Postmodern Philosophy and the Subject in Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*

While she convincingly argues that the allegorical level of Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* "could be characterized in a number of ways as a dispute between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, idealism and empiricism, Dionysus and Apollo, anti-Enlightenment and Enlightenment, and any number of binary oppositions," Alison Lee also insists that "[t]rying to pin down the exact parameters of the opposition is, the novel suggests, essentially fruitless" (Lee 61). Though it is certainly the case that *The Infernal Desire Machines* evades a single allegorical reading, one of the oppositions Lee does not mention is central to understanding this novel: the opposition of postmodern philosophy and a great deal of the preexisting philosophical tradition. While the very nature of individuality is at stake in the battle between these two modes of thought, neither system offers true liberation of the individual. I would like to argue that one of the central allegorical concerns of *The Infernal Desire Machines* is the onset of postmodernism, and the dilemma this creates for individuals.

The war between the Minister and Doctor Hoffman is, in many ways, clearly reminiscent of the sense of radical philosophical change that was beginning to take hold in the mid nineteen-sixties. In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Michel Foucault describes this shift in terms that are strikingly similar to *The Infernal Desire Machines*:

> During the years 1945-1965 (I am referring to Europe), there was a certain way of thinking correctly, a certain style of political discourse, a certain ethics of the intellectual. [. . .] Then came the brief, impassioned, jubilant, enigmatic years. At the gates of our world, there was Vietnam, of course, and the first major blow to the powers that be. But here,

> inside our walls, what exactly was taking place? An amalgam of revolutionary and antirepressive politics? A war fought on two fronts: against social exploitation and psychic repression? A surge of libido modulated by the class struggle? Perhaps. At any rate, it is this familiar, dualistic interpretation that has laid claim to the events of those years. ("Preface" xi-xii)

It is precisely this sort of dualistic battle that Carter describes in *The Infernal Desire Machines*, a novel that is concerned with many of the same ideas Foucault introduces: the ostensibly antirepressive politics of revolution; the relationship between social and psychic repression; the role of desire in the class struggle; and finally, the understanding that the war began from within—as Aidan Day says about the war in *The Infernal Desire Machines*, "the enemy is not simply outside the city. The imaginative power of the human mind exists inside the minds of the inhabitants of the city" (Day 71). As Foucault continues by presenting a series of points intended to outline how one ought to behave "to make this great book [*Anti-Oedipus*] into a manual or guide to everyday life" ("Preface" xiii), it becomes evident just how profound the sense of change was in the early days of postmodernism. Consider, for example, his third recommendation: "Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities" (Foucault "Preface" xiii). These are very much the terms of the battle between Dr. Hoffman and the Minister in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. More than ideas are at stake in this battle: to the victor goes a great deal of power, control of the conditions of individual existence—for instance, whether people are considered to be individuals, subjects, or agents—and, finally, influence over the meaning of reality itself. Carter is quite justified in

allegorizing the shift to postmodern philosophy, which is so focused on overcoming these master-narratives, as a life and death struggle. After all, as Judith Butler states in her critique of Althusser, "[o]ne cannot criticize too far the terms by which one's existence is secured" (Butler 129).

Dr. Hoffman appears to be this novel's representative of postmodernism. His doctrines so frequently echo postmodern philosophers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari that, in the words of Aiden Day, "Hoffman himself stands as something like an arch-postmodernist" (Day 68). Like a postmodernist, Hoffman recognizes that the classical understanding of the individual[1] greatly limits what one is able to be by defining the individual in certain limited ways. It is in this sense that the peep-show proprietor is able to view the Doctor's war as waged to liberate humanity: "man will be freed in perpetuity from the tyranny of a single present. And we will live on as many layers of consciousness as we can, all at the same time. After the Doctor liberates us, that is" (Carter 100). While the Minister proposes to stabilize reality to protect individuals, the Doctor aims to rescue individuals from the limits of stability by offering them a radical form of individual freedom that allows them to reshape the world according to desire. As the Doctor's Ambassador explains, for the Doctor "the world exists only as a medium in which we execute our desires. Physically, the world itself, the actual world – the real world, if you like – is formed of malleable clay; its metaphysical structure is just as malleable" (Carter 35). This malleability of reality allows one to constantly change how one defines one's self to such a degree that individual desires even manage to overthrow *a priori* material reality and reshape the physical world.

