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“Where There is Power, There is Resistance”:

A Foucauldian Reading of Oppression and Resistance in
The Handmaid's Tale

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Abstract

This thesis examines how in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and Hulu's 2017 television adaptation *The Handmaid's Tale* the patriarchal totalitarian regime, Gilead, attempts to control society by enforcing one unified discourse and by creating a society that is essentially a panopticon. This thesis uses Michel Foucault's concepts of and the power of discourse and power of the gaze as a lens to analyse how the regime utilises these tools as instruments of oppression. Moreover, this thesis asserts that in both sources, Offred's appropriates these very same tools as tools for her resistance. By reclaiming the discourse and the gaze, Offred in the novel is able to reconstruct her narrative, which in turn helps her reshape her identity as an individual, not as a Handmaid. This thesis furthermore asserts that the focus of resistance in the adaptation is not merely on Offred, but on the collective. By analysing these two sources, this thesis demonstrates how power can be utilised.

Keywords:

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Michel Foucault, power of discourse, power of the gaze, adaptation, oppression, resistance

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Introduction

“My room, then. There has to be some space, finally, that I can claim as mine, even in this time” (Atwood 60). These words, narrated by Margaret Atwood’s protagonist in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), can be seen as characteristic of this Handmaid’s character. Her narrative can therefore be viewed as a survival narrative. In the Republic of Gilead, a highly patriarchal society, the narrator and protagonist of the novel is stripped of her name, and is now only referred to by the patronymic “Offred”. Gilead deprives women of autonomy and thus Offred is “restricted to the private domestic spaces and [is] relegated to the margins of a political structure which denies her existence as an individual” (Howells 93). In this patriarchal society, women’s voices are not only marginalised, but are in fact overall discarded. Although Offred is imprisoned within the restricting boundaries of Gilead, in both the novel and the 2017 Hulu television series *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred tells her story. In a society in which women voices are silenced, the telling of one’s individual story can be viewed as a form of resistance. This present study will examine the different ways in which Offred resists the regime in both the novel and the series.

Margaret Atwood’s novel has received a great amount of both critical and popular attention since its publication in 1985. Since then, the novel has not been out of print, and has been translated into more than thirty-five languages (Jadwin 21). Over the years, the novel inspired many adaptations. In 1990, the novel was adapted into a feature-length film. It was furthermore adapted into a full-cast radio adaptation by the BBC, an opera, a ballet, a stage play and most recently into a critically acclaimed and award-winning television series by Hulu in 2017. In the novel, Atwood proposes a dystopian speculative vision of the near future. In this world, the Republic of Gilead is governed by the rules of an extreme right Christian fundamentalist movement called “the Sons of Jacob”. Under their ruling, the United States transforms into a highly patriarchal and misogynistic theocratic police state. Sławomir Kuźnicki observes in his essay “Writing to Preserve the Self: A Woman's Resistant Position in the Patriarchal Dystopia of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*” that this is a state that “limits and controls freedom of its citizens, particularly women, dividing society into easily distinguishable, and thus controllable, classes whose social functions are also clearly established” (Kuźnicki 123). In Gilead, women do not have power of choice; for instance they are not allowed to read or to write. Offred, the novel’s protagonist and narrator, belongs to the class of Handmaids. Handmaids are essentially surrogate mothers who, because of a strong decline in birth-rate and a rise in infertility due to chemical and toxic radiation, are forced to

bear children for Commanders and their Wives. Gilead takes away any sense of personhood for women, especially the Handmaids. Gilead solely defines Handmaids “in terms of the condition of their ovaries, commodifying them as objectified livestock with the sole purpose of repopulating North America” (Hogsette 264). Trapped in the gaze of the regime’s Panopticon that endeavours to homogenise the entire society and to rob Offred of her sense of self, Offred, however, manages to deliver a narrative account of her experiences in Gilead. In a society where women are not allowed to read, write or have a voice, Offred provides her subjective vision of the world she lives in. The narration Offred provides, as will be argued in the following chapters of this study, is part of Offred’s resistance against the regime.

In 2017, over thirty years after the novel’s initial publication, the streaming service Hulu adapted the novel into the television series *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Though the story is over thirty years old, the series seems to be well received as it has received widespread critical acclaim for both the first and second seasons and has received multiple prestigious awards such as the Primetime Emmy Award, a Golden Globe and a Critics’ Choice award. According to Jen Chaney, the series is “[a] faithful adaptation of the book that also brings new layers to Atwood’s totalitarian, sexist world of forced surrogate motherhood” (Chaney). Chaney and many other reviewers have commented on the timely relevance of the series. However, there has not yet been much academic attention for the adaptation. This thesis sets out to fill that void by comparing and contrasting the themes of oppression and resistance within the novel with this adaptation.

Over the years, much has been written about the novel. Most of the earlier criticism focussed on the generic status of the novel. Therefore, much scholarly criticism was geared towards the novel’s inheritance from dystopian fiction. Critics such as Lois Feuer, David Ketterer and Chris Ferns specifically write about how *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be related to the dystopian tradition. As a result, the novel is often compared and contrasted to Yevgeny Zamyatim’s *We* (1921), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and perhaps most often to George Orwell’s *1984* (1949). Furthermore, there has been endless discussion amongst critics on whether or not the novel should be viewed as a feminist novel. Critics such as Veronica Hollinger, Coral Ann Howells, Hilde Staels and Karen F. Stein have argued for a feminist reading of the novel. Alternatively Sandra Tomc, argues in her essay “The Missionary Position: Feminism and Nationalism in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” that the novel is “overtly offered as a piece of feminist doctrine” (73-4), but in fact advocates “what looks more like traditional femininity than an insurgent feminism” (74). Scholars such as J. Brooks Bouson,

Jamie Dopp, Danita J. Dodson and Allan Weiss on the other hand do not focus on the generic features of the novel, but rather focus on the Offred's characterisation. These scholars specifically focus on how the character of Offred could be viewed as a victim or participant in her own oppression. J. Brooks Bouson asserts that Offred is "the victim of circumstances, not an active agent capable of directing the plot of her own life" (154) and Jamie Dopp even applies to Offred the "Victims Positions" Atwood outlined in *Survival*. Dodson and Weiss on the other hand argue that Offred is complicit in "the creation and perpetration to the dystopian situation in Gilead" (Weiss 122).

The criticism mentioned above focussed mainly on analyses of the novel's genre, and Offred's characterisation. However, it deals very little with how power is represented in the novel. Although, critics such as Stein and Staels touch upon this subject, they only focus on Offred's internal and linguistic resistance, and they furthermore did not use any theoretical framing to analyse power. Perhaps one of the most influential philosophers in shaping modern understandings of power is the French philosopher, historian, social theorist, and literary critic Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Therefore, this thesis will make use of Foucault's views on power to analyse both the novel and the adaptation. Both Amin Malak and M. Keith Booker have analysed the novel through a Foucauldian lens. However, as both of their analyses focussed purely on sexuality and power, they primarily used Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. Malak describes the novel as a dramatisation of "the interrelationship between power and sex" (15), while Booker asserts that in Gilead sex is "a matter of pure political power" (165). Foucault's theory on power, however, is comprised of more elements than merely sexuality. In his two works *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (1976) Foucault explores two other aspects of power, namely: power in the gaze and power in discourse. In both Atwood's novel and Hulu's adaptation, these two forms of power are used by the regime as tools of oppression. However, Offred in both the novel and the series subverts the ideas of power of discourse and power of the gaze as instruments of oppression by appropriating Gilead's imposed discourse and gazing as a means to in fact resist the regime. This thesis will therefore explore how power of discourse and power of the gaze are utilised in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Hulu adaptation as tools of oppression while Offred simultaneously appropriates these as a means of resistance.

In order to explore these two forms of power and apply these to the novel and its adaptation, it is imperative to first understand his theory on power. Michel Foucault has written several times on the topic of power. Perhaps his two most referenced works are *Discipline and*

Punish: The Birth of the Prison and *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, and they are subsequently “the central sources for his analyses for power” (Koopman). This thesis uses Foucault’s approach to power because his model applies to contemporary societies. Traditional interpretations of power viewed power as binary; there are people who have power and people who do not. In the Marxist conception of power, for example, power resides in the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat has none. In order for the proletariat to gain power, they need to rise up against the bourgeoisie. Foucault rejects this idea, and provides an alternative model for analysing power, which he called capillary power or disciplinary power. He argues that in order for power to be effective, it does not flow from a single centre, but it rather flows in every direction. For example, for Foucault, power is diffuse: in *The History of Sexuality* he argues that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere” (93). He reiterates this argument in his book *Power/Knowledge* by stating that “power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (*Power/Knowledge* 39). According to Foucault, power is therefore not in the hands of the monarchs or the proletariat, but is rather something that is ingrained in everyone in society. He furthermore contends that power is not something that one can possess, but rather something that has to be exercised. Since power is everywhere in society, everyone can exercise power, whether they are in control or are the subject. Power, according to Foucault, can be exercised in several ways, but in his body of work Foucault always returns to two recurring mechanisms: discourse and the gaze.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault’s method of analysing power is through looking at the genealogy of power. Therefore, he explores how power is used in a pre-modern society and compares that to a modern society. For Foucault the modern society starts at “the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century” (8). He observes that in the pre-modern period, the power of the gaze worked differently than in the modern period. In the pre-modern period, the sovereign decided upon a criminal’s punishment. This often resulted in corporal punishment, which was often executed publically. Everyone would be invited to witness the torture or the execution as a warning to not commit the same crime and to inflict fear upon the people. Foucault termed this display of control as “the spectacle of the scaffold” (32). The spectacle is a tool for the sovereign to control his people into obeying. Foucault observes that in modern societies, the gaze operates quite differently: around the turn of the nineteenth century, the spectacle seems to cease to exist because it is replaced by a society of surveillance.

Foucault demonstrates how the experience of being surveilled can affect human behaviour. He calls this the “supervising gaze” (*Discipline and Punish* 204). He begins his observation by again looking at the genealogy of surveillance. He traces it back to a seventeenth century town that was hit by the Plague. He analyses the measures that the town took to keep the Plague from spreading. During this period, the town lived under constant surveillance and fear. This was done by firstly quarantining the town and then dividing it into distinct quarters. Each quarter was governed by an intendant. Every single street was placed under surveillance of a “syndic” (195). This syndic is a guard who locked every door on his appointed street from the outside. If the guard did not do this “he will be condemned to death” (195). Foucault notes that “inspection functions ceaselessly” and “the gaze is alert everywhere” (195). He furthermore observes that “this surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration: reports from the syndics to the intendants, from the intendants to the magistrates or mayor” (196). As a result everyone in the town was constantly observed by others, and it seems that everyone complied. The control that the mayor of this town held over its citizens could be enforced because of the constant surveillance and the constant fear of being punished or contracting the Plague. Foucault notes that “all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (197). Fear was used to make everyone in this town comply, and behave accordingly.

To illustrate his point further, Foucault uses the nineteenth century image of the Panopticon prison that was originally designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham. The concept of the Panopticon was fairly simple. Foucault describes the Panopticon as:

at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other . . . By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. (200)

The structure is quite simple, but at the same time, it is a very resourceful structure because it seems to be very effective. All the prisoners’ cells are arranged in a circular fashion and they are stacked on top of one another. In the centre, in a guard tower, monitoring all of the prisoners,

is a guard. The guard is able to look at any direction and see all of the prisoners. The prisoners are arranged around this tower in the circular fashion, and as a result, they know that they may be watched. They have a constant reminder that there is authority and that there is nowhere to hide. From the prisoner's point of view, they see the guard tower, but they are not able to see whether the guard tower is occupied or not. Furthermore, the prisoners are also able to see all of the other prisoners around them. They can look across and surveil the other prisoners.

In the traditional way of thinking about authority and power one would look at the centre of the building and argue that the guard tower is the place where power resides, because that is where the guard is and where authority lies. Foucault, however, argues that the tower is only a small conception of how power operates in this setting. The value of this is that the prisoners are all surveilling each other and tactics of power and domination are eventually such that the prison guard, who is supposed to be the concrete source of authority in the centre of the prison, could eventually leave. If the prisoners are disciplined in such a way that they begin to surveil each other, they will create norms, expectations and forms of discipline against one another. As a result, that guard tower could be empty and the prisoners will continue to obey and continue to comply. Therefore, as Colin Koopman explains in his essay "The Power Thinker", discipline for Foucault "is a form of power that tells people how to act by coaxing them to adjust themselves to what is 'normal'" (Koopman). In contrast to the sovereign in the pre-modern periods, "discipline does not strike down the subject" (Koopman). This society of constant surveillance will produce obedient people, which Foucault termed as "docile bodies". The subjects will internalise the discipline and will start to police themselves. Angela Laflen argues in her essay "There's a Shock in This Seeing" that "Foucault suggests that the principles of surveillance and social control inherent in the Panopticon can be more generally applied to all facets of society grounded on spoken or unspoken laws" (106). Panopticism literally means "all-seeing", and as Laflen suggests "Foucault draws attention to the fact that every pair of eyes works to enforce social order in a panoptic society" (106). The Panopticon was designed to maximise visibility and it operates silently and, according to Laflen, effectively, because of its "hierarchical, continuous and functional nature" (106). Once a system with its specific rules is in place, everyone in society will work to maintain the specific rules by observing the behaviour of others. The idea behind this, is that power is often most effective where it is least visible. This is a more subtle operation of power in which everyone is surveilling each other, because it shapes and moulds human beings. Foucault states that it would even be possible to use the Panopticon "as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct

individuals” (203). This design is therefore less focussed on punishment and more on corrections and shaping individuals to become compliant with rules and norms.

In addition to power of the gaze, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault also discusses power of discourse as a form of control. For Foucault discourse is essential to power. Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński observe in their book *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity* that for Foucault “discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of knowledge in an intelligible way while excluding other forms of reasoning as unintelligible” (12). They furthermore note that according to Foucault, discourse is what is needed to talk meaningfully about anything. In other words, discourse gives meaning to material objects and social practices. In his essay “Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse”, cultural theorist, Stuart Hall endeavours to explain what Foucault means with his concept of discourse. Hall explains that for Foucault discourse is:

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment in time . . .

Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. (Hall 72)

For Foucault, discourse is not merely a linguistic concept, but entails both language and practice. Discourse is a way of constituting knowledge and it forms systems of meanings. These systems of meanings can be different for each society. Foucault argues that “language develops and generates meaning under specific material and historical conditions” (Barker 92). He argues that language is not static, but rather productive. A set of statements can mean something different under different conditions. He observes that the ways in which these statements gain meaning are determined by how these statements are regulated. He defines the regulation of these statements as “regime of truth”. In “Truth and Power”, Foucault notes that “[e]ach society has its regime of truth. Its ‘general politics’ of truth - that is the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanism and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements” (*Power/Knowledge* 131). The regime of truth essentially entails what counts as truth. Discourse informs people’s way of thinking because “discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic” (Hall 72). And it furthermore “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge” (72). Moreover, it influences the way a topic can be argued about. As a result, some topics cannot be talked about because it is not part of that particular society’s discourse. Lastly, Hall notes that “discourse influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (72). In other words, rules and laws are to be administered according to the discourse of a certain society. In Foucault view, discourse affects how ideas are used to control

the behaviour of others. In short, discourse is therefore used to discipline and subjugate others. Barker and Galasiński concur with this and add that discourse regulates “not only what can be said under determinate social and cultural conditions, but also who can speak when and where” (12). Discourse not only determines the way in which topics can be discussed, but it also determines the speaker and thus agency. Discourse can therefore be a powerful tool to oppress people. However, he also states that it is possible to have more than one discourse even in one society, and not merely the discourse provided by the regime. Foucault therefore argues that discourse can in fact be used as a tool for resistance because contradictory discourses can exist : “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (*The History of Sexuality* 101).

