, stems from the belief that "there is something else to be said, something that cannot be said except through rupture" (217). The surrealists wanted to lay bare latent collective desires as opposed to the promise of catharsis, or substitute wish-fulfilment, in cinematic romance and Hollywood films. Moreover, *if* wishes need to be fulfilled on the screen, the surrealists wanted all the detritus of

the id to be played out on the screen; they wanted to project the collective desires that until then were neatly tucked away by the societal superego that is the Law. They wanted cinema to become, truly, a space of dreaming in a wake state.

The liberation of desire, of the marvellous, and of the imagination was the core aim of the surrealists. “We are still living under the reign of logic,” André Breton - the pope of Surrealism - wrote in the first “Surrealist Manifesto” in 1924. In praise of the work of Sigmund Freud on dreams and the unconscious, he wrote:

“In the guise of civilization, under the pretext of progress, we have succeeded in dismissing from our minds anything that, rightly or wrongly, could be regarded as superstition or myth; and we have proscribed every way of seeking the truth which does not conform to convention. It would appear that it is by sheer chance that an aspect of intellectual life - and by far the most important in my opinion — about which no one was supposed to be concerned any longer has, recently, been brought back to light. Credit for this must go to Freud. [...] Perhaps the imagination is on the verge of recovering its rights.” (Breton)

Under the wings of Breton, a movement developed in search for truth behind logic, a world that lies, as it were, *over* the real. Surrealism is not, however, about a metaphysical reality of ghosts and apparitions, but rather the exploration of what is real behind the appearance of artificial reality. For example, the surrealists experimented with short-cuts to the unconscious because, in the scheme of Freud’s id, ego and superego, the id represents the original and primitive drive, the site of authentic desire. Daniel Cottom argues that the surrealist movement was attracted to Breton’s envisioned “reign of dreams, unfettered imagination, willing consciousness, insanely pure spirit” (Cottom 3). Not that the reign of dreams is a land of Cockaigne, but rather stemming from a “fascination with the phenomena of doubles, uncanniness, revelation, and betrayal” (Cottom 7). Cottom illustrates the Paris-centred movement as based on a distrust of reason. In the wake of the First World War, they were disillusioned with the belief in progress. Reason fell back upon itself: it had failed to lead to a better world. With the fall of reason, suddenly the binary oppositions discerning between good and bad, strong and weak, favoured and neglected, that were used before were no longer uncontestedly true: “sooner or later, reason is driven back upon persuasion, logic upon rhetoric, fact upon value, truth upon sovereignty – at which point it turns out that they were not radically distinct in the first place” (Cottom 15). Reason was unmasked as a human fabrication, not nearly as divine as the Enlightenment and Classicism had wanted to believe.

If not through reason, the surrealists *were* looking for truth but chose to try the power of the imagination and the unconscious. As a young medical student, Breton witnessed Freud's talking cure taking effect on shell-shock patients coming back from the front. After the disillusionment with reason and logic in the wake of WWI, Surrealism offered a move away from that uneasy past. This inspired Breton and his group to experiment with the new territory of the subconscious as a site for discovery and healing. Roger Cardinal and Robert Stuart Short even define the central motive of Surrealism as "the recuperation of man's lost powers" through the site of the unconscious (35). Trauma, memory and retrieval are deeply embedded in the surrealist movement from its beginning. While Freud had no idea what Surrealism was trying to do with his findings, another psychoanalyst was intrigued by Surrealism and even met Salvador Dalí – although Dalí did most of the talking during their meeting (Conley 6; Williams). Linda Williams sees correlations between much of the meaning and context of surrealist film and Jacques Lacan's theory of language. The surrealists worked on an aesthetic project and Lacan was in the interpretative business, but both, Williams argues, "isolate the phenomenon of an absence that is infinitely desirable because never attainable" (210). To Williams, the model of lack, desire and anxiety is the primal framework to understand surrealist film. This model is executed both figuratively, and conceptually. Figuratively, absence is the subject of for example the scene of the hole in the hand from which ants crawl in *Un Chien Andalou*. Conceptually, images of erotic pursuit cluster in both *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*: the fantasy of possessing the Other that is desirable precisely because it is unattainable (Williams 210). Working with the lack as creative figure in film, the surrealists aestheticize the significance of the void. In cinema, Williams writes, the surrealists saw the potential to dream collectively.