[1] By which I mean the Cartesian subject, which is formulated in a system where only knowledge of the individual makes it possible to be certain of any component of material reality.

The postmodern component of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* has received some critical attention. For instance, Raymond van de Wiel discusses the importance of *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (published 1972, the same year as *The Infernal Desire Machines*) as a pretext for *The Infernal Desire Machines*, and the aforementioned Aiden Day uses Jean-François Lyotard's 1979 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (*La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*) to discuss the general postmodern characteristics of *The Infernal Desire Machines*. However, relatively little has been said about the importance of Foucault's archaeological philosophy, and in particular his much celebrated 'death of man,' both of which seem to sprout from the same *zeitgeist* as Dr. Hoffman's ideological framework. Concluding *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*, 1966), Foucault famously insists,

> man is a recent invention [. . . .] As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.
>
> If those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did [. . .] then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (*The Order of Things* 421-2)

On the one hand, this model implies a radical freedom from conventional ways of defining just what it is to be an individual that is also present in Hoffman's ideological framework. On the other hand, as human nature is the product of larger discursive forces, the death of man also seems to imply that there is no such thing as a true nature of humanity, and naturally leaves a void, causing one to question just who or what one is at the most fundamental of levels. In short,

understanding the notion of human essence as untenable and insisting "that the subject is an effect of certain discursive formations rather than an anthropological point of origin" (Macey 83) creates both a feeling of radical freedom from conventional ways of understanding human nature, but also the sense of being inescapably imprisoned within countless discursive formations.

The negative implications of the death of man become quite explicit in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L'Archéologie du savoir*, 1969), Foucault's follow-up to *The Order of Things*. Here, Foucault explains the degree to which discursive relations formulate what it is possible to say, to be, and possibly even to know:

> one cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. [. . .] [T]he object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 49)

This suggests that, while individuals may belong to numerous discursive formations—and, insofar as they are the products of their own ability to signify as subjects and objects of discourse within numerous discourses, may be free from one monolithic definition of 'human essence'—they are by no means free to define themselves in any way they choose. Though this seems to create avenues of freedom by hinting that individuals be able to consciously manipulate the discourses to which they are subject once they understand how these discourses are structured and how they function, the apparent inability to completely escape these discursive formations

greatly limits what it can possibly mean to be an individual. Unlike the Cartesian subject whose very existence provides the only avenue to certainty about the larger material world, the Foucauldian subject is determined by discourses to such an extent that the individual appears to be, by its very nature, completely indeterminate—little more than a cog that may, at best, be able to choose to serve the discursive machine in a finite number of ways.

The consequences models such as Foucault's can have for the individual become evident in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* when it becomes clear that desire, like discourse, exists in the relationships between multiple entities. Ultimately, there are two problems with Dr. Hoffman's emergent social order, both of which are problematic because individual desires do not exist in a vacuum: first, the infinite generative power of desire exists on every level of consciousness, and all of the levels of consciousness are not necessarily in agreement; second, others' desires are also actualized, and there is potential for discord between the desires of multiple individuals. These two features combine to ensure that the individual is by no means liberated when desire is liberated. When the centaurs[2] brutally rape Albertina it becomes clear how difficult it is to contain the former problem, and speak simply of 'desires' as though they are clear, unified, and self-evident:

> [Albertina] was convinced that even though every male in the village had obtained carnal knowledge of her, the beasts were still only emanations of her own desires, dredged up and objectively reified from the dark abysses of the unconscious. And she told me that, according to her father's theory, all the subjects and objects we had encountered in the loose grammar of Nebulous Time were derived from a similar source – my desires; or hers; or the Count's. (Carter 186)

[2] It should be noted that the centaurs are creatures that exist in the 'nebulous time' brought on by the loss of the Doctor's samples, an infinite collection of signs that remind one of the structuralist conception of discourse.