This thesis will provide a Foucauldian reading of power in discourse and power in the gaze by presenting close reading analyses of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the Hulu television adaptation, focussing specifically how these concepts of power can be used as instruments of oppression and at the same time as a means of resistance. The first chapter will explore the various ways in which the Gileadean regime utilises discourse as a tool of oppression. It will furthermore explore the different ways in which this is executed in the novel and the adaptation. This same method will be applied in the second chapter, only this time the focus will be on how the regime applies the power of the gaze as a means of oppression. The third and fourth chapter will discuss how Offred, in both the novel and the series, is able to appropriate the power of discourse and the power of the gaze, respectively. By comparing and contrasting the close reading analyses of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the 2017 Hulu adaptation, it will become evident how power of discourse and power of the gaze are utilised by the Gileadean regime as a means of oppression, while Offred subverts these very tools of oppression by appropriating them into forms of resistance.

Chapter One: Control and Oppression Through Discourse

In *The Handmaid's Tale* Margaret Atwood (1939-) presents, a dystopian future with a totalitarian state that has complete control over everything in society. One of the methods in which the regime attempts to control its citizens is through complete control over the discourse. The regime constructed new laws and with it restrictions, which informs the discourse that the regime wants to impose. For example, women are not allowed to read or write in the Republic of Gilead. Mario Klarer observes in his essay "Orality and Literacy as Gender-Supporting Structures in Margaret Atwood's *'The Handmaid's Tale'*" that this is common practice in dystopian fiction. He notes that "the banning of books and the ensuing 'orality' of the whole population is a common topos in dystopian literature" (130). He furthermore observes, "by controlling the very structures of language and thinking, the leading class is able to consolidate the basis of its monolithic state and keep all others in their assigned position" (130). Klarer asserts that, by restricting language and enforcing orality the government, is able to control everyone in society to make sure they abide by their prescribed role. Karen F. Stein concurs with his argument. She states in her essay "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia" that "people on the margins of societies often find they are denied access to the discourses that confer power and status" (269). The restriction of speech is of course seen in other dystopian novels such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit Fifty-One* (1953). However, in *The Handmaid's Tale* the restriction is specifically designed to suppress women and discourse is a tool used by the Gileadean to achieve this. The ways in which discourse is represented as a form of oppression diverge greatly in the novel and the television series, therefore, this chapter will demonstrate how both sources deal with this. In order to examine the link between language and oppression, this chapter will use the Foucauldian concept of discourse. Through this Foucauldian lens, this chapter will discuss how the regime attempts to use discourse as a tool to subjugate Handmaids into docile bodies.

The Handmaid's Tale is told through a first person narrative presented by the Handmaid Offred. She and her fellow Handmaids are part of what Aunt Lydia calls "a transitional generation" (Atwood 127). These Handmaids lived in both the period before Gilead and under the new regime. As a result of this, Offred knows two discourses, and also two "regimes of truths": the one presented by Gilead and the one before Gilead. In her narrative, Offred uses the language of the discourse before Gilead, but at the same time, she is heavily influenced by the discourse provided by the Gileadean regime. She seems to oscillate constantly between the two

discourses. The Republic of Gilead, however, does not want her to straddle between these two discourses, but they demand that she only uses the Gileadean discourse. The chapter will first discuss what the discourse and “truth” of the new regime entails, followed by the way in which this has affected Offred.

As explained in the introduction, Foucault considers discourse as the manner in which people can talk meaningfully about topics. In the society presented in *The Handmaid's Tale* the way in which anyone can talk about anything is completely altered. Hilde Staels describes this change as followed in her essay “Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance through Narrating”: “the governing discourse of the absolutist state is an artificial, so-called Biblical speech” (457). The new discourse enforced by the new regime is based on the Bible. However, they dismiss elements of the Bible, as they seem to mostly use the Old Testament. The regime does not mention Jesus Christ or the overall message of redemption that is conveyed in the New Testament, and this sentiment is certainly not included in Gilead. Moreover, the passages that the regime takes from the Bible are appropriated in such a way that they can be used as a way to justify the oppression. Michele LaCombe illustrates how the male theocratic totalitarian government seems to use language to their own benefit. She contends,

. . . the language of Gilead is the phallogentric word made flesh, the vehicle of a totalitarian state based upon literal interpretation of the Bible, at least as it is to be understood by the masses. The uses of literal-mindedness are emphasized by the falsification of Biblical texts and their eventual merger with the canon. (qtd. in Hogstette 271).

LaCombe stresses that the regime falsifies Biblical texts, so in other words, the patriarchy of Gilead appropriates Bible texts to fit their own goals. They take scripture from the Old Testament and they manipulate it to their own purposes. Many of the quotations taken from the Bible are misquoted or incomplete. For example, they even use beatitudes, such as “*Blessed are the merciful*” (Atwood 100), which are blessings that Jesus recites on Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. These blessings, ironically enough, echo Jesus teachings on mercy and compassion, but in Gilead, the blessings are not used to this end. In fact, Jesus’s teachings are left out and the beatitudes are used by the regime to justify what they are doing. In addition to the blessings being taken out of its context and appropriated, they are also bastardised. For example the beatitude “*Blessed are the silent*” (100) is not one of beatitudes mentioned in the New Testament, but is used to condone the regime’s silencing of women. Offred seems to realise that this was not in the Bible, but she admits that because she is not allowed to read,

“there was no way of checking” (100). The regime uses the Bible’s authoritative power and since women are not allowed to read or write, they have complete control over this authoritative text to alter it in such a way to suit their needs.

In the Hulu adaptation, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Gilead’s selective use of the Bible is made clear through a small form of resistance. During an interrogation in episode three of the first season, Aunt Lydia tells Offred to “Remember your scripture. Blessed are the meek.” (“Late” 31:05) to which Offred wittily retorts “And blessed are those who suffer for the cause of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven...I remember” (31:18-31:38). Offred cites a part of the Gospel of Matthew, and though this is a correct citation from the Gospel, this particular section of the Gospel is not part of the Gileadean discourse, and thus she is cattle-prodded by Aunt Lydia as a way of punishment. This example illustrates how Gilead filters the Bible to only use certain passages that suit their intentions. More importantly, however, the regime takes certain passages out of context of the greater narrative. By doing this, they are able to build an entire theology around a phrase. Both the novel and the series illustrate this when the Commander reads passages from the Bible that emphasise childbearing. He reads: “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*” (Atwood 99) followed by “*Give me children, or else I die. Am I in God’s stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her*” (99). The Commanders took a literal interpretation of this passage as a commandment for future action. In Gilead, this passage of the Old Testament is used as justification to implement their system to use women with viable ovaries as incubators. However, it seems far-fetched that that the Bible’s authorial intent of those passages is to force women into reproductive servitude. The Bible, and language as a whole, is essentially distorted to suit the regime’s purposes.

The regime needs to have full control over the entire society. The first step they took was to remove all critical thought and free will by banning reading and writing. Secondly, they prohibit the pre-Gileadean discourse. One of the ways of making sure that everyone in society is cemented in the present, is by expunging the United States’ history. The erasure of history is conveyed visually in the Hulu series in a quite literal sense. Ofglen and Offred walk past St. Paul’s Cathedral that is in the process of being demolished. Although St. Paul’s is a Christian church, and thus religious, it does not fit within the Gileadean discourse because it is a Catholic church. Catholicism diverges from the religion practiced by the regime. Moreover, in Gilead, the government is the church, and in their view, anything else needs to be erased. By demolishing buildings that do not adhere to their vision, the regime hopes to erase the memory

of anything before Gilead. The regime hopes that everyone loses their connections to the past and will be completely cemented in the present for they can only remember Gilead and their discourse.

The third method the regime implements as an attempt to gain control over everyone in society is by erasure of language. Words such as “sterile” are forbidden in Gilead, in fact, the word does not exist in the Gileadean discourse. Laflen argues that “the appearance of control and stability is ultimately designed to maintain the status quo and disguise the fact that the ruling body of men, the Commanders, are sterile” (“There Were Signs” 72). It is illegal to even suggest that a Commander could be sterile, so the word “sterile” is erased from the Gileadean discourse. In the novel, Offred notes that “There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially” (Atwood 70-1). Instead, the official discourse points at women as the source of infertility: “There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (71). By law women are blamed for the rapid decline in birth-rates. Not only are women in Gilead blamed for infertility; they appear to be at fault, it seems, for everything else as well. This is not touched upon in the novel. The narrative is written from Offred’s point of view, so as a result, the reader is only allowed to see Gilead from that one particular angle. However, in the television series, the creators have the freedom to switch perspective and show, for example, Serena Joy’s viewpoint. For instance, during episode ten of the first season, Serena Joy confronts Commander Fred after discovering his dalliances with Offred to the underground brothel Jezebel’s. She warns him, and tells him the consequences of his actions: “I will not have her hanging from a ceiling or stepping in front of a truck. Do you understand me, Fred?” (“Night” 14:35-14:41). This example illustrates how in Gileadean discourse women are blamed for anything negative that happens in society. As she demands of the Commander: “You’re going to control yourself” (14:44), he turns the argument around by telling Serena that “you brought temptation back into this house . . . If I have sinned, then you led me to it” (14:52-15:06). He is essentially blaming Serena for his behaviour. This illustrates how in Gileadean discourse, nothing is ever a man’s fault. This is because men are the arbiters of God’s will on Earth. They are the only ones allowed to read the Word of God, and thus whatever they say, is law. Through this way reasoning, women in Gilead as a result are blamed for anything negative that happens.

Through the limitation of language, Gilead also limits the identity of women. The Handmaids do not use their own names. Instead, they are stripped of their pre-Gilead names which are replaced by a patronymic. In the adaptation, Fred explains this concept as follows:

“Handmaids take patronymics, derived from the head of their household. Ofwarren, Offred, et cetera. It's a symbol of their sacred position” (“A Woman’s Place” 11:03-11:12). Through the erasure of names, these women’s identities are essentially erased. What remains is a singular and uniform identity, that Karen Stein describes as “complete[s] their loss of individuality” (271). They are no longer individuals. Gilead goal is to create a unit of Handmaids who are all similar. As a result, women, especially the Handmaids are dehumanised to the extent that “women are interchangeable” (Verwaayen 47).

The renaming of Handmaids is imperative for asserting the men’s power over women in this society. By stripping the Handmaids of their given names, it gives the regime control over them. The appointed names in themselves indicate ones position in relation to the person who is controlling them. This is a tool frequently used in colonialism. An illustrative example of this is the renaming of Native Americans. As an attempt to assimilate natives, children were removed from their parents to forcibly civilise them. Upon arrival at their new school, the children were not allowed to speak their native language were given Christian names. Daniel F. Littlefield jr. and Lonnie E. Underhill observe that “[o]ne of the purposes of renaming them was to remove them farther from the Indian culture and closer to the Anglo-American culture” (35). The purpose is therefore to erase their previous identity. A similar method is also applied in prisons. Here, convicts are given a prisoner’s number and they are given a uniform. Through this process, prisoners are de-individualised: their individual identity is taken away from them and they become the uniform. Even though the Handmaids are not given a prisoner’s number, they are given a new name, which serves as the prisoner’s number. In both the novel and the adaptation of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a combination of the colonial method and the prison’s method of controlling through renaming is administered. Similar to the assimilation of Native Americans, the Handmaids’ names are removed and they are given a new one in hopes of distancing them from their lives before Gilead. But, in Gilead, renaming the Handmaids not only serves to erase the past, but it additionally functions as a tool of dehumanisation. Names are replaced with a patronymic, which immediately indicates that these women are no longer individuals, but rather property of their Commanders. Furthermore, the renaming is implemented because Gilead wants to enforce one unified and singular identity for the Handmaids and as a result eradicate individualism and a plurality in identity. As Stein notes, the Handmaids are “forbidden to acknowledge their names, their selves”, and as a consequence of this “they must submit to their use as objects, possessions” (271). Gilead intends to use these women as mere breeding tools, and aims to achieve the Handmaids’ subjugation by removing their names and reducing them to possessions.

Offred comes to understand that language is the tool that is being used for objectifying and dehumanising her. She becomes aware of this as she recalls a conversation she had with her husband Luke before they tried to escape from Gilead. They had a cat as a pet, but in order for their escape to be successful, the cat needed to be killed, so Luke said, “I’ll take care of it” (Atwood 202). Although Luke does not specifically say this, Offred immediately realises that Luke meant that he would kill the cat:

and because he said *it* instead of *her*, I knew he meant *kill*. That is what you have to do before you kill, I thought. You have to create an it, where none was before. You do that first, in your head, and then you make it real. So that’s how they do it, I thought. I seemed never to have known that before. (Atwood 202)

As she recalls the memory, she realises that by changing something as seemingly insignificant as a simple pronoun from “her” to “it”, one can in fact erase someone’s personhood (Hogsette 268). This is essentially what happens to her and the other Handmaids, by erasing their pre-Gileadean names, their personhood has been expunged. She was an individual before Gilead, but they turned her into a “two-legged womb” (Atwood 146). Through the Gileadean discourse, the regime delineates precisely what a Handmaid’s identity should be. In this discourse there is no room for a subjective identity. Everyone, especially the Handmaids are dehumanised and thus reduced to mere breeding tools.

Besides the erasure of words from the pre-Gileadean discourse, words have also frequently been given a new meaning in Gilead and new words have been invented to describe the new practices. In the series, this is illustrated during a flashback scene in episode ten of the first season. The scene depicts June arriving at the Red Centre. She and a group of other soon-to-be Handmaids receive their first lesson in the indoctrination of Gilead. During this scene, a choir is singing in the background. The song they are singing is “Simple Gifts” which is a Shakers / Quakers song. The song celebrates their religious principles and describes the beauty in life without materiality. It furthermore touches upon how simplicity is a true calling of life. However, the song is used in the Red Centre as a tool to introduce the women to their new identity as servants to the Commanders. In Gilead, however, simplicity means, anti-technology, anti-literary and anti-freedom. A song that is completely outside of the Gileadean discourse, because it is a song from an enemy of the state, is palimpsested in such a way that it does fit in the Gileadean discourse and is in fact instructive to the Handmaids-to-be. Similar to the Scripture texts, the appropriation of the song is another example of Gilead perverting pre-Gileadean discourse to fit into their own discourse for their own gain.

The practice of distorting language to serve the regime's purpose is furthermore illustrated in the way that they have allocated different practices to words of the old discourse. The practice of the Salvaging for example, seems to imply something positive. To salvage something means to rescue or save something. However, in the Republic of Gilead, the Salvaging is a cruel execution. Thus, the meaning of the word is warped into something that reeks of violence to scare people into behaving. David S. Hogsette notes that the Republic does this to "desensitize individuals to social and political horrors by manipulating language so as to create a different reality and by controlling what its citizens see and hear" (268). This is exemplified in the practice of the Ceremony. The word Ceremony implies a traditional or religious act such as a wedding, but in Gilead, it is the ritual raping of the Handmaids. In the novel, it is not clear how the terminology was established, but the Hulu adaptation, explicitly shows that three Commanders came up with this term on the spot. Upon the suggestion of calling the ritualised raping of the Handmaids the act, Fred reacts: "'Act' may not be the best name from a branding perspective. The 'Ceremony'? Sounds good. Nice and Godly" ("Jezebels" 18:15-18:23). This suggests that they only want it to be perceived as something religious. They are deliberately using words from before and actively changing them into something new to fit their own discourse.