Carter was intrigued by the surrealists and worked with their topics of desire, lack, anxiety and the unconscious, but remained critical of their ideology ("The Alchemy of the Word"). In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter seems to critique the surrealist collective dream by staging it *in extremis*. The novel portrays a war between the materialization of desires and the maintenance of the world of Law and Order. On the side of the Dreams, the army is convinced that "the world exists only as a medium in which we execute our desires" which in their strategy requires a "regime of total liberation" (34, 37). Carter's novel insists on the disastrous consequences of materialised desires roaming the streets: "we built a vast wall of barbed wire round the city, to quarantine the unreality, but soon the wall was stuck all over with decomposing corpses of those who [...] proved how real they were by dying on the spikes" (5). The desire for liberation *in extremis* produces a world

full of instabilities instead of a better world. Despite its seductive message, liberation for liberation's sake loses in the end. Desire itself is a problematic end, Williams argues, it "can never be achieved because it is always the desire for an unpossessable fantasy of the Other" (210). In short, desire will last. The only 'liberation' can be found in the film theatre. Cinema exploits the unquenchable desire with its potential to feign a presence in absence, and project visual access to the unpossessable fantasy for the duration of its film.

Gordon found the surrealist adage "The marvellous alone is beautiful" repeated over and over in Carter's journal in the Sixties (Gordon 88). She certainly flirted with Surrealism. Her first enchantment with the movement was Breton's manifesto and its bold ideas on beauty. However, the surrealist movement turned out to be outdated when Carter tried to work with its material in the Sixties and Seventies:

"The surrealists were not good with women. That is why, although I thought they were wonderful, I had to give them up in the end. They were, with a few patronised exceptions, all men and they told me that I was the source of all mystery, beauty, and otherness, because I was a woman – and I knew that was not true. I knew I wanted my fair share of the imagination, too. Not an excessive amount, mind; I wasn't greedy. Just an equal share in the right to vision" ("The Alchemy of the Word" 512)

Carter was not the only one: it seems a trend with Surrealism that women continue to be intrigued with the movement but rather work on the outskirts on their own projects. Whitney Chadwick gives many examples of such women in *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. Although women often collaborate with surrealists, they were never allowed to be in the core group. Cottom accounts for this by arguing that "surrealism as a cultural movement was both male and patriarchal" (5). In their visions of collective dreaming, the surrealist group itself was rather exclusive. Breton chose the members of the group and expelled those who went astray from his envisaged path. There were no women in the core group. Katherine Conley argues that women's attraction to Surrealism lies in the radical change from the *status quo* at the time. Conley argues that the surrealists' reverence of Woman as Other, the gender closer to the unconscious, opened the discourse for feminism to claim an autonomous place for women. Surrealism opened the way for a different kind of writing through automatic writing, in which desire, imagination and the unconscious could all be used to dismantle the set of myths and artificial constructions of Western society.

Moreover, the surrealists placed a great emphasis on desire, love and lust. The more the surrealists worked through their movement to liberate the unconscious, the more they

foregrounded desire and eroticism. Conley argues that the surrealists moved from the trauma of WWI to a longing for ideal reciprocity in love, even if that love leads to the annihilation of life. This movement between Thanatos and Eros stumbles upon what Nicholas Royle found out about the uncanny, namely that “[t]he death drive has to do with the figure of woman” (87). As the surrealists praised Automatic Woman for her more direct connection with the unconscious, she could only be a muse and should not talk back. “The Surrealists were not good with women,” Carter wrote (“The Alchemy of the Word” 512), but their obsession with women paved the way for women to start talking back.

Taking everything into account, Carter looked at Surrealism and took what she needed to liberate her own desires and form her own vision. What she continued to work with, was Breton’s ultimate surrealist statement “The marvellous alone is beautiful”. She was firstly seduced by the definition of beauty in Surrealism: “Surrealist beauty is convulsive. That is, you *feel* it, you don’t see it – it exists as an excitation of the nerves”; it is “an abandonment to vertigo” (“The Alchemy of the Word” 512). Carter was never part of the movement of Surrealism, but found, in it, the feeling that her fiction should have. The one word that enters her work time and time again. Vertigo. Carter wrote about vertigo in relation to her experience of the Sixties and the feeling at the time of being on the brink of something new. Her appreciation of Godard’s films lies in his ability to “crystallise the vertigo of that decade”: “Vertigo that came from the intoxicating, terrifying notion that the old order was indeed coming to an end, vertigo of beings about to be born” (“Jean-Luc Godard” 381). Vertigo: that dizzying sentiment of being up high, that feeling of sinking down. The feeling of Baroque.