Given that the centaurs *could* be a reification of Desiderio's or the Count's desires, how is Albertina able to consider that the centaurs are the offspring of her own desires when it seems quite clear from the horror of the rape scene that she does not *want* to be raped? Is it a matter of Albertina simultaneously possessing seemingly irreconcilable desires on multiple levels of her consciousness? It seems the suggestion here is most likely that there is a disjunction between Albertina's conscious and unconscious desires, almost as though Albertina's *Thanatos* has overpowered her *Eros*. But liberating desires that threaten the fundamental desire for self-preservation does not seem terribly liberating. The second problem with this supposed liberation arises when it becomes apparent that though the centaurs are, undoubtedly, the reification of *someone's* desires, once they come into being they possess their own desires:

> the coherence of [the bay's] own universe was so inflexible, my own conviction that I was a man named Desiderio, born in a certain city, the child of a certain mother, lover of a certain woman, began to waver. If I was a man, what was a man? The bay offered me a logical definition: a horse in a state of ultimate, biped, maneless, tailless decadence. I was a naked, stunted, deformed dwarf. (Carter 189-90)

As with discourse, which exists as a macro-scale phenomenon that is beyond the control of any one individual[3], the desires of numerous individuals seem to produce a collective that may valorize, criticize, or even disregard individual desires. Ultimately, Desiderio's desires come into conflict with the centaurs' desires, and it becomes clear that the stronger will of the centaurs may just have the potential to overwhelm Desiderio's own desires. The desires of the centaurs are so powerful, and their need to create an all-encompassing system of classification so strong

[3] Consider, for instance, Foucault's response to the question of who or what produces discourse: "What is this anonymous system without a subject, what thinks? The 'I' has exploded . . . this is the discovery of the 'there is'. There is a *one*. In some ways one comes back to the seventeenth century point of view, with this difference: not setting man but anonymous thought, knowledge without a subject, theory with no identity, in God's place" (Foucault, cited in Eribon 161 and Mills 106).

that, ultimately, Desiderio feels as though their existential certainty and inability to account for his appearance threaten to cancel out his very existence: "we were surrounded by giant and indifferent forms. I felt myself dwindle and diminish. Soon I was nothing but a misshapen doll clumsily balanced on two stunted pins [. . .] [Albertina] also had become a doll; a doll of wax, half melted at the lower part" (Carter 176). Far from enabling liberation, allowing desires to materialize spontaneously creates a seriously frightening state of affairs. Because desires exist on multiple levels of the psyche, and because the simultaneous actualization of everyone's desires necessarily creates power-struggles, liberating desire seems to fall well short of truly liberating individuals.

While it does little to liberate individuals generally, Dr. Hoffman's liberation of desire does even less to liberate women. Alison Lee presses this point, emphasizing that "[w]hether the images of women in the novel are meant to be the emanations of Desiderio's or of the Doctor's desires is unclear, but what *is* clear is the male colonization of female desire" (Lee 72). Lee goes further still, insisting that Albertina's very being is the product of male desire:

> Doctor Hoffman and Desiderio provide Albertina with the ready-made limits of her subjectivity, including the rape fantasy. More often than not, she is either a subordinate or a victim, and she is even denied her female body in having to be disguised as both a man and a hermaphrodite (Lee 72-3).