Another appropriate example is the naming of the different castes in Gileadean society is also an appropriate example of this. "Angels of Light" (Atwood 92), for instance, seem to imply that they are there to protect people from harm. The Angels presented in this society, however, have guns. They are high-ranking guardians that are on the top of the chain of oppression. They are ranked only second to Commanders and they are allowed privileges such as a Wife, and even a Handmaid. Lower castes such as Guardians and workers are not allowed these privileges. The caste of the Aunts is another example of language being corrupted by Gilead. The connotation with the word Aunt is familial and warm. The Aunts in Gilead, however, carry electric cattle prods to shock the Handmaids into submission. The Angels and the Aunts act like the complete opposite of their given label. They are not the moral and virtuous being that their label implies. The words of are taken from the past and are given different meanings and have become part of the new discourse. Not only Handmaids, but everyone in this society has been stripped of their identity and they are only seen as and talked about regarding their function or social role. The idea behind this is, that by doing this, everyone will eventually subject themselves to these roles because they can only think of themselves in connection to these roles.

Aside from language being distorted by the regime, it is moreover restricted in its usage. As mentioned earlier, women are not allowed to read or write. In the novel, this is made clear through the eyes of Offred. In the opening chapter she longs for speech. She thinks “if only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged” (Atwood 14). The television adaptation handles this differently. In the first episode, this is first visually depicted and then further illustrated through dialogue. Upon entering the grocery store, the audience sees products such as canned tomatoes, milk and pickled snap beans. The labels of these products have been stripped of words and there is only an image of the particular product. In addition, during a casual conversation about oranges, one of the Handmaids, Ofsamuel, mentions that she saw Mr. Waterford’s name on the news. When she realizes her slip up, she immediately explains that she “didn’t read it, I promise” (“Offred” 14:31). Women are not allowed to read, but they have to do the groceries, therefore the concept of money has been replaced with tokens. This becomes clear when Ofglen tells Offred to get oranges for her mistress, but she is unable to because “I don’t have a token for oranges” (14:15). The Handmaids are restricted to such a degree that they cannot even decide what groceries to get. They are limited to the token they were given by a Martha or Wife.

In the novel, the restriction is furthermore iterated in the limited language of the Handmaids. Stein notes, “as [The Handmaids’] names are erased so is their discourse. They are denied access to writing, and restricted in their use of speech” (Stein 271). This is even stretched to the level of private conversations, because Handmaids are only allowed to speak in stock phrases. This is immediately instilled in the Handmaids at the Red Centre. The Red Centre is an institution where “divorced or remarried young women with viable ovaries are trained to become Handmaids” (271). The Aunts run this institution. Their speech consists “of platitudes, admonitions, and iterations of codes of behaviour such as ‘modesty is invisibility,’ ‘pen is envy’” (271). The Aunts are the vehicle that “transmit[s] the words of the patriarchal government, and they silence unwanted speech. They script the authorized speech of the Handmaids” (271). The women are taught to speak the language that is expected of them in Gilead, and for this, they need to be brainwashed.

The unwanted speech that Stein mentions goes beyond literal words, but it also applied to concepts and narratives of the past need to be adjusted or need to be forgotten in order to fit in to the new discourse. A good example of this is the reversal of who is to blame for rape. During “Testifying” Handmaids are prompted to confess their previous sins. One of the women, Janine, discloses that she was gang-raped when she was fourteen and subsequently had an

abortion. Instead of blaming the boys, the Aunts turn the narrative around and place the blame entirely on Janine. The Aunts ask the Handmaids in training “whose fault was it?” (Atwood 82). The Handmaids-in-training answer: “her fault, her fault, her fault” (82). The shaming of Janine continues:

Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us.

She did. She did. She did.

Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen?

Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. (Atwood 82)

In the Gileadean society, nothing is ever a man’s fault. This was initially shown in the scene in the Hulu adaptation, where Fred blames Serena Joy for his illicit trips to Jezebel’s. It is furthermore reiterated in this passage. In addition, this can be seen again in the novel, by the way in which Janine is blamed for her own rape. Janine was just an innocent fourteen-year-old girl when she was raped. Gilead’s discourse, however, does not allow for the man to be blamed for this. It seems that guilt for a man does not exist in Gileadean discourse. Additionally, Janine had an abortion. Similar to the word “sterile”, the word “abortion” no longer exists and, in this world of low fertility rates is illegal.

In addition to being blamed for men’s transgressions, the Handmaids’ language in itself is highly restricted. The Handmaids are instructed to only use stock phrases and responses. These phrases are platitudes that are Gilead’s interpretation of passages taken from the Bible. For example, as a way of greeting the Handmaids use the stock phrase, “Blessed be the fruit” and respond with the phrase “May the Lord open” (29). It is forbidden to speak about other matters. This restriction also applies to a certain extent to women from higher castes such as the Wives. Perhaps the best example of this is Serena Joy. In the novel, she used to be a public speaker, who was a staunch advocate of the sanctity of the home. She is now forbidden to make speeches. In the television show, they push the boundaries with her character, not only was Serena Joy a staunch supporter of what she dubbed as “domestic feminism” but she even helped write the drafts for the Gileadean laws. Although Serena Joy on the show is complicit in the oppression of women, even she has been silenced in the Republic of Gilead. This is represented in a conversation she has with Fred in episode four, “Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum” about the United Nations. Serena attempts to provide advice on damage control after an Aunt has escaped to Canada and gave an interview to several newspapers. Fred immediately dismisses what she says and says, “you don’t need to worry about this, I promise. We’ve got good men working on it” (“Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum” 07:40). This is in stark

contrast with how Fred treats her in the flashbacks. In the flashbacks, he always listens and follows her advice. In the present time, however, Fred dismisses her ideas because of the simple fact that Serena is a woman, which implies that she should not interfere with the business of men. It is also interesting to note that whereas the novel solely focusses on Offred's experience of oppression, the series portrays the oppression of various characters. It is not just the Handmaids that are being oppressed, but also all of the other castes including the high-ranking Wives.

By focussing on Offred's experience of oppression, the novel demonstrates how the Gileadean regime's method of oppression through manipulation of the discourse affects Offred's memory and language. Before Gilead, Offred worked at a library where she had been "transferring books to computer discs" (Atwood 182) and it is implied that she lived in the Cambridge area. There is, therefore, a strong implication that she went to Harvard. This indicates that Offred should certainly be linguistically adept. However, in the novel, there is an instance where she and Ofglen pass an ice cream parlour that she used to frequent in the period before Gilead, and it appears that her mastery of language seems to have been erased from her memory:

There used to be an ice-cream store, somewhere in this block. I can't remember the name. Things can change so quickly, buildings can be torn down or turned into something else, it's hard to keep them straight in your mind the way they used to be. You could get double scoops, and if you wanted they would put chocolate sprinkles on the top. These had the name of a man. Johnnies? Jackies? I can't remember. (Atwood 173)

Offred is able to recognise the ice cream parlour, and she remembers that she used to go there with Luke and her daughter. But even though Offred is aware that this ice cream parlour was a place that she used to frequent, she does not seem able to come up with the specific term for the coloured sprinkles. Offred is slowly losing her grasp on language. She has to actively access her memory to be able to remember the term:

We would go there, when she was little, and I'd hold her up so she could see through the glass side of the counter, where the vats of ice cream were on display, coloured so delicately, pale orange, pale green, pale pink, and I'd read the names to her so she could choose. She wouldn't choose by the name, though, but by the colour. Her dresses and overalls were those colours too. Ice cream pastels.

Jimmies, that was the name. (Atwood 174)

It seems such a simple word, but “Jimmies” is no longer part of the discourse in Gilead. In fact, the word no longer exists. However, as Aunt Lydia notes, Offred is part of the “transitional generation” (127), and is therefore on the cusp of remembering. This example illustrates how memory is susceptible to oppression. She is not able to simply remember, but she has to actively think outside of the regime’s discourse to be able to remember. This notion is reiterated in the scene where Offred sees Moira at Jezebel’s. Though Offred is able to recognise Moira instantly, she is unable to identify what Moira is wearing:

She’s dressed absurdly, in a black outfit of once-shiny satin that looks the worse for wear. . . There’s a wad of cotton attached to the back, I can see it as she half-turns; it looks like a sanitary pad that’s been popped like a piece of popcorn. I realize that it’s supposed to be a tail. Attached to her head are two ears, of a rabbit or deer, it’s not easy to tell; one of the ears has lost its starch or wiring and is flopping halfway down. She has a black bow tie around her neck and is wearing black net stockings and black high heels . . . Girls dressed for Easter, in rabbit suits. What is the significance of it here, why are rabbits supposed to be sexually attractive to men? (Atwood 250-1)

Moira is evidently dressed as a Playboy bunny. Offred, however, is unable to connect the idea of a woman dressed as a rabbit to something that is sexually attractive. To the reader this image is immediately familiar, but it is de-familiarised through Offred’s eyes. Offred is aware that the outfit stems from the pre-Gileadean period. She describes that “the whole costume, antique and bizarre, reminds me of something from the past, but I can’t think what” (251). The image of the Playboy bunny is not part of the Gileadean discourse. This example illustrates the effects of indoctrination on the cognitive mind. Offred slowly seems to forget everything from the society she lived in pre-Gilead. Thus, it seems that Offred’s memory is affected by being placed under restricting censorship; to the extent that Offred no longer had individual control over her memory.

The effects of Gilead’s indoctrination through the restriction of language also becomes clear in other instances such as the language that Offred begins to use. At the beginning of the novel she refuses to call the room where she sleeps her own. She narrates “not *my* room, I refuse to say *my*” (18). Offred seems to be adamant about not calling the room that she occupies as her own. However, after her indoctrination in the Red Centre she is shocked by her own thoughts. She narrates, “Was he in my room? I called it *mine* (59). She unconsciously calls the room she occupies her own. It seems that gradually Gilead is becoming a part of Offred, as she is normalising the situation that she is in. In the novel, Atwood seems to make a connection

between oppression and memory. The mind appears susceptible to oppression and this manifests in forgetting the pre-Gileadean discourse and normalising the new discourse provided by the regime.

The series, however, does not use the idea of memory and forgetting as a result of oppression as a theme. In fact, the entire notion of memory seems to be absent in the adaptation. Although the series meticulously portrays how the regime appropriates discourse in such a way that they can use it as a means to oppress women, they do not depict how this can affect memory. In the novel, Offred seems to have lost her sense of self, as she appears to forget her life pre-Gilead. In the series, Offred does not lose her identity from before Gilead. In fact, she reiterates several times throughout the series that her name is not Offred, but June. Rather than focussing on how discourse has impacted Offred's memory and sense of self, the series focusses on how discourse, and specifically language, can be used as a means of resisting the regime. The way in which the novel and the series approach this theme will be discussed in chapter three.

In conclusion, the totalitarian regime of Gilead uses discourse as a mechanism for complete control, especially over women. Both the novel and the series stress how discourse is utilised in such a way that it restricts women with the purpose to subjugate them and to suit the regime. Gilead does not allow any other "regime of truth" to be present in their society other than their own. They enforce this by banning certain words such as "sterile". They furthermore, give words such as "Aunts" and "Angels" a completely different meaning to create disconnection to the past. Through the disconnection from the past, Gilead ensures that everyone in society is cemented in the discourse of present time Gilead. The regime's attempt to make their subjects docile bodies seems to have worked on Offred to a certain extent. Offred is partly affected by the Gileadean discourse as she is on the cusp of remembering the pre-Gileadean discourse and her own identity. However, the appropriation of discourse by the regime is not the only medium used to control society. The government also uses the power of the gaze to utilise complete authority, as will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Control and Oppression Through the Gaze

In the Republic of Gilead, the entire society is under constant surveillance. Kimberly Verwaayen similarly notes that “in Gilead, the gaze reigns supreme as an instrument of control” (44). Through an omnipresent apparatus of surveillance, the patriarchal regime attempts to oppress and control women. Seeing and being seen is used by the regime as a form of social control. In her essay “Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of *the Handmaid’s Tale*” Pamela Cooper analyses the oppressing power of the gaze in the novel. In this study, however, she focusses purely on Foucault’s 1963 concept of the “medical gaze” or also termed as the “clinical gaze” in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). She asserts that the gaze of the doctor is essentially an arm of the surveillance imposed by the regime and can thus be seen as the “clinical gaze”. Within the scope of that essay, Cooper was unable to discuss other forms of this type of oppression, but in order to fully comprehend the methods of oppression through the gaze, it is imperative to also look at two other aspects, namely surveillance and the spectacle. Angela Laflen illustrates the importance of analysing these two aspects by stating that the novel focusses primarily on “the roles surveillance and spectacle play in shaping individuals to suit the will of the dominant regime” (“There’s a Shock” 104). The previous chapter discussed how the shaping of individuals is implemented by the regime with regard to discourse and in particular, language. However, as a Handmaid, Offred faces limitations not only upon her usage of language, but also in the way she is allowed to see the world. This chapter will therefore analyse how the gaze is used as an instrument of control and oppression in both the novel and the Hulu television show by exploring the way in which the two aspects of the gaze, namely the spectacle and surveillance, are manifested in the novel and series. By analysing the manifestations of the power of the gaze, it will become evident that these aspects of the power of the gaze are an effective way of oppression.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault discusses how seeing and being seen can impact human behaviour. Foucault demonstrates how the power of the gaze manifests itself through surveillance. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the regime’s power and oppression is exercised through a manipulation of discourse. However, the novel additionally focusses on the roles that surveillance and spectacle play in the shaping of docile bodies to suit the will of the dominant regime. Both sight and visuals play an important role in this. In a similar way to what Gilead has done to language, visuals have also been manipulated to fit the new discourse that Gilead wants to instil in the society. Angela Laflen notes that this is done through surveillance, as such “disciplinary institutions construct ‘docile

bodies” (“Laflen “There’s a Shock” 105). Michel Foucault’s analysis of power in surveillance is valuable in order to better comprehend Gileadean society. He explores the power of sight as a means of social control. He traces the evolution of the modern prison system and finds that a more effective way of disciplining people is not by corporal punishment, but rather through creating docile bodies. In other words, he observed that there was a demise in the spectacle of the scaffold, and it moved to a society of surveillance. For Foucault there is a definitive distinction between the two. He argues that docile bodies can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136). Chris Barker notes that discipline, in Foucault’s view, “involves the organization of the subject in space through dividing practices, training and standardization” and as a result “it produces subjects by categorizing and naming them in hierarchical order through a rationality of efficiency, productivity and normalisation” (92)

The society presented in *The Handmaid’s Tale* appears to thematise Foucault’s analysis of a modern society. Linda Kauffman observes that “Gilead strips women of their individuality, categorising them hierarchically according to class status and reproductive capacity” (237). However, the categorisation of society goes much further than that. For example, men are also categorised and standardised. The categories applicable to men are fewer and they are given the opportunity to move up from one caste to another. For women, however, it is impossible to move up in society. The top tier of society is comprised of Commanders and they have complete control over Gilead. The next in hierarchal power are the Eyes, a military group that spies on everyone in society, closely followed by the Guardians and workers. Women are categorised in the castes Jezebels, Unwomen, Handmaids, Econowives, Marthas Aunts and Wives. Whereas women are defined by the colour that they wear and are reduced to that function, the men in this society all wear the same colour, black, and thus there seems to be less of a clear division between the men.