In Carter’s fiction, the feeling of Baroque sides with surrealist influences. According to Richardson, who looked at cinematic representation of surrealist films made aside from *Un Chien Andalou* and *L’Age d’Or*, “there is no conflict between surrealism and baroque methods of representation and it is perfectly possible to be both surrealist and baroque” (160). Carter saw the same, as she reviewed Pontus Hulten’s book on the baroque painter Giuseppe Acrimboldo. The baroque works of Acrimboldo, she writes, fall into the “twinned categories of the grotesque and the marvellous” and “convincingly [related] to the surrealists” (“Pontus Hulten: The Acrimboldo Effect” 431). Based on the importance of the visual and the look in both the Baroque and Surrealism, Mary Ann Caws argues that “The baroque sensibility and techniques have an urgent application in the world of surrealism and its reversal of words, thoughts and concepts and its exuberant ways of thinking and expressing in general” (8). The baroque technique, Caws suggest, is for example the use of colours, bright “red-orange, black,

gray and white” (68). Most of all, the surrealist adages “the marvellous alone is beautiful” (Breton, “The First Surrealist Manifesto”) and “Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all” (Breton, *Nadja*) call for the typically baroque demand of art to bring about visual emotion. Caws writes that “The baroque finds its truest post-reflection in surrealism,” ending on a disturbing note: “Baroque blood disturbs more than any other...” (165). Carter’s novels are streaked with that baroque blood that demands to be looked at in bright ‘lifelike’ colours: her Baroque demands to be seen.

Carter’s Baroque is most clearly explained through her 1982 film criticism on Peter Greenaway’s *The Draughtsman’s Contract*. The film is set in England in 1694, which places the events during the time that the Baroque whirled through Europe on the continent (Wellek). In England, an abundance of available denotations of the period halted the use of the term ‘Baroque’. Recently, however, scholars agree that English metaphysical poetry is a subspecies of the Baroque (Canfield 35, 41; Sayce 251; Van Hook 24). Roy Daniells sees the English Baroque as being “somewhat elusive and concealed” (116). He compared the Baroque with the Renaissance and saw a radical shift from “absolute clarity”, the light of reason, to beauty found in “relative clarity” in which darkness plays a major role in bringing about the beauty: ‘significant darkness’ (Daniells 118). The same shift can be found in the image that stuck to the Baroque, the misshapen pearl: it is the misshapen that evokes the curiosity that *demand*s to look. A philosophy of contrast emerges: siding red with green, red stands out. Recall Caws’ baroque colours, intense colours that demand for grey and black to bring out the fiery hues. Significant darkness is also that which fills the peep-show, the cinema, and intensifies what can be seen. The invisible, what is right outside the frame, hints at an infinite *elsewhere* that is characteristic of the Baroque. The dark shows the light; the highly artificial shows the extremely real. It is the elaborate artificiality in Greenaway’s film that draws attention to the act of looking, the act of acting. The peeping itself, spectatorship, becomes the central theme of the film.

In Carter’s review of Greenaway’s film, she underlines that “what you are watching is elaborately constructed artificial reality” (*Visions* 10:38:57). The scenes that Carter chose to comment upon correlate with the themes she was fond of using in her own works of fiction, and allow insight into her aesthetics. The atmosphere of *The Draughtsman’s Contract* breathes the visual, the luscious, the light, candlelight on the flesh, mists of mornings, so that the staged scenes ask you to peep, arouse you with excitement to see more. Carter argues that cinema is often concerned with its own historical relevance vis-à-vis other movies (“The

Draughtsman's Contract" 377). *The Draughtsman's Contract*, on the other hand, she compares with a coffee-table book: enjoyable on other terms than purely cinematic ones. This film asks to be looked at more in the way a painting asks to be looked at. Greenaway's film seems to answer to Woolf's essay on cinema, making a moving image spectacle by blowing up its parasitic relation to the other arts: drawing, architecture, painting, the theatre. Instead of a voice in an eternal echoing chamber of cinematic cross-reference, *The Draughtsman's Contract* is in dialogue with drawing, landscape architecture, the murder mystery and the novel of manners. Carter's fiction moves the same way; the close reading of Carter's peep-shows show that Carter's own cross-media references and symbols are proliferate.

Being looked at is one of the central themes of Greenaway's film that Carter highlights. Look at the women in Greenaway's film. Carter remarks that they wear clothes from which they need to be rather violently *cut* free. Their dresses are part of the British theatre costume. While critical of the overt acting on British theatre stage, she appreciates in Greenaway's setting that the actors never stop wriggling their hands. The continuous acting and performing, instead of embodying feeling, asks the onlooker to be precisely that: an onlooker. We look at the artificiality, the darkness in a plot about looking and observing. Blowing up artificiality is a technique that Carter uses in her fiction, as well. In her biography, Gordon interprets Carter's confrontation with Japanese culture as a heightening of the sense that masculinity and femininity are constructions in social activity and communication: "She was appalled by the 'intense polarity between the sexes', but at the same time it was enlightening to see gender identity being so ludicrously exaggerated, since it seemed to substantiate her belief that it was always a fabrication" (164). It was also in Japan that Carter found "One is the object of a quite incredible erotic curiosity, bordering on the hysterical. It is our size, our bigness, our fairness which drives them wild" (qtd in Gordon 138). Carter's subsequent return to Britain, her engagement in intellectual reading on de Sade for *The Sadeian Woman*, and the research for her novels then resulted in a sense of the peep-show in her novels. The 'wonders of the world' are on display in stunning artifice. Carter may have found the power of peeping in Japan, a culture notable for peeping as Huhtamo suggests¹⁰, when her own cultural paradigm was shocked by something both alien and familiar, and above all carefully constructed. Gordon writes that Carter's time in Japan inspired her novels