It should be pointed out that in this instance Lee greatly oversimplifies several quite complex issues, and misrepresents Albertina. First, Lee's assertion that the rape fantasy is provided by Dr. Hoffman and/or Desiderio ignores the fact that Albertina considers the possibility, discussed

above, that her own desires were at least partially behind the rape[4]; if Albertina considers this, why ought not we? Second, Lee here completely ignores the quite relevant fact that Desiderio is also raped on multiple occasions (Carter 115-7, 180). Third, Lee's reading ignores the fact that Albertina's ability to convincingly perform multiple genders—male, female, and hermaphrodite—may be read as a genuinely liberating consequence of the Doctor's liberation of desire, and need not necessarily signal her being robbed of her female body. Finally, Lee's reading ignores both the degree to which Albertina often determines Desiderio's identity—nearly swaying Desiderio to abandon his mission to assassinate the Doctor, for instance—and the degree to which her shifts of identity sometimes happen despite Desiderio: "she was now yet another she and this she was the absolute antithesis of my black swan and my bouquet of burning bone; she was a crisp, antiseptic soldier to whom other ranks deferred. I began to feel perfidious, for I had no respect for rank" (Carter 193). That being said, it does seem to be the case that Albertina enters a male system of exchange in a way that Irigaray characterizes as disturbingly typical of the male commodification of women:

> The use of and traffic in women subtend and uphold the reign of masculine hom(m)o-sexuality, even while they maintain that hom(m)o-sexuality in speculations, mirror games, identifications, and more or less rivalrous appropriations, which defer its real practice. Reigning everywhere, although prohibited in practice, hom(m)o-sexuality is played out through the bodies of women, matter, or sign, and heterosexuality has been up to now just

[4] To take an excerpt of the section quoted at length above: "[Albertina] was convinced that [. . .] the beasts were still only emanations of her own desires, dredged up and objectively reified from the dark abysses of the unconscious" (Carter 186).

> an alibi for the smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men. (Irigaray 172)[5]

It is striking that Albertina's role in the reality war is to stabilize the relationship between Dr. Hoffman and Desiderio, and in this way to settle a dispute between Dr. Hoffman and the Minister. Furthermore, Albertina accompanies the Count in disguise to neutralize the dangerous potency of his will, despite the fact that this role leads to the Count repeatedly raping her. While I disagree with Lee and believe that Albertina's desires are not necessarily more or less present or influential than Desiderio's, I agree with her point that this system is extremely oppressive: the fact that Albertina is commodified in such a manner shows the degree to which Dr. Hoffman's liberation of desire does not liberate women. Furthermore, given the fact that Dr. Hoffman's model falls so tragically short of challenging the homosocial/homosexual system of exchange that allows half of humanity to be reduced to objects of exchange, it seems quite ridiculous to propose that Dr. Hoffman's model could possibly be credited as the liberation of humanity.

The final problem with Dr. Hoffman's postmodern model of the individual is that it cannot seem to address the apparently stable core of individuality that sometimes remains even when the individual's identity changes. In both Dr. Hoffman's model and a great deal of postmodern philosophy—including Foucault's archaeological model— the larger social network seems to preclude the possibility of an intrinsic or essential identity. Lee insists that "even the most intimate of desires does not emanate from an essential kernel of self but is created by the interaction between self and world. One of postmodernism's most contentious areas of

[5] See also Sedgwick's *Between Men* for her characterization of this masculine system of exchange as 'homosocial' rather than 'homosexual.' I believe Sedgwick's terminology to be more accurate. However, Irigaray's model deserves credit for being published first, and ultimately her Marxian mode of analysis provides a more concise example of the exchange of women as commodities.

theoretical discussion has been in this area" (Lee 74), and continues to imply a similarity between postmodernism and Dr. Hoffman's model of reality by quite rightly pointing out that "both Albertina and Desiderio take on a number of roles" (Lee 74). However, this philosophical framework faces a challenge in *The Infernal Desire Machines*, because a stable core of individual essence repeatedly appears to linger behind the constantly shifting surface of identity. This problem first enters *The Infernal Desire Machines* through Aoi's doll, which is "a large fish dressed up in baby clothes" (Carter 75). This odd fish-doll, paradoxically, retains a stable identity despite frequently having its very substance replaced: "Whenever the fish began to rot, Mama exchanged it for a fresh one just like it so that, though the doll was always changing, it always stayed exactly the same" (Carter 75-6). That Desiderio encounters this doll while being tempted to permanently embrace his assumed identity as one of the river people is important; it suggests that it is not enough to perform the identity of a river person, and introduces the idea quite early in the novel that Desiderio's fundamental changes of identity may not actually influence a stable core of identity.