The Hulu television series visually highlights Gilead’s social categorisation by colour coordinating each caste. The Commander’s Wives wear blue, which is reminiscent of the pure Virgin Mary. Blue is a colour symbolic for companionship, loyalty, as well as privilege. As a stark contrast to the blue of the Wives, Handmaids wear red nun-like robes along with a bonnet called “wings”. Their robes symbolise the colour of blood and fertility, but also the colour of desire, sin and Mary Magdalene. Gilead is presented as a saturated grey world; as a result, the colour red is a colour that springs out. Consequently, it sets the Handmaids apart from other women as prized rarity. A Martha, who functions as a servant, wears grey. By wearing this colour, Marthas easily blend into the background and are easily ignored. The Aunts wear khaki

brown, and it is interesting to note that the uniforms they wear are eerily similar to Nazi uniforms. Wives, Marthas and Aunts are all soberly dressed and their function in society is made clear through these uniforms. Similar to the erasure of names, the uniforms are a sign of de-individualisation. The uniform ensures that the women are reminded of their function in society, and that they are nothing more. David Coad notes how women's uniforms in Gilead are in stark contrast to the state-owned whores at Jezebel's. Only they "continue to wear makeup and what only can be described as a male fantasy of feminine attire: feathers, sequins, lingerie, shortie nightgowns" (55). However, the way the women are dressed is also in stark contrast to the singular colour that men wear. This could symbolise that even though there are also different castes for men, they all wear black and arguably can be viewed as a unified entity. It seems that men are not defined by their function. This system of categorising everyone in society certainly seems to embody the controlling society that Foucault describes in his analysis of the prison. Angela Laflen notes that "the purpose of this structure is to combat failing population rates and ensure that people who raise children are morally fit to do so" ("There Were Signs" 68). That would be the Gileadean official logic for implementing this structure, but in fact, this is Gilead's method of creating docile bodies.

The creating of docile bodies is especially illustrated in the way Handmaids are dressed and are restricted from seeing. In her book, *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*, Linda Kauffman argues that the Handmaids are disciplined like soldiers. In the Red Centre, they are taught how "to control their bodies, to respond mechanically, to think and act as a collective unit" (246). Indeed, similarly to soldiers, Handmaids' movements are restricted to the point that they all move as one entity. Kauffman furthermore notes that Handmaids are "commanded by signals and not by comprehension" (246). In other words, they are determined by their gestures, and not by their intelligence. Kauffman compares their behaviour to dressage of horses, which "metaphorically signify blind, unthinking obedience" (246). This analysis seems apt. The bonnet literally restricts the Handmaids from seeing or being seen. It furthermore constricts them to look forward and be part of the collective unit. Aunt Lydia told the Handmaids in the Red Centre that "modesty is invisibility" (Atwood 38). She reiterates that the Handmaids must "never forget it" because "to be seen – to be *seen* – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated" and "What you must be, girls, is impenetrable" (38). They are trained not to look or be seen because they are not individuals, but mere entities of the same unit. They are restricted to move and to act within the discourse provided by this regime. Similarly, to the dressage of horses, their movements are severely controlled and restricted. The horse is under complete control of the rider, as are the Handmaids by the regime. Through surveillance the

Handmaids are seen, but they are not seen for the individual person, but by their function as “two-legged wombs” (Atwood 146). This fits in perfectly with what Foucault claims about docile bodies. A docile body is “seen, but does not see; he is always the object of information, but never a subject of communication” (*Discipline* 200). Because Handmaids are only perceived as incubators, they are never the subject of communication and thus are never in control.

In that same analysis, Foucault investigates two types of control. He demonstrates how society moved from the spectacle of the scaffold to the constant surveillance. According to Foucault, there is a strict distinction between these two modes of control. The spectacle is a form of control used in a pre-modern society, whereas surveillance is the mode of control used in modern societies. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, however, both types of control are combined in order to discipline the public. This panoptic society simultaneously uses the spectacle of the scaffold as a medium to scare people. The Panopticon in Gilead is evident in both visible and invisible ways. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the constant surveillance is Gilead's police force, the Guardians. Pamela Cooper observes that “at the most elementary levels of society, the Guardians articulate state security as a regime of the visible” (49). The Republic of Gilead is constructed in such a way that it is made impossible to escape. The city in which Offred resides, is surrounded by barriers and checkpoints. At each checkpoint, Guardians review the identification papers of the passing citizen. Only Commanders and those authorised by Commanders are allowed out of the city. The checkpoints and the Guardians are therefore a visible example of how Gilead attempts to restrict the movement of the public. This structure is similar to the structure that Foucault describes in his example of the seventeenth-century Plague ridden village that was discussed in the introduction of this thesis. Similar to that village, where a guard was placed on every street to supervise that particular street and report to his superior, in Gilead, Guardians are placed everywhere. However, the situation in which this structure is placed is quite different. While the seventeenth-century village set out to contain the outbreak of the Plague, in Gilead the Guardians are expected to report on the citizens when they do not behave according to Gileadean law. Guardians monitor their citizens constantly, and by doing this they evoke a sense of restriction. To the public, therefore the Guardians are the visualisation of the power of the government. As a citizen, being seen by a Guardian immediately means that they are being seen by the government. As a result, citizens in Gilead are merely objects to the regime's scrutinising gaze.

According to Offred, however, Guardians are not “real soldiers. They’re used for routine policing and other menial functions” (Atwood 30). In Foucault’s model of surveillance, he proposes that “with the police, one is in the indefinite world of a supervision that seeks ideally to reach the most elementary particle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body” (*Discipline* 213-4). In order to reach every single particle in society, however, Foucault states that “this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible” (214). Therefore, behind the visible Guardians, there is the secret and undercover police organisation called “The Eyes”. They operate “from a space of observation much more clandestine, menacing and violent” (Cooper 49) than the Guardians. This undercover police force could perhaps be best equated to the German Stasi. They seem to embody the “faceless gaze” (*Discipline* 214) that Foucault states is necessary because they could transform “the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert” (214). The Eyes are everywhere: they are placed at every level of society and work incognito. For its citizens, the society becomes severely stifling. To reiterate the fact that the government is always watching, Offred’s room is searched regularly and Offred constantly worries about other occupants of the house reporting her (Atwood 76). There is a constant threat of being turned in by someone. The almost stifling fear becomes evident during her initial interaction with Ofglen, Offred’s shopping partner. According to Gileadean discourse, Handmaids are not allowed to go anywhere except in pairs as a means of protection. However, “the truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers” (Atwood 29). Through Offred’s inner monologue during her first walk with Ofglen, it becomes clear that she does not trust Ofglen. She narrates:

During these walks she has never said anything that was not strictly orthodox, but then, neither have I. She may be a real believer, a Handmaid in more than name. I can’t take the risk. (Atwood 29)

Ofglen starts to talk about the weather and Offred only answers in prescribed stock phrases. This exemplifies how meticulous Offred is in her behaviour. She thinks about every word she says and every step she takes. This is furthermore demonstrated in her interaction with Nick, who is the Commander’s driver. In her first interaction with Nick, Offred loses her composure for a brief moment. She looks directly at Nick, who is smoking. When she is caught looking at him, she narrates “He looks at me, and sees me looking” (28). As he winks at her, she quickly reverts to the correct position, so she drops her head and turns so that the white wings hide her face. As she walks away, thoughts plague her mind:

He's just taken a risk, but for what? What if I were to report him? Perhaps he was merely being friendly. Perhaps he saw the look on my face and mistook it for something else. Really what I wanted was the cigarette.

Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do.

Perhaps he is an Eye. (Atwood 28)

She was not supposed to look at Nick, and they certainly should not have made eye contact, because that would mean that she is being seen. Offred frantically tries to interpret Nick's actions, but she outwardly does not question his actions. She merely acts the way she is supposed to according to Gileadean law.

While the government is constantly surveilling and watching its citizens, women are actively prevented from seeing and being seen. David Coad describes in his essay, "Hymens, Lips, and Masks: The Veil in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" that "Serena Joy, the Commander's wife, wears a light blue veil" while "Rita, one of the Marthas, puts on a veil to go outside" and the Handmaids are made "to wear a long red dress, gloves and white wings which surround and cover the face, as well as a red veil" (55). He contends that in this world the veil could symbolise that women in this society "are silenced, oppressed, and disempowered (55). He goes on to note that the function of the veil is two-fold. He states:

to help conceal and hide women as well as to prevent women from seeing. It helps render the Handmaids anonymous, it makes them nun-like, ostensibly pure, chaste, and virginal and it aids their effacement, actively disempowering them. (Coad 56)

Coad argues that the clothes that the Handmaids are forced to wear make them anonymous. It is disempowering because the Handmaids lose their sense of individuality and personhood. They are merely viewed as Handmaids. Furthermore, as a result of the clothes that Offred has to wear and Offred's manner of communication in limited speech, it becomes rather easy for Guardians and Eyes to police her, and others. The slightest change in, for example a greeting or glance, could already be considered dangerous for Offred, because these deviations from the standardised discourse could suggest that she is not completely committed to Gilead. The ultimate goal of the constant surveilling is to truly instilled Aunt Lydia's statement of "Gilead is within you" (33) in the Handmaids.

Not only Handmaids are prescribed to act a certain way, but every caste in society has its own set of rules to live by. The Gileadean regime is not afraid to remind its citizens of this fact. This is made clear in the novel when a Martha is shot for no apparent reason:

Last week they shot a woman, right about here. She was a Martha. She was fumbling in her robe, for her pass, and they thought she was hunting for a bomb. They thought she was a man in disguise. There have been such incidents. (Atwood 30)

It seems that the Martha did not do anything wrong. However, similarly to Handmaids, Marthas are also prescribed how they should walk, talk, and look. This particular Martha was not moving exactly in that specific, prescribed way, and therefore this diverging behaviour was flagged by the Guardians as suspicious and they executed her. This Martha was made into an example, to scare everyone into behaving.

Although the Gileadean society uses surveillance as a mode of control, it also resurrects Foucault's spectacle of the scaffold. Foucault described this method of punishment as something from a pre-modern culture. In the event that corporal punishment was administered, the public was called to witness the inflicted penalty in order to frighten them from disobeying and repeating a similar offence. In Gilead, however, this is taken a step further. Men and women of all castes of society are required to attend and participate in public executions called "Salvagings" or "Particutions". In the novel Offred recounts two public executions, both in which she had to participate. She explains that everyone, no matter the caste, can be subjected to these executions, even men. She witnesses executions of both women and men. She explains in order for men to be executed, they had to doctors, scientists, priests, or gay in the world pre. Women such as Handmaids are only salvaged for attempting to kill their Commander or their Commander's Wife. This is done perhaps because they are too valuable for reproduction, and thus other offences require "only a hand [to be] cut off" (287). Wives of highly positioned Commanders can also be subjected to Salvaging, but Offred recounts that they are only salvaged for three reasons: Wives "can do almost anything to us, but they aren't allowed to kill us" (Atwood 287). The second reason "could be adultery, of course. It could always be that" (287) or lastly "attempted escape" (287). In the two Salvagings that Offred describes in the novel, Offred was an active participant. The first execution is of a Handmaid, who is hanged. Offred describes that she and the other Handmaids place one hand on her heart "to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman" (288), and the other hand is grasping the rope that initiates the hanging. During the second execution, the Handmaids need to participate more extensively and also more violently. This time a man dressed as a Guardian is supposedly a convicted rapist. The Handmaids need to stand in a circle around this man, and upon Aunt Lydia's signal, they need to beat this man to death. In Foucault's description of the spectacle, he describes that an audience is necessary to public

executions because, as Laflen notes, they need to witness “the restoration of social order” (“There Were Signs” 73). In Foucault’s model of the spectacle, the ruling monarch is represented by the executioner. In Gilead, however, the audience takes up the role of executioners and it simultaneously also represent the regime. Angela Laflen notes that through these executions, the regime effectively instils “Gilead’s system of punishment into ‘spectators’” and it furthermore can be used “as a way of identifying those whose allegiance in Gilead is incomplete” (“There Were Signs” 74). In other words, if the Handmaid is not participating in the execution, she is not fully indoctrinated yet. Executions are used to further instil Gilead within these women. They were spectators but are made active participants. Similar to the constant spying of her shopping partner and housemates, this example furthmore illustrates how Gilead combines both the spectacle and surveillance and this demonstrates the power of these forms of control (“There Were Signs” 74).

After the Particicution, all of the Salvaged bodies are put on display by hanging the bodies on the Wall. Their faces are covered with a bag and they have a sign hanging around their necks that indicates Gilead’s official reason for executing them. Although looking and seeing is severely restricted in Gilead, the government in fact encourages their citizens to look at the Wall. Offred describes:

We stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies. It doesn’t matter if we look. We’re supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they’ll be there for days, until there’s a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them. (Atwood 42)

Walking past this wall is a daily reminder to Offred of the encompassing power of Gilead. The displaying of the bodies is another form of the spectacle. By doing this repeatedly, Gilead implements what Frederic Johnson calls “historical amnesia” (206). He argues that through

the disappearance of a sense of history. . . [the] social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve. (Johnson 206)

Although Johnson is talking about a postmodern contemporary society, this is also applicable to the Gileadean society. Through the executions and the constant surveillance, Laflen notes that Gilead “enforces historical amnesia” and she describes the executions and the surveilling to be “superficial and sensately intensified, short lived and repeatable spectacles” (“There’s a Shock” 107). The historical amnesia is also evident in the fact that Gilead literally destroys

history. For example, churches are demolished, and buildings such as gymnasiums and universities have been given a new purpose. Gilead palimpsests everything from the world pre-Gilead and makes it impossible to remember the original purpose. As a result, the citizens of Gilead are not given the opportunity to imagine their society to be different in past, present or future. Gilead is successful in enforcing this amnesia, therefore they are firmly cemented in the present. This is perhaps best exemplified in Offred's continuous struggle to remember simple words or connotation from the period before Gilead as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

The historical amnesia is present in language but also visuals. In the novel, Gilead manipulates visuals not only by restricting the Handmaids from seeing, but also by manipulating the actual content of what they are seeing. For example, the news is altered in such a way that it will benefit the regime. Perhaps even more jarring are the altered video footages shown at the Red Centre. During her indoctrination, Offred and her fellow Handmaids are subjected to movies or documentaries from the period before Gilead. The content however has changed quite drastically. Offred recalls, "sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film from the seventies or eighties" (Atwood 128). The porno film displayed "women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks" there were also "women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed" (128). There was even one film that showed how a woman was "slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out" (128). Aunt Lydia states that this was how women were viewed before, and that the Handmaids need to "consider the alternatives" (128). Indeed, in Gilead there are as feminist scholar Fiona Tolan notes, "no pornography and no objectifying images of women" (23). Although there are no longer actual photographs that objectify women, women are still very much objectified in the male gaze. It seems that Offred is not aware of this. In fact, she is starting to believe the discourse that has been indoctrinated. She remembers a time pre-Gilead, a time where she used to go out running, but she did not do this at night because "women were not protected back then" (34). Gilead is forcing visuals such as the news and the porno movies to support the regime's ideology. Offred does not realise that the videos they are subjected to are altered to serve Gilead's discourse. Moira needs to tell her that "it wasn't real, it was done with models" but even after being told this, Offred still confesses that "it was hard to tell" (128). Similar to the repurposing of buildings, old video material is palimpsested to fit the new discourse of the regime. Thus, manipulations of visual processes such as the news and documentaries are a tool implemented by the regime to keep the public docile.