¹⁰ Huhtamo describes that Japanese peeping culture can be seen in its architecture (see-through ricepaper walls), and its long-standing history of peep-show boxes. However, the origins of these boxes are probably foreign: "However, as Timon Screech has shown in his groundbreaking study *The Lens Within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*, the peepshow, originally a foreign (probably Dutch) import, gained a complex and distinctive discursive identity."

from *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* onwards, in which the visual, the excess, and the picaresque are more prominent than in the novels before. When Carter praises Greenaway's film for being about the act of seeing, and looking, and "how in the gap between looking and seeing truth might lie" (*Visions* 10:54:24), her aesthetic of the visual in her writing shines through. After her own double experience of *looking* and *being looked at*, her fiction is increasingly filled with mirrors that return the gaze.

The gaze is turned once more in the cinema theatre: it looks back, in the gap between looking and seeing, beyond the red velvet rows of seats. The technology that holds the spectators in the dark room. at the lens of the large peep-show. The lens is the focal point of the desire the audience's eyes are skewered to on the screen, if you will. Determining the Baroque of Versailles, Louis Marin defined space and place and their function in the signifying process. A place, firstly, "is determined by 'beings-there,' by presences (the dead body as the foundation of a place, for example)" – look behind us in the theatre, the 'beings-there' gaping at the screen, they make cinema a place of entertainment, emotional transport (Marin 170-1). Space, on the other hand, Marin sees as "determined by the operations which specify it" (171). Film itself is an infinite operation: it is (projects) when it works, when it stops, it is not. Cinema produces an art that only exists as long as the technology is in operation. Within the technology of cinema, the film is a baroque fold itself, especially in its early days when the images were stored on endless lengths of film stock, neatly folded up only to unfold and fold again. Deleuze diagnosed the Baroque with "the infinite work or operation" as it "endlessly creates folds" (237, 227), and cinema itself is the infinite operation in that it only is when it functions. The screened film compels the spectators to look, while the dark room obscures the theatre itself. People visit the cinema for the place, but lose themselves in its space when the lights are switched off.

A ticket bought for a place in that space, is the desire to see what is on the programme. On a more fundamental level, Laura Mulvey and Marshall McLuhan agree on, the reason behind the attraction to the screen is the pleasure of seeing oneself blown-up right before our eyes. Mulvey calls it "narcissistic scopophilia" (835) and McLuhan traces this narcissism back to the ancient myth. He connects the pleasure of recognition on the screen to the Western myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own, quivering image in the pool: "The extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image" (62). The filmgoers become illusionary prosthetic devices to the screen: they love seeing themselves and, for a moment, are numbed by the sight of

themselves. No wonder that McLuhan condemns humanity to the fate of “the sex organ of the machine world,” only fit for procreating more machines, while “[t]he Machine world reciprocates man’s love by expediting his wishes and desires, namely, in providing him with wealth” (69). Whereas McLuhan interprets the relation between human and machine in terms of reciprocal servitude, cinema offers its spectators not wealth but the illusion of wish fulfilment. In return for priceless attention, the spectator gets nothing material in return – only shimmering light on a screen, an image of him or herself.

Yet, when all the attention is aimed at the screen, something happens in the room. Carter looked back at the seats: “But, wait. Something has happened while you have been away. Now the audience is ‘all sitting stiffly in their seats with weird flattened-out faces, their dilated eyes locked onto the screen like they’re hypnotized or dead or something’” (“Robert Coover: A Night at the Movies” 384). Something happens to the audience as they, like Narcissus, are numbed by the screening. The emptiness on their faces betrays the lack commercial cinema masks, as Linda Williams writes that:

“the whole apparatus of the fiction film aims precisely to cover up this fundamental absence by creating the illusion of presence. Just as the fetish that covers a lack takes on the erotic desirability of the whole love-object, so the entire cinematic institution – considered especially in its technical prowess – becomes erotogenic.” (Williams 218)

Gadget-love is stimulated by technology’s prosthetic possibilities. The surrealist film, Williams continues, took on the project to defetishize the cinematic institution (218). The technical prowess of the institution, however, outran the attempts of the surrealists: it eradicated the illusory character of cinema that appealed to the surrealists (Richardson). Cinema remained a fetish, an expert even.