The key to Desiderio's stable identity is his frequent characterization of himself as 'indifferent' (Carter 41, 117, 121, 137, 193)[6]. The choice of this particular characterization is interesting because it seems to imply multiple contradictory things. Insofar as indifference implies "having no particular interest or sympathy" or being "unconcerned" (Soanes & Stevenson 724), Desiderio's indifference appears to be the essence of his unchanging identity, which in this one regard remains stable from the beginning of the novel to the end. Furthermore, Desiderio's indifference to external influences seems to undermine the influence of the very

[6] Several examples are excluded from this list: Desiderio's characterizations of both the world (161) and the centaurs as indifferent (176, 190); Albertina's difference from Desiderio, which he suggests "almost withered" him (187); Desiderio's inability to "tell the difference between memory and dream" because "both share the same quality of wishful thinking" (197); and the "essential undifferentiation" (211) at the core of Hoffman's machine.

forces that are supposed, in a postmodern model, to play the central role in defining what or who an individual is. However, it is also important to note the central role that difference plays in determining identity in a postmodern/poststructuralist model. As Derrida puts it, "the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences" (Derrida 285). Whereas "signs are meaningful because they are different" (Macey 93), the fact that Desiderio lacks difference seems to make it impossible that he could possess an identity; the key place of difference in signification seems to imply that Desiderio's lack of difference makes it impossible for him to enter into a system of signification. In this way, Desiderio's very lack of difference simultaneously grants him identity and eliminates any possibility of identity. To summarize this point, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* challenges the postmodern account of identity in numerous ways: by gesturing towards a stable core of identity; by challenging the power of the external forces that are supposed to define an individual; and by suggesting that the very quality at the core of Desiderio's identity should make it impossible for him to possess any discrete identity.

The Minister emerges from Dr. Hoffman's assault on human reason. Desiderio calls him "Milton or Lenin, Beethoven or Michelangelo – not a man but a theorem, clear, hard, unified and harmonious" (Carter 13), highlighting the centrality of the Minister's theoretical model to his overall identity. Apart from Desiderio—already both a friend and an employee of the Minister when the war begins—the Minister alone is not fooled by Dr. Hoffman's manifestations, and soon after the manifestations begin, the Minister gains unopposed rule of the city:

> A state of emergency was declared. A special meeting of the cabinet took place in a small boat upon so stormy a sea that most of the Ministers vomited throughout the proceedings and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was washed overboard. My Minister dared walk on the water and retrieved his senior dryshod since there was, in fact, not one drop of water there; after that, the cabinet gave him full authority to cope with the situation and soon he virtually ruled the city single-handed (Carter 17).

His sheer confidence in being able to tell reality from fantasy gets the Minister of trade promoted to something very much like protectorate and dictator of the city. But what about the Minister makes him so particularly adept at distinguishing reality from simulation? Desiderio reveals the Minister's central characteristic when he refers to "the Minister's architectonic vision of the perfect state" (Carter 60). His choice of the word 'architectonic' has a variety of important implications. The eleventh edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines architectonic: "adj. 1 relating to architecture or architects. 2 having a clearly defined and artistically pleasing structure. n. (architectonics) [treated as sing.] 1 the scientific study of architecture. 2 musical, literary, or artistic structure" (Soanes and Stevenson Ed. 68). However, 'architectonics' can also signify "*Philosophy* of or relating to the scientific systematization of knowledge" (dictionary.com). The roots of 'architectonic' reveal a great deal. Robert Martin suggests that *arché*, the Greek term used to signify "'principle' or 'foundation'" is used "to refer to the basis of political authority, existence, or knowledge" (Martin 24). Leslie Kavanaugh expands on this definition, explaining,