Gilead's successful indoctrination is also demonstrated in Offred's reaction to the clothing of the Japanese tourists. Offred describes, "I can't help staring. It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. The skirts reach just below the knee and the legs come out from beneath them, nearly naked in their thin stockings" (Atwood 38). Although Offred is not supposed to look, she is unable to look away because the sight before her seems so foreign to her. She furthermore describes that "[t]heir heads are uncovered and their hair too is exposed, in all its darkness and sexuality. They wear lipstick, red, outlining the damp cavities of their mouths, like scrawls on a washroom wall, of the time before" (38). Offred is able to recognise that this is something that was possible before Gilead, but, Offred has been taught that this image is not appropriate. She describes, "I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed." (38) Offred describes that she is offended; perhaps even disgusted by the way, these women are dressed. Offred is interpreting the clothes through a Gileadean lens. Although Offred is able to realise that she "used to dress like that" and she is able to acknowledge that dressing like that, "that was freedom" (38), she observes these tourists with Gilead's gaze and describes them using Gilead's language. She rejects what these women are wearing because this is not part of Gilead's discourse, and therefore, through this encounter, it becomes clear that Offred's mind has been captured to a certain extent by Gilead's ideology.

In the Hulu television series, the constant surveillance of the gaze is handled quite differently than in the novel. As previously mentioned, Pamela Cooper analyses the representation of surveillance as a tool of control, by using Michel Foucault's "clinical eye" to prove that doctors in *The Handmaid's Tale* are "an arm of the surveillance mechanism" (49) of the Gileadean regime. She compares her analysis of the clinical gaze in the novel with the 1990 Volker Schlöndorff adaptation *The Handmaid's Tale*. She notes that through the camera "the politics of looking operate in a wider social and psychological basis, with explicit reference to the role the spectator and the mechanization of vision through the agency of the camera" (57). She furthermore argues that the audience is in fact complicit in the "objectifying practices of despotic looking thematised in the novel" (57). However, according to Cooper, the movie does not seem "concerned about the difficult relation between film and novel to work any such ironic awareness into the text of the movie itself" (59). The 2017 Hulu adaptation however, is aware of the irony Cooper mentions. In fact, they seem to actively play with this notion visually by using camera techniques such as framing.

Language is something that is severely restricted in Gilead, and in the television series much of what the audience learns about the characters in the show is expressed through other means than dialogue. For example, it is never explicitly mentioned that Gilead is like a panoptical prison, but this is made clear in the framing. For example, in episode one, Offred, the Commander and Serena Joy meet for the first time. Two different camera shots are used to convey the climate. The scene starts with a close-up of Offred. Reed Morano, the director of the first three episode mentions in an interview that she used a handheld camera to capture the intensity that is happening inside Offred mind (Bennett). Then the scene cuts to a symmetrical wide shot (Alloway), which as a result makes the room feel deeply enclosing, which provides almost a prison-like feeling in just the composition of the scene. This is furthermore explored in the extreme close-ups of Offred while she is locked in her room for several days. The camera moves closely to her face, which provides a stifling and claustrophobic feeling. The series utilises the camera as an Eye that constantly follows Offred everywhere she goes.

Whereas in the novel Offred is constantly reminded of the Eyes by their logos, in the series it is much more implicitly brought forward to the audience through various camera points of view. For example, the Ceremony was shot from a bird's eye point view, which is also often called God's eye view. During this scene, they are literally "Under His Eye." The Hulu adaptation furthermore uses different camera techniques to convey how women, not only Offred, are oppressed in this society. For example, when the series wants to show the face of a prisoner who is unable to speak freely, they use extreme close-ups of Offred's face. The shots are unusually tight to the degree that the audience is not able to see Offred's entire face. The shots are so narrowly filmed in fact parts of her face are obscured. These shots provide a deeply claustrophobic and paranoia-inducing feeling. Moreover, rather than using dialogue to express women's oppression, the series uses framing to explicitly show how women are marginalised in this society, by literally marginalising them in the framing. Very often women are placed on the edges and corners of the frame, while men occupy the centre of the frame. Similarly, women are often positioned low in the frame. For example, when Offred goes to see the doctor for the first time, she sits in the waiting room with two other Handmaids. The three Handmaids are all three at the bottom of the frame and do not occupy the centre, whereas the Guardian in the background is placed higher in the frame, literally down at these women. This provides a sense of powerlessness for the women in this frame: They are trapped in the frame in the same way that they are trapped in Gilead. Placing women in the corners and margins of the frame echoes Gilead's oppression. Similar to their status in society, women are not actively in control of the composition. This visually conveys their powerlessness.

Similar to the novel, Foucault's modes of control of the spectacle and surveillance are both present in the series. The supervising gaze is also omnisciently present throughout society in the form of Guardians, Angels and Eyes. This is first illustrated when Ofglen and Offred go shopping. The guards at the shop are heavily armed, and they watch the Handmaids' every move. The Handmaids only whisper to each other, because they are afraid they will be reprimanded. While walking back from the Particution, a black van rolls up beside them. It has not been explicitly mentioned what will happen, but through the tense score music it becomes clear that it is not something good. The music is tense to such a degree that it is frightening. Even when there are no Angels, Guardians or Eyes in the frame, the music is still sometimes played in the background. This is perhaps done to enforce just how constant the surveillance is without having to explicitly show it. The feeling of the stifling society is transmitted to the audience merely through sound.

The spectacle aspect of Foucault's model of control is immediately present from the first episode. In that episode, the Handmaids need to participate in a Particution of an accused rapist. The scene is violent and gruesome. As they walk back from their shopping trip, they walk past the Wall. They see a priest, a doctor, and a gay man hanging on the Wall. Neither Offred nor Ofglen comment on what they see. In season two, however, Gilead's use of the spectacle is addressed more overtly. This season has two suitable examples of this. The first clear example of the spectacle is demonstrated in the form of a collective punishment for collective resistance. After the Handmaids collectively refuse to stone a fellow Handmaid to death, they need to be punished for their insubordination. The episode opens with Handmaids who are brought to the gallows with ropes around their necks. In order to scare the Handmaids into submission, Aunt Lydia pretends to have them hanged. The Guardians and Aunt Lydia go as far as actually removing the ground underneath the Handmaids' feet to demonstrate that the regime will not tolerate this kind of behaviour. In this instance, the regime uses fear as a mechanism for control. Although it would seem unlikely that they kill all of the Handmaids because they are all viable wombs, which in the world of Gilead, is a rarity, fear is being used a tool of control to make the Handmaids comply. By having the Handmaids stand on the gallows and having the ropes around their necks, the regime has the Handmaids sit in the fear for a long time. This creates the feeling that perhaps they will go through with their punishment, or perhaps hang a few Handmaids to have them function as examples. The Handmaids are ultimately spared, but they still need to be punished. Therefore, as further punishment, all of the Handmaids, except Offred because she is pregnant, are mutilated one by one by chaining them to a stove and lighting it. Offred is ordered to continue eating her soup while listening to

her fellow Handmaids suffering. The mutilation of the Handmaids could be interpreted as what Laflen notes as “repeatable spectacles” (“There’s a Shock” 107). Offred needs to sit, eat her soup, and listen repeatedly to how her fellow Handmaids are in agony. The tool of the spectacle is implemented here to firmly remind the Handmaids that they need to forget about rebelling.

The second example of Gilead’s control by means of the spectacle is seen in the episode entitled “Other Women, in which Offred is returned to Gilead after attempting to escape. Initially, Offred resists the spectacle, but ultimately through repeatedly being exposed to the spectacle, Gilead is able to break Offred. After Offred’s failed escape attempt, Offred needs to be re-indoctrinated, thus she is sent to the Red Centre. At the Red Centre, Offred is actively resistant of the regime. She refuses to be dehumanised to a patronymic, and she defiantly says to Aunt Lydia, “my name is June. You know my fucking name” (“Other Women” 03:01-03:10). Because Offred in the adaptation firmly identifies and refers to herself as June, this thesis will refer to Offred in the series as “Offred/June” from this point onwards. Even though Offred/June openly defies her indoctrination, Aunt Lydia does not resort to violence, but after presenting Offred/June a Handmaid’s uniform, she provides Offred/June with two alternatives. It is important to note that Aunt Lydia shows June the uniform, because the uniform symbolises Offred and thus the erasure of June. Aunt Lydia explains to Offred/June that “June will be chained in this room until she gives birth and then June will be executed” (03:38-03:55). However, as an alternative, “Offred has an opportunity” (03:57). Aunt Lydia provides Offred/June with the choice of either being June and actively resist and thus be executed, or be Offred and live. Offred/June chooses the uniform, and thus to be Offred in order to survive. At the house, Commander Fred presents Offred/June with the official statement of her escape. He tells her:

It wasn't easy finding you. The terrorist networks in Gilead are insidious. But we were determined to rescue you from your kidnappers. And God blessed our endeavor. You've been through quite a trial. (“Other Women” 07:24-07:46)

This is a version of the story that can exist in Gilead, as Offred/June describes in her inner monologue, in this version “the Waterfords can keep the baby” and “[it] shows off Gilead's reach and might” (08:56-09:01). Additionally noteworthy is that Aunt Lydia is actively erasing June from the narrative and moulds the narrative in such a way that it will fit in the Gileadean discourse. Through this monologue, however, it becomes clear that Offred/June has not given in to the regime. This is furthermore reiterated in scene between Serena Joy and Offred. After being choked by Serena Joy, Offred/June is not scared, but rather defiant. She boldly says

“Serena...remember, As long as my baby is safe so is yours” (11:09-11:22). Offred/June does not address Serena Joy in the way she is prescribed by Gilead. Perhaps more importantly, however, rather than being intimidated by Serena Joy, Offred/June threatens Serena Joy, using the baby as leverage. Offred/June’s biggest form of resistance, however, is talking about the past. After Serena Joy’s baby shower, Serena Joy and Rita are collecting the gifts. Offred says faux-innocently, “you know, after my shower, we ended up giving away half our gifts” (36:00). Offred/June is talking about her life before Gilead, which is strictly forbidden. This furthermore illustrates that she is not Offred, but June. However, Offred/June is unable to persevere in her resistance, because Gilead keeps exposing her to the spectacle.

After realising that her initial attempts of getting Offred/June to comply failed, Aunt Lydia realizes that she needs to re-educate Offred/June. However, because Offred/June is pregnant, Aunt Lydia is unable to resort to her cattle prod to shock Offred/June into submitting. Instead, Aunt Lydia uses Foucault’s form of control by way of the spectacle to shock Offred/June into subjugating. Aunt Lydia brings Offred/June to the Wall, which she initially refuses to look at. When Aunt Lydia tells her, “I believe you know him. He drove a bread delivery truck” (“Other Women” 38:38), Offred/June looks up at Omar, the man who attempted to help her escape, and shudders down to the ground. Aunt Lydia tells Offred/June the consequences of her actions: “the wife will redeem herself by serving as a Handmaid. The boy will never see his mother again . . . Gilead has shown them mercy” (39:17-39:34). Mirroring the scene at the Red Centre where all of the Handmaids during their indoctrination needed to point at Janine to blame for her rape, Aunt Lydia asks who is to blame for this man’s death: “Who induced him to commit such a crime?” (40:18) Offred/June confesses that it is her fault, and that God has allowed this to happen “to teach me a lesson” (40:42), again mirroring the scene. However, Aunt Lydia corrects her, by saying that is “to teach June a lesson” (41:11). She emphasises, “June did this. June ran away. June consorted with terrorists. Not Offred. Offred was kidnapped. Offred is free from blame. Offred does not need to bear June’s guilt” (41:19-42:02). Seeing her friend hanging on the Wall and having to listen to her fellow Handmaids suffering, Offred is subjected to multiple spectacles that will cement her into the present and consequently into Gilead. It is a firm reminder that no one can escape Gilead. This seems to be Offred/June’s breaking point. Her inner monologue at the end of the episode illustrates this: “My fault, my fault, my fault, my fault. . . I have done something wrong. Something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead. Please, God, let Hannah forget me. Let me forget me.” (49:01-50:31). She pleads with herself to forget June in order to fully become Offred. As

Nick attempts to talk to her, Offred/June keeps her gaze downwards and says the stock phrase “[w]e've been sent good weather” (51:48). He calls after her, by addressing with “June”, but she does not respond. Instead, she repeats the phrase “[w]e've been sent good weather” mechanically. The language Offred uses, both inside her mind and outside of it, is clearly the Gileadean discourse. It seems that the regime has broken June, and only Offred remains.

In conclusion, Gilead brings together two forms of the power of the gaze, namely the spectacle and surveillance. The combination of these two aspects of the gaze is used to control Gileadean society, especially women. Although Foucault argues that there is a strict distinction between these forms of control, both the novel and the television series demonstrate how both forms of control are implemented to subjugate women in this one society. In the novel it becomes clear that Offred feels the constant surveillance and is stifled by it to the extent that she doubts everyone's true intentions. Moreover, Offred shows that the indoctrination is at least partially successful, as she is unable to discern real news from fake and starts to look at the world around her as a true Gileadean, as the scene with Japanese tourists illustrates. In the Hulu television series, it seems initially impossible to break Offred into subjugation. The adaptation demonstrates how through extensive use of the gaze in the form of repeated acts of the spectacle can break even the most rebellious.

Chapter Three: Resistance Through Discourse

The first chapter discussed how language has been altered to specifically fit the discourse of the new Gileadean regime. In Atwood's novel, discourse, and specifically language, is manipulated in such a way that it can be used as a tool to oppress women. The chapter used Michel Foucault's theory of discourse to analyse how the manipulation of language as a tool of repression is specifically implemented in Gilead. Language, however, as Sławomir Kuźnicki notes in his essay "Writing to Preserve the Self", is Offred's principal weapon against the totalitarian regime (129). He furthermore notes that "it is through writing/storytelling that Offred tries not only to resist the oppressive contemporaries, but also to fight for her real position in the world" (123). This chapter will explore how Offred in both the novel and the series finds a way to resist the Gileadean regime by using the very discourse that is used by the regime to oppress her.