The fetish of cinema is a blown-up form of gadget-love. The projection on the screen offers an erotic encounter in the dark. It was the speed brought by film, according to McLuhan, that “carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure” (*Understanding Media* 25). Instead of moving from one image to the other, a new reality is presented – a reality Woolf already saw in 1926 (“On Cinema”). The speed of film sweeps the spectators of their feet, leaves them with their mouths wide open in amazement. J.G. Ballard foresaw a crash, in the 1970s – figuratively in his novel *Crash!* but quite literally in culture itself. McLuhan’s “delight in high-speed information mosaics” is only one side of the coin, Ballard writes in his introduction to *Crash!* The other side is that

“we are still reminded of Freud’s profound pessimism in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Voyeurism, self-disgust, the infantile basis of our dreams and longings – these diseases of the psyche have now culminated in the most terrifying casualty of the century: the death of affect.” (Ballard 5)

The passive watching, the rows of gazes in wonder in the film theatre, are not the round eyes of child’s wonder, but eyes of apathy. Carter’s Evelyn in *The Passion of New Eve* pays a tribute to the flickering image on the screen, unaffected by the girl he is physically with. Carter’s Chance sisters from *Wise Children* watch themselves on the screen, dwell on nostalgia and memories among the fleas, and learn nothing new. Meanwhile, as the screen plays tricks with time, in reality time passes by.

Carter wanted something new from cinema, which she found in the films by Godard, whose films emphasises the importance of sex, politics and the movies, but “in images of such energy even stolid Brits became afflicted with that blessed acne of the soul, recognised ourselves, at last, as part of the great international conspiracy of the disaffected” (“Jean-Luc Godard” 380). Godard’s *Nouvelle Vague* films are amply criticised by surrealists for their emptiness – Richardson for example argues that “they instituted [...] a sensibility that exalted film above life, ideas were elevated above content, but not in order to explore these ideas; they were simply hooks to hang the film on, but the idea could be anything at all just so long it was an idea” (167). However, Carter saw in Godard’s films the ‘crystallisation of the vertigo of the sixties’, when, “however briefly, it seemed imagination might truly seize power” (“Jean-Luc Godard” 381). Optimistically, Carter here echoes Breton’s manifesto, that “Perhaps the imagination is on the verge of recovering its rights.” Alongside the romantic films of engulfment, cinema showed a potential for awakening, for sharpening the senses – a potential for affect, convulsion, the marvellous.

The expectation felt by both Breton and Carter of the triumph of the imagination starts in cinema with the dimming of the lights. When Carter relates her own first cinematic experience, notice how the darkness plays the leading role: “I fell in love with cinema although I scarcely remember the movies I watched with my father, only the space in which we sat to watch them, where we sat with all those wonderful people waiting in the dark” (“The Granada, Tooting” 400). That darkness is the site of expectation, the marvellous, and it has always been more about the space than about the projected shadows. The expectation is much like the theatre, as Dora Chance lovingly and repetitively relates: “The lights went down, the bottom of the curtain glowed. I loved it and have always loved it best of all, the moment when the lights go down, the curtain glows, you know that something wonderful is

going to happen” (*Wise Children* 54). The darkness and the glow – cinema borrowed *that* theatricality.

See: it was not film itself that appealed to the surrealists. Contemporary films shown at home are barely comparable to the early cinema days of black and white silent films, in which a pianist accompanies the film with live music and film actors gesture theatrically, in full make-up, because the misty old film stock would otherwise blur their features. Cinema the institution attracted the surrealists, “the experience of seeing a film in a darkened hall” (Richardson 6). The cinema of the old days offered a setting for the encounter of the marvellous. Michael Richardson historicises cinema, when the surrealists were enthusiastic in the 1920s about the medium that relied on images and music rather than speech which invited “the exploration of universal themes” (8). Moreover, the cinema theatre is democratic in that there are no class distinctions in the dark and the space dictates that you cannot talk: “language barriers were also temporarily overcome” (8). Carter would add the sexual connotations of that dark room in which desires are projected – both in *Wise Children* and *The Passion of New Eve* feature meaningless sex in the dark, as flimsy and fleeting as the images on the screen. The space that allows a collective experience appealed to the surrealists. They truly sought a universal liberation of the unconscious: their movement aimed at being a collective, working in a universal sense, the cinema offered this possibility.