> *arché* has from the time of the ancient Greeks meant verily: beginning, origin, source, basic principle, foundational principle, first principle, original or elemental constituent. Philosophy seemingly begins with wonderment, and yet remains with the never-ending

> desire to search for the beginning, for the origin, for the first, for something solid and basic on which to stand firmly. The oldest philosophical texts also searched for the *arché*. (Kavanaugh 17-8)

In short, as a philosophical term, *arché* can be related to either a systematic study of or schema for the foundations of knowledge, or the origins of philosophy itself. 'Tectonic' entered the English language from the Latin, '*tektonikos*,' derived from the Greek, '*tektōn*,' meaning 'carpenter' or 'builder,' and is defined: "1 geology relating to the structure of the earth's crust and the large-scale processes which take place within it. 2 relating to building or construction" (Soanes and Stevenson 1479). In this way, 'architectonic' is a term that simultaneously points to the foundations of the earth and the plates on which the continents float, to the construction of physical edifices that we would characterize as architecture, to the systemic structuring of all human knowledge, and to the search for the beginnings of philosophy. Describing the Minister's social vision as 'architectonic' blurs the line between knowledge and material reality, suggesting that human knowledge, the foundations of nature, and the construction of edifices cannot be easily distinguished for the Minister; furthermore, this characterization connects the Minister with the tradition of philosophy stretching back to time immemorial.

This characterization of the Minister becomes quite important in the Minister's meeting with the Doctor's ambassador. Discussing the Cathedral, the Minister suggests that its beauty comes from its relationship to many of the elements that characterize apparently different senses of 'architectonic':

> Yesterday the cathedral dissolved in a display of fireworks. [. . .] the cathedral had been a masterpiece of sobriety. It was given the most vulgar funeral pyre that could possibly have been devised. Yet it had brooded over the city like the most conventional of stone angels

> for two hundred years. Time, the slavish time you despise, had been free enough to work in equal partnership with the architect [. . . .] I am not a religious man myself and yet the cathedral stood for me as a kind of symbol of the spirit of the city. [. . .] its grandeur, increasing year by year as it grew more massively into time itself, had been programmed into it by the cunning of the architects. It was an illusion of the sublime and yet its symmetry expressed the symmetry of the society which had produced it. The city and, by extension, the state, is an artifice of a similar kind. A societal structure. (Carter 34-5)

For the minister, the Cathedral's importance comes from an interrelationship between architecture and nature, as well as past and present. In addition, it appears as though the Cathedral functions as a symbol of the larger social order from which this beautiful building has emerged. For the minister, the physical world, the systemization of knowledge, and the connection to bygone times are not discrete. In this way, the Doctor's destruction of the cathedral is an assault on reality itself, which threatens the importance of the past, the organization of all knowledge, and even the apparent physical structure of reality. By resisting the Doctor, who equally threatens all of these components of his architectonic understanding of reality, the Minister is fighting not only for humanity, but even for what it means to exist at a fundamental level.

While the Minister's cause appears to be a worthy one, his conception of reality has just as severe consequences as Dr. Hoffman's; while his defense of the city seems to protect what it means to exist, the means by which he carries out this defense greatly limit the nature of individuality, subjectivity, and agency. The Minister's belief that "the criterion of reality was that a thing was determinate and the identity of a thing lay only in the extent to which it resembled itself" (Carter 23) makes Desiderio quite understandably uncomfortable: "I possessed

a degree of ambivalence towards the Minister's architectonic vision of the perfect state. This was because I was aware of what would have been my position in that watertight schema" (Carter 60). While Desiderio had been able to ignore his heritage and rise despite the bigotry of his society before the war, the Minister's refinement of what it is to exist imposes a strict limit on Desiderio's identity that makes it impossible for him to be anything other than what he is already considered to be. In the fourth charge laid by the Determination Police it becomes apparent just how problematically limiting this is:

> (4) Posing as an Inspector of Veracity Class Three when I was really the fatherless son of a known prostitute of Indian extraction, an offence against the Determination Regulations Page Four, paragraph i c, viz: 'Any thing or person seen to diverge significantly from it or his own known identity is committing an offence and may be apprehended and tested.' (Carter 62)

In this charge, Desiderio's identity is reduced to three points: he has no father, his mother was a prostitute, and he is of Indian origin. In this manner, the Minister's attempts to be able to distinguish real individuals from manifestations solidify identity in such a way that perceived identity, no matter how reductive, becomes the very essence of identity, and it is impossible for one to be anything but what others already consider one to be. It is greatly troubling to consider the impact of reducing the full richness of identity to one's mother, one's father, and one's ethnicity. In addition, given the nature of the tests used to verify the identity of those who appear to be other than what they ought to be, deviating from the Minister's formulation of identity threatens one's continued existence (Carter 22). While the Minister's system of determination in some sense ensures the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, it does so by ensuring that only generally accepted modes of differentiation be taken seriously, regardless of how prejudiced they

may be, and regardless of whether or not they reinforce the oppression of large swaths of the population by legitimizing harmful modes of differentiation—in a sense, eternally freezing all current modes of discrimination as essential features of identity.

Paradoxically, one of the most postmodern features of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* is the way in which this novel deconstructs the ostensible binary opposition of the philosophical tradition and postmodern philosophy. This deconstruction is carried out by raising questions about whether Dr. Hoffman and the Minister are, in fact, more similar than they are different: "Neither reason nor passion is good or evil; each has its complexities, its moments of boredom, and its dangers. It is also the case that neither is entirely discrete" (Lee 61). The first clue to the striking similarity of the two models enters the novel when Desiderio describes both systems as possessing similar logical structures. Lee notes, "[t]hat 'I think, therefore I am,' is the answer to Descartes's pondering identity and that Desiderio seems to take on different identities throughout the novel would seem to raise one of the novel's important thematic concerns" (Lee 71). Just as important is that both Dr. Hoffman and the Minister are presented as possessing their own version of Descartes's *cogito*. When he discusses the Minister's method of determining the reality of an entity by inserting it into an incinerator, Desiderio considers the possibility that "the Minister, out of desperation, intended to rewrite the Cartesian cogito thus: 'I am in pain, therefore I exist,' and base his tests upon it" (Carter 22). While this statement appears to be a tongue-in-cheek joke, the Count's joyous exclamation while he is boiled alive, "Lafleur! I am in pain! I've learned to name my pain!" (Carter 163), seems to suggest that the Minister's cogito might be more than a joke. After all, as Albertina points out, "those who inflict suffering are always most curious about the nature of suffering" (Carter 169). When the Doctor insists that "desires must, of course, subsist, since desire is to be" (Carter 211), Desiderio thinks

he has uncovered the key to Dr. Hoffman's theoretical model: "So *that* was the doctor's version of the cogito! I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST" (Carter 211, author's emphasis). While the exact nature of Descartes's *cogito* remains the subject for a great deal of debate[7], it is generally agreed that it is "the starting point of Descartes's system of knowledge" (Audi 127). Using different versions of the *cogito* to refer to both the Minister's system and the Doctor's suggests the two are, at the very least, comparable. This is particularly troubling if these *cogitos* function as arguments, for if this is the case both arguments appear to suffer from the *petito principii* fallacy, defined briefly as "asking to be granted the 'principle' or issue of the discussion to be proved" (Audi 375)[8]. If this is the case, it is immaterial whether the verb is 'desire' or 'suffer' or anything else, as the verb functions as a mere placeholder, and it is the subject, 'I,' that implies existence. In this case, identical structure seems to be more important than the particular choice of placeholder, and the two *cogitos* seem to be structurally indistinguishable.