Scholars such as Carol L. Beran have argued that "Offred's power is in language" (Beran). However, over the years, scholars have objected to the interpretation that Offred resists the oppressive regime. Critics such as, Jamie Dopp, Stephanie Barbé Hammer, and J. Brooks Bouson, focus on Offred's passivity. For instance, Bouson argues that the form of resistance shown in *The Handmaid's Tale* is non-existent. He states, "despite Offred's cynical inner voice, her anger remains largely censored" (147). Furthermore, he views her as a "victim of circumstances, not an active agent capable of directing the plot of her own life" (154). Bouson thus argues that Offred should not be viewed as a model of resistance. Sandra Tomc concurs with Bouson, and claims that Offred's actions are "self-protective" in order to avoid "any form of political interaction with her circumstances" (77). She furthermore argues that Offred is a "heroine whose sole resistance goes on inside her head, a resistance at once indistinguishable from passivity and masochism and uncomfortably synonymous with traditional stereotypes of feminine behaviour" (77). Dopp concurs with Bouson and Tomc. He states that the novel does not offer the reader "a position of active resistance to patriarchy, but a position of abjection that shares in the fatalistic passivity of the protagonist" (Dopp). He seems to argue that the novel does not work against women's oppression. Hammer also stresses the passivity of Offred's character, but she views the character as a negative example and thus like a warning. She describes:

On one hand the very fact that Offred is not a revolutionary but an average, college-educated working mother makes her both recognizable and sympathetic to us. But at the same time Atwood turns our empathy for Offred against us, suggesting that her

protagonist (and thus we too, in so far as we resemble her) acts or fails to act based on a dangerous amalgamation of gender assumptions [*sic*] which have governed women's behavior for centuries and which have guaranteed their oppression by men: a vicious circle of passivity and helplessness-wherein passivity perpetuates impotence which in turn justifies and excuses passivity. (Hammer 44)

Though Dopp and Hammer view the character of Offred differently, they both contend that Offred's identity consists largely of passivity. They compare Offred to the more overtly resistant characters: Offred's mother, Moira and Ofglen. These characters represent alternatives for Offred's passivity. All three characters seem to have resisted the regime more actively, however, Dopp argues that the novel "works to delegitimize these alternatives" (Dopp), because all three alternatives fail to escape Gilead. Marta Caminero-Santangelo, on the other hand, points out that the more active resistance seen in those three characters can be seen as "[r]esistance by the sword" and she contends that this "is not condemned by the text--it is merely seen as useless" (Caminero-Santangelo). Instead of a more active form of resistance, *The Handmaid's Tale* advocates, what Laflen describes as "a more context specific resistance" ("From a Distance" 94).

A similar matter is explored in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. He states that "where there is power, there is resistance" (95). He furthermore contends that "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). Foucault asserts that resistance is not outside of power, "one is always inside 'power', there is no 'escaping' it" (95). Not only does Foucault argue that resistance exists, but he contends that it is in fact necessary for resistance to exist because otherwise there is no power relation:

[Power relationships'] existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance. . . . These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 95-6)

According to Foucault, resistance does not come in a certain shape. He rather argues for more possibilities in resistance. Caminero-Santangelo argues that this is the case in the novel. She argues that instead of actively being in opposition to the regime, similar to what Ofglen,

Offred's mother and Moira do, Offred finds a "space for resistance" (Caminero-Santangelo). This space of resistance, Caminero-Santangelo argues, is "located *within* the discourses of the symbolic order (including technologically produced and disseminated discourses)" (Caminero-Santangelo). Indeed, as Dopp, Hammer and Bouson argue, Offred's resistance seems passive, but within the context of the extremely oppressive regime, Offred's actions are "locally resistant" (Laflen "From a Distance" 95) and they help her "to assert her own sense of identity in opposition to the one allowed to her by Gilead" (95). This chapter will demonstrate how Offred uses the very discourse that was implemented to oppress her, to resist the authoritarian regime in both the novel and Hulu's television adaptation.

As demonstrated in chapter one, in the novel, Gilead succeeds in indoctrinating Offred to such an extent that she seems to not only lose her sense of self, but also the discourse from before Gilead, and thus her language skills. Offred seems to have forgotten simple words such as "Jimmies," and is unable to recognise a Playboy bunny costume. Therefore, in the novel, Offred is in the process of rediscovering language. Her rediscovery of words is prompted by Latin words she finds carved in the wall of her wardrobe. In order to keep her mind occupied from her otherwise mundane existence, Offred discovers the words "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" (62). Harriet Bergmann observes that the words "don't really mean anything - they are in a metalanguage" (849). Moreover, these words were penned down by schoolboys from an exclusive prep school (Caminero-Santangelo), which provides a highly patriarchal context to the words. However, both Offred in the novel and Offred in the television adaptation utilise these words to resist the regime.

For Offred in the novel, this phrase becomes "most important for Offred's growing awareness of the liberating power of language" (Hogsette 269). Although Offred does not understand the Latin words, she realises that "it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered. Except by me, for whom it was intended. It was intended for whoever came next" (62). Michele LaCombe argues that the phrase is significant for Offred because "[i]n the absence of genuine faith, the writing on the closet floor becomes the focus of buried hope and itself appears as an act of charity by the previous female tenant" (qtd. in Hogsette 269). It seems such a small act, but in this horrid world, even the slightest hint of a connection is vital for Offred. The scribblings are left for another Handmaid to find. These are words of encouragement, but also they suggest that defiance is possible. In the novel Offred states that:

It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one other person, washed itself up on the wall of my cupboard, was opened and read by me. Sometimes I repeat the words to myself. They give me a small joy. (62)

Finding these words allows Offred to believe that perhaps her own narrative will be found in the future. The narrative that Offred creates will be the embodiment of her existence and as Stein notes “our reading validates her narrative and her subjectivity” (270).

In addition to providing comfort to Offred, the words also propel Offred to rediscover words. Ironically enough, Commander Fred inadvertently helps her with this, with his illicit games of Scrabble. The Commander invites Offred to have a relationship outside of the mandatory Ceremony by playing scrabble in his office. This scene is significant because it demonstrates Offred’s first attempt of regaining a sense of control. Even though it was never made explicitly clear in the novel, it seems that Fred uses the game to satisfy a sexual desire. It is yet another tool for Fred to control Offred. However, Offred turns this around by using the Scrabble games to reacquaint herself with language. What is first important to note about this Scrabble scene is that the Commander demonstrates how he is able to control the game. That is why when they play the game for the first time, he lets her win. However, Offred ricochets the ball back to the Commander by letting him win and thus making him believe that he has complete control over the game, while he is in fact being manipulated by Offred. In this instance, Offred first attempts to control the situation. The second significance of this scene is that Offred is finally able to use language again. Offred describes this sensation as follows:

My tongue felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language I’d once known but had nearly forgotten . . . It was like trying to walk without crutches. . . That was the way my mind lurched and stumbled, among the sharp *r*’s and *t*’s, sliding over the ovoid vowels as if on pebbles. (Atwood 164)

Although her language skills are initially stunted, Offred rediscovers language and is able to create archaic words such as “Zilch” (193). Kauffman notes that this is Offred’s “method of stealing language back again” (233), and concludes that “through language, [Offred] tries to steal knowledge and power; she demands to know what is going on” (233). Perhaps more importantly, however, it is through these illicit Scrabble games that Offred discovers how language is manipulated by the regime. Offred describes that after a few drinks the Commander “becomes silly, and cheats at Scrabble. He encourages me to do it too, and we take extra letters and make words with them that don’t exist, words like smurt and crup” (Atwood 220). The Commander shows that he is able to construct words that do not exist. Those words are not part

of the Gileadean discourse. Therefore, Offred realises that there is more than Gilead's discourse. Through this discovery, Offred realises that this is how Gilead created one version of reality. The key to creating a reality, Offred realises, is language. Gilead uses language to compose a reality that would fit their gain. Offred, thus discerns that she can do the same by telling her story in her own poetic language; a language that is strictly forbidden by the regime. As a result, Offred resists Gilead's monolithic meaning of words by creating multiplicity of words, and stories. Therefore, in the novel, the Latin phrase coupled with the Scrabble scene embodies Offred's beginning of regaining language and thus the beginning of her resistance.

The Hulu adaptation addresses the significance of the Latin phrase in a different way. Whereas the words incite Offred in the novel to rediscover language and as a result create her own story, the series uses the phrase to spur Offred to action. After finding out that Offred is not pregnant, Serena Joy banishes Offred to her room, forbidding her to go outside for her daily shopping, and walks. She is only able to explore her room, she describes herself as "an explorer, a traveller to undiscovered countries" (02:52-03:02). She thinks that this is perhaps a better way of spending her day than being "a lunatic, lost in her memories" (03:08). Desperate to occupy her mind, she literally changes her perspective by laying down on the ground and finds the Latin words carved in the closet. This is perhaps the first time in a long time that she has seen any words. Offred therefore touches and cherishes the words. "Words. It's Latin, I think. Someone wrote it. In here, where no one would ever see it. Was it Offred? The one who was here before? It's a message, for me" (04:20-04:45). This brings her back to a memory at the Red Centre where Moira carves "Aunt Lydia sux" on the bathroom partition. Offred warns Moira not to do it because "If they catch you writing, you will lose a hand. You know that. It's not worth it" (05:43-05:46). Offred is unaware of the significance of words. However, Moira explains to her that it is in fact worth the trouble because "there's going to be a girl that comes in here and reads it. It will let her know she's not alone" (05:53-05:58). Offred then realises that the former Offred had to be brave to carve those words, and for that, she is thankful. The words give her strength. Offred's realisation of the effect of words is reiterated in episode seven, "Jezebel's" where she herself carves words into the wall as a form of resistance. After receiving a music box from Serena, which is "the perfect gift" (47:21) because similar to Offred, the ballerina is "a girl trapped in a box" (47:22) More importantly to note is that this ballerina is not an individual entity, but "she only dances when someone else opens the lid, when someone else winds her up" (47:30-47:39). The ballerina is under complete control of the person who opens the box and winds it up. Although this gift seems to be an act of kindness from Serena Joy's part, it is in fact a reminder for Offred to remain the box's boundaries in order to survive.

Serena Joy therefore uses this gift to remind Offred who is in control. Offred, however, takes this physical object of control, and uses it as a means to resist. Offred takes the key that is used to wind up the music box, and uses it to carve the words, “you are not alone” into the wall. Presumably knowing that her time in this place may be limited, and that perhaps she may not survive because she did not stay within the set boundaries, she embodies the importance of leaving that message for the next Handmaid. Even though she is resisting, she knows that she will likely be replaced by a new Offred, and thus attempts to leave hope for next Handmaid.

Similar to the novel, Offred in the series uses the game of Scrabble as a first indication of her resistance by attempting to regain some modicum of control. The series also uses language to portray this control. However, the way this is used in the series diverges greatly from the novel. Offred uses the Scrabble game to uncover the meaning of the words “*nolite te bastardes carborundorum.*” Commander Fred shows her an old book in which Latin words are scribbled in the margins as a pun. He tells her that it does not mean anything “it’s probably only funny if you’re a twelve-year-old boy studying Latin” (“Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum” 46:20). He tells her that it roughly translates as “don’t let the bastards grind you down” (46:34). Commander Fred somehow knows that Offred learned about this phrase through the former Offred. As they talk about the former Handmaid, Offred learns that Fred feels guilty for the death of former Offred. She immediately detects that this is Fred’s weakness, and uses it to her advantage. Offred therefore uses this opportunity to manipulate the Commander in lifting Offred’s banishment to her room by playing on his guilt.

It has been so hard. Being alone in that room all the time. I know Mrs. Waterford is, is trying to teach me a lesson. I know. I know she's right. I have so many flaws. But it has been so long. I'm afraid I'm starting to give up. I certainly wouldn't want to give up. Like my friend. (“Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum” 48:02- 48:52)

She insinuates that she is thinking of killing herself. She furthermore implies that it is because of her banishment. She does not explicitly ask for anything, but this is enough for Fred to lift her banishment. Thus the next day, Offred is allowed outside her room once again, much to the displeasure of Serena Joy. During the coda of the episode in a voice-over Offred clarifies just how much the words by former Offred have affected and inspired current Offred. The coda is a flashback of Offred at the Red Centre who has just been punished for trying to escape. Offred is unable to walk because her feet have been whipped by Aunts, so she lies in bed with bloody bandaged feet. One by one Handmaids walk past Offred’s bed, and leave tiny bits of food at her bed. They then stand before her, smiling. This scene illustrates that Offred is not alone and

the Handmaids know that. The shot then cuts to a group of Handmaids walking for their daily shopping. The episode ends with the words, “There was an Offred before me. She helped me find my way out. She's dead. She's alive. She is me. We are Handmaids. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum, bitches” (50:45-51:08). Although the former Offred is not alive and she did not actively help Offred find her way out of her banishment, the words she left in the closet did help Offred. It reminded Offred that she is not alone. There is a sense that there could be some form of sisterhood amongst the Handmaids, because these women are all in a similar situation and perhaps together they can resist the regime. In the novel, the Latin phrase, for Offred, is utilised as an encouragement to rediscover language, which ultimately helps her articulate her story. In the series, the focus on the Latin words is different. In the adaptation, the words prompt Offred to think about the significance of words. It seems to have awakened her to the importance of words and it makes her realise that power and comfort that words can provide. She realises that words can create a sense of community, which becomes evident in the message she carves into the wall, and also in the use of the Latin phrase as a call to arms. Therefore, both Offred in the novel and Offred in the adaptation appropriate this phrase to use to as a form of resistance.

In both the novel and the series, Offred's resistance is furthermore discernible in the way she resist the monolithic identity that the government imposes on the Handmaids. As mentioned in chapter one, for the regime, one of the most striking ways of repressing the women in Gilead is the stripping of their names and non-individualising the women. This is in fact a linguistic domination through naming. M. Keith Booker notes in his book *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* that this is reminiscent of the labelling of the citizens of One State in the novel *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin. Booker connects these two novels to Louis Althusser's theory on ideology. Althusser argues that the nature of someone's identity begins before birth. He argues that “it is certain in advance that it will bear its father's name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject” (176). Althusser argues that an individual's identity is innately their own, and thus it cannot be altered. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead strips Handmaids of their names in order to destroy individualism and in order to create a unified and singular identity. Offred, however, actively resists this. Offred finds this renaming a critical danger to her identity, and thus guards her true name as a treasure:

My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number,

useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. (Atwood 94)

In Gilead's discourse, names are not important. The only thing that is important is one's duty in society. Although she is taught that there is no importance in names, Offred knows that this is a violation of her identity. Offred seems to realise that her name is connected to her identity. She becomes aware significance of this, because her own plural, composed identity is something that is the complete antithesis of what Gilead prescribed. Offred recognises this, and thus keeps her name hidden, even from the audience throughout the novel. Even as she tells Nick her real name, she does not disclose it to the audience. Her real identity is furthermore important to her because it validates her existence. Offred notes, "I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known" (282). Lois Feuer notes, "[w]e never know Offred's real name, not only because her identity is subsumed by her status as Handmaid, but because that name is a link to her past, her unique individual self" (85). Kuźnicki concurs and adds that the hiding of her true identity "may suggest some survival instinct hidden deep inside Offred" (127). However, perhaps more importantly the protagonist's hiding of her true identity can be interpreted as an act of rebellion. The new discourse provided by the new regime forces her to forget her name from before and only refer to herself as a patronymic and thus as her function as a Handmaid. Offred, however, actively resists this. She keeps in mind her real name, and actively forces herself to remember this name. Although Offred fights to remember her identity, her resistance sometimes falters:

But that's where I am, there's no escaping it. Time's a trap, I'm caught in it. I must forget about my secret name and all ways back. My name is Offred now, and here is where I live. (Atwood 153)

Kuźnicki contends that these failures of resistance and doubts "seem to be inscribed in Offred's personality making her a more reliable character" (127). More importantly, however, Offred seems to have given in to the oppression, but she still refuses to disclose her name to the reader. Therefore, as Coral Ann Howells notes, "[Offred] guards her lost name as the secret sign of her own identity and as guarantee of her hopes for a different future" (99). Staels concurs and furthermore notes, "[i]n Gilead, Offred used to silently repeat her hidden name (June) to maintain her existence" (459) which is seen in Offred's inner monologue: "I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name; remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me" (Atwood 108). By recalling her name from before, Offred "regenerates her creative

energy” and it spurs her into action. She ends her inner monologue with “I want to steal something” (108). Offred does steal something; she steals language in order to create her story. Staels concludes that in her own tale “Offred is the grammatical subject and narrative agent of the tale, whereas Gilead reduced her position to that of (grammatical) object and patient” (459). Offred in the novel does not comply with the position that Gilead imposes on her. In Gilead’s discourse, Offred, and the other Handmaids are marginalised to objects, but in Offred’s story, she re-centres herself by making herself the subject of the story opposed to the object.