Carter fell in love with cinema but always from a distance. She made a few films, *The Company of Wolves* and *The Magic Toyshop*, but the technology was insufficient to work out precisely what she imagined. Woolf, Williams and Richardson attest to the power of the image to say more than a writer can with words. Otto Rank, too, wondered if “cinematography, which in numerous ways reminds us of the dream-work, can also express certain psychological facts and relationships – which the writer often is unable to describe with verbal clarity – in such clear and conspicuous imagery that it facilitates our understanding of them” (qtd in Royle 76-7). Technological improvement of cinematographic techniques continually strengthens the illusion of reality: “cinema could bring into focus the unseen or previously unseeable, but the wonder of it was that in addition to representational prowess it possessed magical powers, could make things appear and disappear, could conjure ghosts, could mutilate and multiply and reconstitute bodies – could mess with time and matter” (Lesley Stern qtd Royle 82). The train on the screen no longer frightens us – rather, we are thrilled by heightened “orgiastic violence that hurts nobody because it is not real – all the devices of dream, or film, or fiction” exploited on the screen (“Robert Coover: A Night at the Movies” 382). The thrill of the cinema is increasingly the pleasure Carter described of fun

fairs: “Pleasures of incipient nausea; of feeling danger when one is absolutely safe. Of concealment and revelation” (“Fun fairs” 342). Cinema becomes a place to make up for boredom, to cover a lack of excitement by the illusion of its presence. Cinema as fetish, the ultimate escapist technology, the conjuror of dreams built its cultural imperium with the speed of light.

For a moment, Woolf’s tadpole seemed to quiver and bulge with potential; likewise, cinema did the same in history with its potential for a true collective experience. However, the democratic possibility was quickly dimmed by technological developments. The potentially marvellous could at first only be encountered in the darkness of cinema, but the advent of television changed the scene, so that “the most public of art forms has been transformed by technological change into the most intimate” (“Jean-Luc Godard” 381). Carter was sceptical of the television set, how it “gobbled up the dream factory and the reality factory, too” (“Jean-Luc Godard” 381). The marvels of the black box, the entertainment box, were privatised in homes, creating isolated islands. Yet, Carter saw Surrealism rise again with the advent of the home cinema set: the spectator was never allowed to be immersed indefinitely. In absence of Breton, Vaché, and Desnos and their disruptive cinema behaviour, we now have commercials:

“This is what is marvellous about the commercials, marvellous in the surrealist sense. There is a kind of lateral imagination at work that makes it no wonder so many poets work in advertising. This quality of allusiveness is what roots the television commercial to firmly in the absurd. Maybe that is what makes it the dominant art form of our time – the unacknowledged, despised, low culture art form spontaneously generated in the twilight kitsch of the Krazy World of Kapitalism [sic]” (“Theatre of the Absurd” 401).

Advertising disrupts the romantic comedy, the thriller, the talk show and the news, shattering the substitute wish fulfilment and mirroring – again – the fundamental shortcoming of the screen to offer symbiosis. Carter sees in television commercials an analogy with vaudeville, “The commercial breaks are gaps in the fictive reality of the television evening through which a magic otherworld of lights, bustle and glamour is glimpsed – the magic otherworld of art” (“Theatre of the Absurd” 402). The artificiality of grandeur, the darkness that brings out the contours: in baroque fashion, the television experience is one of elevation and dropping. The commercial is the new architecture of images that demands: Look at me!

Television sets displaced the religious instinct that hitherto had drawn spectators *en masse* to the cinema. The structure of the dream factory created by cinema and Hollywood did

not subside when the boxes appeared in living rooms. Carter was adamant in defining the place of the television in the home: “I’m not saying that television *is* a religion, mind, only, that it functions rather like a religion – as consolation, entertainment and a method of relating to the real world by proxy” (“The Box Does Furnish a Room” 411). The privatisation of the black box became a possible escape from everyday life. Especially when Carter visualises the poor family, crowding in the small living space, so that the only form of privacy is provided by the light box, as they “retreat into the television, not into the action on the screen so much as into the act of viewing” (“The Box Does Furnish a Room” 412). Although the screen has shrunk from the larger-than-life spectre in the dark to an encased piece of furniture, the film lends the eye a way out – like the oculus in the baroque building.

Carter wrote a version of the history of cinema, shows, and television in her novel *Wise Children*. The aged Chance sisters in tell about their life on the stage as showgirls, a personal history of staged, collective peeping. In this novel, Carter writes about Hollywood and film making without writing about Hollywood directly. She sketches the outlines of the economic empire, the stories of the extras, the ones who are – by chance – right outside the limelight. The ones who are only extraordinary because they are not unique – twins. In *Wise Children*, Carter combines theatricality of the stage, comedy, television, a film set all seen through the memoir of one of the Chance sisters. In an essay on Hollywood, Carter wrote how “Telling stories about the people engaged in telling stories is a basic informal concern, and no matter if these are twice-told tales – they gain richness and significance with repetition” (“Hollywood” 385). In *Wise Children* Carter offers a story about stories, twins doubly fathered by twins, so that the repetition cannot be unseen. The dream-like quality of the novel refers to something *beyond*, something *unseeable*, the folds of the Baroque – but here perhaps the folds of the skirts of costumes throughout the ages. Especially when they start flying about the room:

“Something leapt off the shelf where the hats were. No, not leapt; ‘propelled itself’, is better because it came whizzing out like a flying saucer, slicing across the room as if about to knock our heads off, so we ducked. It knocked against the opposite wall, bounced down to the wall, fluttered and was still. [...] And as we nervously inspected it, there came an avalanche of gloves” (189-90).