Desiderio's discussion of the Count with Albertina supports this idea, and suggests that neither 'desire' nor 'suffering' truly characterize the Minister and the Doctor. Rather, the central characteristic of both is a will to power. Will is most explicitly an integral component of the Count's character. As Albertina explains, "This galvanic mover was his will. [. . .] His self-regarding 'I' willed himself to become a monster. [. . .] [I]f he had wanted to, or willed it, he could have flattened my father's castle by merely breathing on it" (Carter 168-9). It is important to note that the Count's 'I', not his particular actions, is the centre of his will and the source of his power here, because this is strikingly reminiscent of the logical structure of the two *cogitos*: it

[7] There is debate whether, for instance, the classical understanding of the *cogito* should be read as an argument. Husain Sarkar argues, "A great deal of what Descartes has said militates against construing the *cogito* as an argument" (*x*), and insists that the *cogito* should be read as an intuition rather than an argument (*ii*, *ix*).

[8] As Vere Claiborne Chappell asks, "what right has Descartes to assume that the substance in question exists? [. . .] [W]hy can I not be sure that *ego cogito* without being sure that *ego existo*? On the other hand, if I can argue 'I think, therefore, I am', why can I not argue 'The triangle has three angles equal to two right angles, therefore the triangle exists?'" (193).

is the 'I', not a particular verb that motivates the Count. But the similarities between the three suggest that the will is no less important to the Minister and the Doctor than it is to the Count. It is no mistake that Albertina and Desiderio each initially thought the Count, characterized by will and ego, could have been the leader of the other's side of the reality war:

> 'At first I thought he was your father, the Doctor.'
>
> 'My father?' she cried in astonishment and laughed very musically for a long time. 'But at first we thought he was the Minister! Even after I met the Minister, I thought it might be possible. Both of them had such earth-shaking treads' (Carter 169).

Their initial confusion is quite understandable; the earth-shaking treads are doubtlessly the power of will, and apply equally well to both the Doctor and the Minister. In the end, the structure of Albertina's description of the Count, "his fatal error was to mistake his will for his desire" (Carter 168), applies equally well to both Dr. Hoffman and the Minister—though for it to apply to the Minister, the error becomes mistaking will as something other than desire (such as suffering, perhaps, or existence). In effect, by repeatedly pointing to the similarities between the Doctor and the Minister, *The Infernal Desire Machines* deconstructs the very notion that the two exist as binary opposites, and consequently calls into question how independent postmodern philosophy is from its philosophical predecessors.

In conclusion, as an allegory of the transition to postmodern philosophy, the war between the Minister and Doctor Hoffman refers to the uncomfortable shift to postmodernism, which offers individuals countless new possibilities, but also creates numerous unforeseen dangers. Though Desiderio ultimately sides with the Minister, and consequently with traditional philosophy, he does not do so with a clear conscience. As Ricarda Schmidt notes, Desiderio "unwillingly helps to stabilize the Minister's rule of social order [. . .] But he does not identify

with that rule" (Schmidt 60). On the surface level of the novel, the war could have gone either way, and things may have ended quite differently had the Doctor not asked so much of Desiderio. However, on the allegorical level, the ending seems to be a clear warning to postmodern theorists to not ask too much of the individual/subject, for this may produce a dialectical jump back to something like a system dominated by the Cartesian subject and monolithic systems of classification, which could potentially lead to some of the same horrors that follow from the Minister's architectonics. Furthermore, the fact that the opposition between the Minister and the Doctor breaks down should be read as a significant critique of postmodern philosophy, as it suggests that postmodern philosophy is not really so different from the preexisting philosophical tradition. While postmodernism is often discussed as "the demise of grand narratives" (Macey 307), most often those of the philosophical tradition, the fact that the Doctor's allegorical postmodernism is so similar to the Minister's architectonics—both in the logical foundations of both models, and in the tragic effects both models potentially have on individuals—suggests that postmodernism is more similar to than distinct from the philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, deconstructing this binary also suggests a certain allegiance to deconstructive methodologies generally considered to be uniquely postmodern.

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