As argued earlier in this chapter, Offred in the novel comprises different meanings to words. Through this exercise of her literary game, Offred discovers the power behind words. She discovers that language must be interpreted and is therefore prone to misinterpretations. Bergmann states, that as a result of this discovery, “verbal ambiguity is suddenly possible, making possible an alternate version of her reality” (850). This is demonstrated in the way Offred presents the audience with alternative versions of the same the same story. She, for example, imagines three alternatives of Luke’s fate, claiming that she believes every single one of them: “the things I believe can’t all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of them” (Atwood 116). She furthermore provides two different interpretations of her first sexual encounter with Nick. After her second interpretation she concludes that “It didn’t happen that way either. I’m not sure how it happened; not exactly” (275). She does something similar with Moira’s story, as well as her first meeting with Commander Fred in his office. Verwaayen contends that the creation of multiple possibilities “marks a strategy for survival” (47). She points out that Offred acknowledges that “[t]he things I believe can’t all be true, though one of them must be. . . this contradictory way of believing seems to me, right now, the only way I can believe anything” (Atwood 116). Offred knows that not her some of her interpretations are not true. However, she needs to believe in the conflicting stories because this is these interpretations differ from the enforced Gileadean discourse, which she know she cannot trust at all.

Gilead endeavours to create one discourse with one uniform identity for all of the Handmaids. This is in part done by imposing a regulated unequivocal language over all its citizens. They regulated Handmaids’ language to such a degree that their language has been diminished to mechanical platitudes. Offred’s narrative continuously subverts this very idea. The narrative defies “the monologic either/or binary” (Verwaayen 47) of the regime to instead delineate “multiple/both” (47) stories. She does not stick with one story, but rather tells multiple interpretations of the same story, while believing them all. The stories that Offred describes, exists completely outside of the allowed discourse in Gilead. Moreover, Offred’s fragmented,

“limping and mutilated story” (Atwood 279) subverts the fixed, singular inscription of identity that Gilead aims to impose. Howells also notes that Offred’s narrative presents “a mosaic of alternative female worlds which undermined Gilead’s patriarchal myth of women’s submissiveness and silence” (101). Consequently, through the narrating of these stories, Offred seems to rehabilitate herself from “a two-legged womb” to an individual (Howells 103). Therefore, Offred’s plurality in discourse is not solely a survival strategy but a form of resistance.

The importance of names and the power in the plurality of storytelling is combined in the television show. Though the show does not overtly use language as a tool of resistance, they do touch upon this theme in both season one and two. In the season finale of season one, Offred/June opens the package that was smuggled out of Jezebel’s. She discovers letters from women who are now enslaved and imprisoned in Gilead. In each letter, they introduce themselves with their names pre-Gilead. They tell the stories of who their family pre-Gilead was, how they were captured and where they are stationed. The writing of the letters, which is punishable with death, in itself is a form of resistance. The letters, however, contain more than merely written words; they contain words that are completely outside of the regime’s discourse. These women use their own names, and tell their own stories; stories that according to Gilead do not exist. This seems to be a collective form of resistance among the women in Gilead. As Offred/June opens the packet, she feels the stories of her sisters surrounding her. Furthermore, Offred/June being surrounded by words written by other women seems to recharge her. She drinks in the hope in the fact that she not one, but she is one of many.

As an immediate reaction to this, Offred/June feels empowered enough to act against Aunt Lydia and to not cast the first stone to kill one of her fellow Handmaids during the Particicution. After the first Handmaid refuses, all of the other Handmaids followed. This shows the power of the collective. They were an army of Handmaids and not on their own. They took authority away from Aunt Lydia even for a short moment. It was a short moment of rebellion and a show of force. This example demonstrates how Offred/June in fact appropriates one of Gilead’s restrictions, namely their imposed uniforms. As argued previously in chapter one, uniforms in the Gileadean society, similar to prison wear, are introduced to remind everyone what their place is in society. In the Handmaids’ case, this means that they are not seen as individuals, but rather as two-legged incubators. However, by de-individualising the Handmaids, they can in fact function as a unit that is similar to an army. Offred/June even specifies this clearly in the episode: “They should have never given us uniforms if they didn’t

want us to be an army” (“Night” 06:09). The uniform that is the symbol of the erasure of identity and is thus intended as a means of oppression, is in fact appropriated to provide strength to resist. Offred/June observes that, “We refused to do our duty to kill Janine” (“Night” 53:34), and she realises that “for that sin we will be punished. I have no doubt.” (“Night” 53:38-53:45). Although she knows that there will be consequences for her actions, Offred/June has found the strength to actively resist the totalitarian regime by not doing her duty. This is essential to note, because in an authoritarian system of control such as Gilead, fulfilling ones duty is the only purpose in society. Therefore, in refusing to do their duty as it is defined by the state, the Handmaids show perhaps the largest act of resistance.

As mentioned before, Dopp, Bouson and Hammer contend that Offred seems too passive. They argue for a more active opposition to the regime. However, as Caminero-Santangelo aptly notes, “the novel does not condemn this kind of resistance, but it also does not encourage it because those actions are seen as useless” (Caminero-Santangelo). The Hulu television show takes a similar stance. In season two episode six, entitled “First Blood”, an overtly form of resistance takes place. During the presentation of the new Rachel and Leah Centre, one of the Handmaids detonates explosives as an attempt to kill all of the Commanders present at the launch. Although this attack initially feels satisfying for the audience, in the following episode, entitled “After”, the repercussions of this action becomes clear as the episode opens with the funeral for the thirty-one fallen Handmaids. The series reminds the audience what a terrorist movement does. The attack caused twenty-six Commanders their lives, but it also caused thirty-one Handmaids their lives. Even though the audience might initially sympathise with the attack, a consequence of this attack was that innocent lives were taken. To contrast the violent ending of episode six, in the following episode a more subtle form of resistance takes place. Firstly, this episode reiterates the importance of names. In the series, Ofglen did not hang herself, but she was sent to the Colonies. One of the consequences of so many Handmaids dying at the bombing was that there were not enough Handmaids left for the Commanders. They therefore decided to bring some of fertile women back. Ofglen is one of those people. Offred and Ofglen meet again for the first time in the supermarket. Offred does not address Ofglen with a patronymic, but rather with her given name, Emily. She then tells Emily that her name is June. She then turns to another Handmaids and introduces herself. This causes all of the Handmaids present in the shop to whisper their real names to each other. This is a small, but significant moment. They refuse to be dehumanised into a product or slave. Although these Handmaids have spent months, perhaps even years in each other’s company, this is the first time they see each other and are introduced to each other. This was a strong

reminder that they are still these people. They are not the breeding tools that Gilead has attempted to reduce them to.

Secondly, this episode illustrates how words can be used as a means of resistance instead of violence. While Commander Waterford is indisposed in the hospital due to his injuries caused by the bombing, Serena Joy starts to draft new executive orders. Serena Joy wants Offred/June to read over and edit the executive orders drafts. Offred states that she “will need a pen” (“After” 52:36). As she sits down to start working, the focus shifts from the paper to the pen. For this shot, the creators of the series used an extremely thin shallow depth of field. By doing this, everything in this shot is blurry except for the pen that Offred/June is holding. The pen is therefore in extreme focus and this indicates its importance in this scene. It is through writing the executive orders that Serena Joy gets a Commander charged with treason and apostasy. The pen has power, and with this, the series suggests that words are more powerful than swords. The action of the clicking of the pen parallels the clicking of the bomb in the previous episode. However, this time there is not a bomb that goes off, but the click of this pen lights a small match of rebellion with both Offred/June and Serena Joy. This, alongside the insistence of the Handmaid’s true names and not their patronymics, seems to suggest that through language and a united front they can slowly start to take back more than just their names.

In Gilead, the regime endeavours to create a society that is uniform in all aspects of society. Gilead imposes one kind of discourse over all its subjects. Offred in both the novel and the television adaptation defies this by telling her story. Offred in the novel trains her brain to think subjectively and through that she is able to construct stories. Caminero-Santangelo concurs, by noting that:

We do not discard a particular kind of discourse because it is a reconstruction. Rather, we recognize the constructed nature of reality, and use constructions and reconstructions as provisional systems of understanding while pointing attention to their provisional nature as a strategy for undermining the dangerous claims of any discourse to absolute truth (Caminero-Santangelo)

Caminero-Santangelo argues that Offred’s power lies in the fact that she is able to construct a story that lies entirely outside of the allowed discourse in Gilead. Howells similarly notes that in the novel, Offred’s narrative centres on “the possibilities for constructing a form of discourse in which to accommodate women’s representations of their own gendered identity” (93). It becomes clear that story telling becomes Offred’s most powerful act of resistance to an

imprisonment in silence. Through storytelling, the Offred in the novel is in the process of reconstructing herself as an individual. Stein similarly notes that “to speak, to write, is to assert one’s personhood” (270), but it furthermore carves one’s subjectivity. By doing this, Offred rejects the uniform sameness that Gilead demands of the Handmaids and revitalises a language that was extinct by the regime. Moreover, by asserting her right to tell her different interpretation of the same story, Offred relegates the grand narrative that Gilead wants to impose through their discourse, to the margins. The oppressor’s discourse therefore functions merely as a framework in Offred’s story. In the novel’s epilogue, “Historical Notes” the reader discovers through a symposium that takes place in 2195 that Offred’s story has survived. Although her story is interpreted and arranged by the misogynistic professor Pieixoto, the narrative endured. The Republic of Gilead, however, no longer exists. The regime attempts to silence women, but their attempts ultimately fail. The adaptation has not been completed yet. Therefore, the series does not offer a similar appendix to the series as with the novel yet. Hence, the series takes a different approach. While the novel focusses on Offred’s ability to reconstruct her story in order to recreate her identity, it seems that the adaptation’s Offred/June does not need to reconstruct her story in order to compose her identity because it seems that she remains aware of her true identity is June. Instead, the series highlights not just Offred internal act of resistance, but a more external resistance in the form of the collective. The series does not promote violence, but rather portrays how women can resist this oppressive system by uniting and using their words to do that. The click of the pen is therefore perhaps more powerful than the click of the detonator.

In conclusion, it can be said that both the series and the novel portray resistance against the regime. Though both the novel and the series focus on how discourse can be altered and used in such a way that it can be used as an instrument of resistance, the way in which the book and the series achieve this, diverge. The novel mainly focusses on the reconstruction of identity through language and as a result resisting the discourse that the regime views as the one legitimate master discourse. The resistance in the novel is therefore much more personal. The series on the other hand portrays not only Offred’s resistance, but also other Handmaids’ and Serena Joy’s resistance. The series portrays a violent attack, and contrast this with the power of words. The words “*nolite te bastardes carborundorum*” and the women’s stories provide Offred/June with a sense of community. The sense of community gives Offred/June the strength for resistance.

Chapter Four: Resistance Through the Gaze

In the second chapter, the regime's utilisation of power of the gaze in Gilead in regards to the oppression of Offred and women in general was discussed. As Kimberly Verwaayen notes, "Offred's tale exposes the surveillance, the institutional gaze, the Panopticon of Western patriarchal ('Gileadean') occulocentrism" (44). Furthermore, in chapter two, it was discussed how Offred's wing-like bonnet quite literally obscures Offred's vision. She describes that "it's hard to look up, hard to get a full view, of the sky, of anything" (Atwood 40). Their vision is literally restricting because, as Verwaayen asserts, "in Gilead, the gaze reigns supreme as an instrument of control" (44). This is mainly in the form of Eyes because are everywhere in Gilead. Verwaayen continues, "the regime's symbol of oppression is the winged eye, and its agents of repression are Eyes. On her ankle, Offred is marked as a commodity, as a product in such a society, by four digits and an eye, while a winged cap on her head restricts at once her ability to see and be seen (44). Verwaayen ultimately concludes that "the text makes explicit the horrifying exposure and subjectifying puissance of the patriarchal gaze" (44). However, Offred states that it is possible to see "a little at a time, a quick move of the head, up and down to the side and back. We have learned to see the world in gasps" (40). Through these small gasps of ability of vision, Offred is able to resist the very tool that is meant to oppress her. As described in chapter one and two, despite Offred's efforts to remember her life prior to Gilead, she inevitably does begin to internalise Gilead's perception. But as Kauffman notes, "although Offred internalizes the oppression to which she is subjected, she also resists it" (249). Verwaayen notes that Offred "subversively appropriates the acts of both seeing and being seen" (44-5). This chapter will explain how Offred appropriates the gaze in the form of seeing and being seen as a tool to resist the regime. It will furthermore discuss how Gilead's tool of oppression through the gaze in the form of the spectacle is subverted by reclaiming some of Gilead's spectacles and reconstructing those spaces into spaces of commemoration instead of spaces of fear and erasure.

In the novel, Offred is able to appropriate the gaze because she is able to identify that what she sees is not completely accurate but rather part of Gilead's truth. Angela Laflen concurs, who dubs this process as being able to "read beneath" ("There's a Shock" 109) or "visual literacy" ("There Were Signs" 75). She contrasts this concept to James Elkin's concept of "the wall of usual seeing" ("There's a Shock" 103). Elkins argues that it is challenging "to break through the wall of usual seeing and begin to discover how many other things there are to see" and he stresses that "it requires practice and special information- you have to know what

you're looking for- and it also requires energy, since it involves special concentration” (Elkins 56). Elkins suggests that one is used to seeing a certain way, and to be able to see differently is incredibly difficult. By literally limiting the Handmaids’ sight with their winged bonnet, and through the manipulation of visual media, Gilead caused Offred to learn to see a particular way. In other words, visual processes such as the news are utilised in such a way to keep Offred, and the other Handmaids, docile. Laflen additionally asserts that by capitulating to this “usual seeing”, one would in fact assist “to oppressive and destructive systems” (“There’s a Shock” 103). In order to be able to resist Gilead’s prescribed way of seeing, Offred needs to be learn to see differently from this “usual seeing”. In her essay “There Were Signs and I Missed Them” Laflen observes, “the possibility of resistance is correlated to visual literacy” (76). As elucidated in the previous chapter, Offred’s resistance lies very much in being able to tell her story; the story that Gilead strongly endeavours to suppress. Offred thus needs to interpret Gilead’s discourse outside of the allowed discourse. Critics such as Danita J. Johnson and Allan Weiss note that “before the installation of the Gilead regime she was very complacent” (Weiss 133). Offred herself states that in her life pre-Gilead she was “careless. I was careless” (Atwood 61), but she was aware of her actions because she states that “We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn’t the same as ignorance, you have to work at it” (Atwood 66). By becoming aware of her ignorance, Offred as a result, becomes aware that she actively needs to break her blindness in order to start resisting the regime.