Carter’s fiction then says most with its images, its dynamics, and the movement of objects – sometimes even at seemingly random. However, it happens when her protagonists are on the brink of losing themselves in nostalgia, of stranding in the past. The fiction is meant to wake

its protagonists up and their readers alike. Nora and Dora are seventy-year-olds whose life has only just begun and the ghost of their Grandmother urges them to go out and live. While they were tempted to dwell on the past in front of the television, they don their showgirls' make-up once more to go outside. When Carter wrote about television sets in the living room, she asked the question that the Chance girls' grandmother could have asked: "Now why would anyone want to look at [a box in a room, which transmits pictures when you press a switch], when the world is so full of a number of things?" ("The Box Does Furnish a Room" 412).

The Fold Continues

“The Baroque does not refer to an essence, but rather to an operative function, to a characteristic. It endlessly creates folds. It does not invent the thing [...] But it twists and turns the folds, takes them to infinity, fold upon fold, fold after fold. The characteristic of the Baroque is the fold that goes on to infinity.” (Deleuze 227)

Carter’s vertigo of excess finds its expression in the Baroque fold: her ‘demythologising business’ is not a disentanglement of myth, but a further knotting of the strands of cultural baggage until they become stuck, useless, and ridiculous (“Notes from the Front Line” 38). The cultural myth on the dissecting table is dismantled as a *trompe l’oeil* and is used in Carter’s fiction as an ornament to enjoy, instead of a fact to believe in. Carter borrowed that from the surrealists: the joy of myth-busting, creating art on the way. She differed from the surrealists in seeing cinema not as a site for revolution, but rather as a place that betrays our desires. In *Wise Children*, the twins Dora and Nora Chance watch themselves on the screen: “God! Times have changed. More people on the screen than in the auditorium, and fleapit’s the word, a flea bit me on the inner upper thigh [...] fun was the last thing *I* was having, sitting there in my used body, watching it when it was new” (*Wise Children* 110). The twin sisters are plagued by their image’s eternal youth on the screen. The derelict auditorium betrays the itchiness of the sisters: the flea is the only intimacy the sisters find in the dark, while next to them a couple lives the implied intercourse from John Donne’s *The Flea*. Although Dora hints that the days of arousal are over, *Wise Children* ends in an unbelievable and fantastical scene of reconciliation that only daydreams provide, including an earth-shattering sexual escapade. Cinema is no country for old women, it seems, but compulsively the twins watch themselves repeated, over and over again, on the screen. The double double, seeing double, as if we have gazed too intently. Excessively.

Raised in a literary landscape committed to social realism, Carter turned for inspiration to the authors of the generation before – such as D.H. Lawrence – for their ability to “quicken the pulse” (Gordon 49). What appealed to her most, was the affective quality of this kind of literature. Like Woolf’s fascination with the tadpole on the screen, Carter seizes the visual power to show, not tell. Screenplay writing was never Carter’s forte, but writing about the screen offered her an entirely new vocabulary to grapple with ubiquitous visual myth.

We have looked backwards in the cinema theatre and peeped at the seductive heights and lows of Carter's fiction projected larger than life. History relegated the vulgar and baroque peep-shows into the shadows, but the perverse satisfaction of peeping continues to arouse curiosity. The allure of the visual was blown up in the cinema theatres but, then again, the image never sat still. The moving pictures shrunk back, now to television sets, at home, to enjoy at leisure on your own. With the remote control, the spectator is now in control of what is seen. The surrealist experiment of moving from one film of the other is now imitated in a lazy thumb-movement on a couch. The spectator does not even need to budge that much. The only infringement on the control of watching are the advertisements Carter saw as the truly disruptive, a child from Surrealism and vaudeville. Had Carter lived to see the recent developments of cinema and virtual reality, how much more would she stress: "Now why would anyone want to look at that, when the world is so full of a number of things?" ("The Box Does Furnish a Room" 412).

Peeping persisted. Society was pleased to have done away with the suggestive and powerful black boxes of the peep-show, but now a new, shining box returned. A box that, after Carter passed away, shrunk into laptops, smartphones, tablets with a continuous stream of images provided by the Internet. Perhaps it was not the peep-show per se that was sent outside the light of history, but its murky, ambiguous contents. Technological development could not erase the dark side of humanity, so that each new gadget is invaded with viruses, supercomputers are used to make selfies and promote oneself on the Internet, and pornography boomed now that peeping could be done in the relative safety of one's own home – in the tiny gadget that fits the hand. Mulvey's narcissist scopophilia trod outside the limits of cinema, now that we can photograph and film ourselves and put ourselves on display on the World Wide Web. McLuhan wrote in the Sixties about the human being as the servomechanism of the machine world: half a century later, the ultimate peep-media that is social media has skewered all us gadget-lovers to our tiny screens that are increasingly connected to everything.

The Enlightenment sought to shine the light of reason on the darkest recesses of the earth and humanity. However, Freud's discovery of the unconscious presented us with a new black box: our own deepest *id*, filled with the perverse, as if we could never really tuck away that Pandora's box. Well, as Michel Foucault observed, the madman was relegated to the madhouse (*Madness and Civilization*). The madwoman was duly placed in the attic. Psychoanalysts peep into those peep-shows of the human psyche, extract metaphor and

metonymy, showing the masking faculties of language. Reason could not triumph over madness, over desire. Wars attested to that. The airiness, the grotesque, is contained in our deepest selves, in the folds of the layers of our consciousness. The Baroque, in a sense, never left the premises.

Carter's demythologizing business is still relevant today, now that a single Tweet can become a cultural, no, *global* myth in a second. Her fiction invites the reader not to sit back and let the plot happen, but to look beyond the characters and the stories. Carter planted so many references and jokes in her fiction that there is always more to see. She did not need hyperlinks to make her texts interactive. Rather, the power of exaggerating the artifice in her stories endlessly defers identification with the protagonists, while the marvellous and the grotesque in her stories compel the reader to read on. Carter wrote about the films of Jean-Luc Godard, that his "movies are themselves an education in cinema and how to see it" ("Jean-Luc Godard" 381). I would say, Carter's novels are an education in literature and how to read it, to question the names and images, look them up and conduct your own research into the images that in daily life seem normal but – in the end – are constructs and built from, sometimes, outmoded lies.

In her appreciation of Surrealism, Carter wrote that "It is this world, there is no other but a world transformed by imagination and desire. You could say it is the dream made flesh" ('The Alchemy of the Word' 509). The world outside, in the end, proved the most interesting projection screen to Carter. In her demythologizing business, she sought to dismantle the modern myths and deconstruct social structures of gender and desire. Her fiction was her method, in which she could create carnivals in which desire was exaggerated, only to fall apart at the end of the story. A carnival in fiction with image stacked upon image, a love of excess, until the last page. Carter herself quoted Umberto Eco, "An everlasting carnival does not work," after which she wrote:

"You can't keep it up, you know; nobody could. The essence of the carnival, the festival, the Feast of the Fools, is transience. It is here today and gone tomorrow, a release of tension not a reconstitution of order, a refreshment... after which everything can go on again exactly as if nothing had happened" ("In Pantoland" 399).

Carter gives a license to excess – it cannot last, anyway. Cinema had to make way for television sets at home, and whatever is left of the early days of grand cinema: "Nevertheless, the darkened hall remains: we are still alone with strangers experiencing an encounter with images of light" (Richardson 8).

The analysis in Carter's works of the figure of the peep-show, the visual project of the surrealists, and how cinema completely disrupted the culture of peeping show the importance not only of looking, but also of looking *at* looking in Carter's demythologising project. By blowing up images from cultural myth, Carter uses her fiction like a looking glass to not only point out the fabricated lies, but also to burn them down with the light that shines upon it. The Baroque as literary paradigm serves to appreciate Carter's project in a different light from the usual paradigm of the 'Victorian bric-a-brac'. After Carter's biography was published, the *Financial Times* (Harris), *The London Review of Books* (Turner), and *The Literary Review* (Hughes-Hallett) among others, all copy the 'Victorian bric-à-brac' uncritically from Gordon's book. However, the phrase would refer more to the chaos in the cauldron that Woolf saw in early cinema – perhaps the label fits Carter's earlier novels more, as they portray life among the debris of the past. However, from *The Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* on, her style has left the 'bric-a-brac' behind and makes way for picaresques beyond reality as perceived in everyday life. Moreover, Carter's work continues to invite students and scholars to investigate her fictions, metaphors and plots, and fan-fiction grows wild on her fairy tales. Carter's work interpreted as a Baroque fold does precisely that: it continues to create folds, endlessly, which is why Angela Carter remains an important literary figure even twenty years after she passed away.

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