Offred’s ability to see more than what is allowed in Gilead is first seen in recognising Gilead’s propaganda. As mentioned in chapter two, Offred is subjected to Gilead’s propaganda through media. One of the formats used is the news. Offred is allowed to watch television on Ceremony nights. The newsreader is someone whose “manner is kindly, fatherly; he gazes out at us from the screen . . . like everybody’s ideal grandfather” (93). The regime placed an older gentleman who could be perceived as trustworthy. His job is to instil in everyone in Gilead that everything that is taking place in Gilead “is for our own good. Everything will be all right soon. . . You must trust. You must go to sleep, like good children” (93). Though Offred finds this news reader to be very convincing, and admits that she “struggle[s] against him” (93), Offred does not believe what she sees on the news. In fact, she becomes aware that the news is complicit in spreading Gilead’s propaganda. She observes that, “They show us only victories, never defeats. Who wants bad news?” (93). Offred is clearly aware that the news is merely another one of Gilead’s devices to indoctrinate her; she narrates, “[w]ho knows if any of it is true? It could be old clips, it could be faked” (92). However, she continues watching the news in the hope that she will “be able to read beneath it” (Atwood 92). In Offred’s flashbacks to the

Red Centre, she is unable to recognise that the porno movie that is being shown as indoctrination, is in fact a Gilead production. Moira needs to point out to her that “it wasn’t real” and that “it was done with models” (128). Though she is made aware of this, Offred is not able to discern this herself, because for her “it was hard to tell” (128). In present time, Offred is able to identify that the news could be faked and that the newsreader is “possibly an actor” (93). She watches critically, and questions everything she sees, “I look into this man’s eyes, trying to decide what he’s thinking. He knows the camera is on him: is the grin a show of defiance, or is it submission?” (93). Offred thus breaks out of the pattern of “usual seeing” and is able to see differently.

Laflen notes that Offred “becomes aware of how her own visual processes are a trap for her thinking” (“From a Distance” 97). This becomes apparent when Offred and Ofglen are standing in front of the Wall. As mentioned in chapter two, The Wall is one of Gilead’s instruments to implement the spectacle to scare people into behaving correctly. Upon looking at the Wall, Offred attempts to come up with metaphors to be able to cope with what she sees in front of her. She describes the men hanging on the Wall as “scarecrows” (Atwood 42). She describes that their heads are like “sacks, stuffed with some undifferentiated material, like flour or dough” (42). Her analogy continues:

Though if you look and look, as we are doing, you can see the outlines of the features under the white cloth, like grey shadows. The heads are the heads of snowmen, with the coal eyes and the carrot noses fallen out. The heads are melting. (Atwood 43)

Though Offred is aware that these bodies are placed here because “they are meant to scare” (42), she does not acknowledge the bodies as human beings. When she sees blood trickling through the white bag, she compares this to a “mouth, a small red one, like the mouths painted with thick brushes by kindergarten children” (42). She compares this red to the red tulips she has encountered in Serena Joy’s garden. Through these metaphors, Offred is able to distance herself from seeing the murdered bodies. Offred dehumanises these men in a similar way that Luke reduced their cat to the pronoun “it” as explained in chapter one. Similarly to what Gilead does with old buildings such as gyms and schools, she palimpsests the bodies in a satisfactory way. However, her analogies and metaphors no longer suffice, because Offred is unable to sustain the image of the men looking like snowmen (Laflen “From a Distance” 97). The blood on the white cloths leads to Offred being forced to reconsider her metaphors. She notes:

The red is the same but there is no connection. The tulips are not tulips of blood, the red smiles are not flowers, neither thing makes a comment on the other. The tulip is not a

reason for disbelief in the hanged man, or vice versa. Each thing is valid and really there. It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions. I need to make them. I need to be very clear, in my own mind.

Offred manipulates language through the use of these analogies, and this becomes a tool for her to control what she is seeing. However, it becomes clear to Offred that her analogy does not hold up. Offred recognises that the interpretations “are indeed plural and temporary, and she decides to take responsibility for creating her own meaning” (Hogsette 268); as a consequence, Offred rejects the regime’s institutionalised meanings. In other words, she realises that she needs to re-evaluate everything she sees every day and interpret it differently than what she has been taught to see; and thus she learns to see differently from “usual seeing”.

The effect of Offred’s decision to see differently is two-fold. Angela Laflen notes that Offred firstly recognises that the visual is vulnerable to manipulation and secondly she comes to recognise the various ways in which women can resist the regime (Laflen “There’s a Shock” 110). Laflen furthermore asserts that Offred manipulates the way she appears to others in order to survive the regime (110). In other words as Verwaayen notes: Offred is able to appropriate the acts of both seeing and being seen (44-5). This is perhaps best seen in the way that Offred manipulates the male gaze.

The male gaze is discussed by Laura Mulvey in her famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. She demonstrates how the passive female is the object of the active male gaze. Mulvey’s analysis seems to point out that the objectification through the male gaze is disempowering to the objectified female. Mulvey argues that “[i]n their exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (837). Mulvey’s point is illustrated several times in the course of the novel. Perhaps this is best exemplified in the scene where Offred and Fred are set to go to Jezebel’s. Offred is not dressed in her usual red robes. In fact, Fred dresses her in pre-Gileadean clothes, Offred describes the clothes as: “[i]t’s a garment, apparently, and for a woman: there are the cups for the breasts, covered in purple sequins. The sequins are tiny stars. The feathers are around the thigh holes, and along the top” (Atwood 242). The outfit that Fred dressed Offred in would be what Mulvey describes as “being displayed as sexual objects” and this “plays to and signifies male desire” (837). Fred is projecting his male fantasy onto Offred. The way she and all of the other women at Jezebel’s are dressed functions as an object that can be admired by men. It is ironic how the

Commanders prescribe the women in Jezebel's to be dressed because it is in stark contrast to the way they prescribe the women of Gilead to be dressed. The women in Gilead, especially the Wives, are dressed in a dull and plain way. This example illustrates how the male gaze can disempower women, as they are diminished to objects of desire.

Although the male gaze seems to disempower Offred, at the same time, the male gaze is also something that empowers Offred. This becomes clear from the very beginning of the novel. As much as the Handmaids are forbidden to see, they are also forbidden to be seen by others. For example, the Angels are not allowed to look at the Handmaids and so they "stood outside [the Red Centre] with their backs to us" (Atwood 14). Offred describes the Angels as "objects of fear to us, but of something else as well" (14). The Angels are not allowed to look at the Handmaids perhaps in fear of being seduced by them. Offred sees this as a moment where she has power over the men. She states, "If only they would look. If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade-off" (14). Offred seems to realise that when eye contact is made, she has an opportunity to manipulate the Angel.

The power of seeing is furthermore emphasised when a few looks are exchanged between Offred and a young Guardian when she crosses a checkpoint. Offred describes, "I raise my head a little, to help him, and he sees my eyes and I see his, and he blushes" (31), after they make eye contact Offred wants to touch his face, but "he is the one who turns away" (31). Though Offred and the Guardian should not exchange looks, Offred actively wants to defy the prescribed orders. She notes that even though this is merely "an event, a small defiance of rule, so small as to be undetectable" (31), it is still significant for her because "such moments are the rewards I hold out for myself, like the candy I hoarded, as a child, at the back of a drawer. Such moments are possibilities, tiny peepholes" (31). To Offred, this seems to be a glimmer of possibility, which is significant because possibilities are not allowed in Gilead's discourse. Perhaps more importantly, Offred is using the male gaze to feel empowered. Although she is the object of the Guardian's gaze, she feels power in being in his gaze. This is because she is able to control what the Guardian sees. Glenn Deer concurs with this view. He states, "[i]n these visual motifs the power structure consists of the observer and a vulnerable object of vision. But this power structure is prone to reversal" (127). This feeling of being in control while being the one who is being observed is reiterated when Offred and Ofglen are lead out of the checkpoint and Offred manipulates the Guardians:

As we walk away I know they're watching, these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling

the full red skirt sway around me. . . I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young. Then I find I'm not ashamed after all. I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there. I hope they get hard at the sight of us and have to rub themselves against the painted barriers, surreptitiously. They will suffer, later, at night, in their regimented beds. They have no outlets now except themselves, and that's a sacrilege. There are no more magazines, no more films, no more substitutes; only me and my shadow, walking away from the two men, who stand at attention, stiffly, by a roadblock, watching our retreating shapes. (Atwood 32)

Offred realises that she is the object of the Guardians' gazes and she enjoys the power she has over these men while she is in their gaze. She reclaims the gaze of desire. In this example, the weakness of being the object of the male gaze is reversed because Offred has turned herself into "the controlling observer" (Deer 127). This example illustrates Foucault's argument that power is diffuse. Power is not something that moves from the top down, but rather it comes from everywhere. That is why, even though Gilead is a phallogocentric society, the power of the male gaze can be inverted to Offred's advantage. Laflén notes that the way that Offred is manipulating the gaze "becomes a form of language in and of itself - a body language that allows individuals to speak to one another without violating prohibitions on speech" ("There's a Shock" 111).

Hulu's adaptation only touches upon this topic lightly. There is one scene in season one where Offred/June subverts the male gaze as a form of power and resistance. After coming back from a shopping trip with Ofglen, Offred/June and Nick are in the kitchen and he warns her about getting close to Ofglen. As Offred takes off her wet outer clothes, she notices Nick's lingering gaze on her exposed thigh. Instead of immediately covering up her uncovered thigh, she watches as Nick stares at her, and lifts her skirt just a little bit higher before lowering her skirt. She seems to enjoy the fact that she is the object of Nick's gaze, and perhaps more importantly, she likes that she has control over the situation. She has complete control over what Nick sees and for how long. Nick on the other hand, has no control over what he sees. He is only able to watch. Although Offred/June is the object of the male gaze, she appropriates it by gaining control over what the male gaze is allowed to watch.

In addition to being able to manipulate the male gaze and turn it into a tool of control, the novel also suggests that being under someone's gaze is not always purely for sexual desire or surveillance, but it can also function as human connection. This is illustrated in the novel when Offred and Ofglen stop in front of a store and look at each other for the first time through

the reflection in the window. It is only when they meet each other's gazes that they are able to make a connection and really see each other for the first time:

Ofglen and I stand outside Soul Scrolls, looking through the shatterproof windows, watching the prayers well out from the machines and disappear again through the slot, back to the realm of the unsaid. Now I shift my gaze. What I see is not the machines, but Ofglen, reflected in the glass of the window. She's looking straight at me.

We can see into each other's eyes. This is the first time I've ever seen Ofglen's eyes, directly, steadily, not aslant. Her face is oval pink, plump but not fat, her eyes roundish.

She holds my stare in the glass, level, unwavering. Now it's hard to look away. There's a shock in this seeing; it's like seeing somebody naked, for the first time. There is risk, suddenly, in the air between us, where there was none before. Even this meeting of eyes holds danger. Though there's nobody near. (Atwood 176)

Similar to the scene in the adaptation where all of the Handmaids introduce themselves to each other with their real names, Offred and Ofglen meet each other for the first time. By restricting their gazes, Handmaids are unable to make eye contact and with that, human connection. Through looking at each other and legitimately meeting each other, they establish a connection. It is through this connection that Offred defies the regime. They both realise that their shopping partner is not "a true believer" or "so stinking pious" (177). They proceed to have their first honest conversation that does not consist of stock phrases. By establishing this connection, Offred learns about the underground resistance, May Day. If Offred had used the gaze imposed by the regime, had not been able to see differently, she would not have been able to find out about May Day. Offred is therefore able to see differently because she is able to "read beneath". As a result, Offred has constructed a critical gaze. It is through this critical gaze that Offred is able "to narrate her experience using the genre and conventions of eyewitness testimony to expose Gilead's visual manipulations" (Laflen "There's a Shock" 111). The novel is Offred's narrative as an eyewitness account. In this narrative she recounts her experiences in Gilead by looking at the world differently than what is allowed in Gilead. By doing so, she consequently exposes Gilead's "carefully crafted lie" (Laflen "From a Distance" 99).

The novel illustrates how, through Offred's ability to "read beneath", she is able to inverse the male gaze as a tool to empower herself, to use it to make a human connection and eventually to construct a critical gaze. The adaptation, however, does not use these expressions to illustrate how Offred uses the gaze as a means of resistance. The series uses the gaze to

explain how it empowers Offred in two ways: firstly, through use of framing, secondly through their use of point of view and thirdly by reclaiming the spectacle.

As discussed in chapter two, the show uses certain framing and camera techniques to convey Offred/June's state of mind. Through extreme close-ups, Offred/June's feeling of being oppressed and imprisoned is conveyed. The framing of Offred/June contrasts severely with the way they represent Gilead as a whole. Colin Watkinson, the main cinematographer of the show, describes the framing of Gilead as something that "had to be formal" and has to be shot in a "tableau shot" (Gold Derby). Those shots are for example used when there is a group of Handmaids together for an official gathering. The shots are made with a wide-angle lens and often in a "bird's-eye view", which displays the Handmaids as a unified army. The shots are no longer personal, but rather abstract. It seems as if the women in the frame do not have their own identity, but are anonymised to such a degree that they are only identifiable as Handmaids.

Although the show uses many camera techniques to communicate the claustrophobic and oppressive state of Offred/June's mind, it also, however, makes use of the framing to convey the resistance of the gaze. This can be seen, for example, in episode five of the first season, entitled "Faithful". After coming back from her daily shopping, Offred/June is called into Serena Joy's sitting room. While Serena Joy is interrogating Offred/June about what happened during her daily shopping, Offred/June is thinking about killing Serena Joy. This, however, is not done through internal monologue, but merely by use of the camera and focus. The show uses shallow depth of field to focus (Puschak). Although the audience is not offered an internal monologue, Offred/June is able to voice her thoughts through the changing in the depths of field. By using the depth of field the focus of the shot falls exactly into what Offred/June is focussing on. While she is talking to Serena Joy, Offred/June is considering making a move on the garden shear that lies directly behind Serena. The camera makes this clear not just by entering on the shears, but by specifically focussing on the shears, while Serena has dropped completely out of focus. This indicates how Offred/June's inner thoughts do not correspond to her outside demeanour. On the outside, she is completely composed; she seems to be completely obedient and compliant. However, on the inside she is plotting to murder on her conversation partner and captor. Offred/June's gaze moves outside of the prescribed Gileadean gaze. She looks at more than she is allowed to, and through this small peek into Offred/June's gaze, it is exemplified that Offred is not completely indoctrinated.

In one frame at the end of the first season of Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the series combines the oppressive and claustrophobic camera shots with Offred/June's resistance. The

first season is mostly Offred/June's journey from someone who does not rebel or resist to someone who steps into the position of the leader of a rebellion. The final scene of the first season is subsequently also the final scene of Offred/June's narrative in the novel. The series, however, used a tool that is perhaps not available in a novel. The show has the ability to explore the gaze visually, by using certain framing techniques. At the end of the novel, Offred escapes the Commander and Serena Joy's house and steps into the black van, and that is the end of Offred's narrative. This moment is paralleled in the series. The moment where Offred/June steps into the van the camera lingers on an extreme close-up of her red dress. The audience is not allowed to see Offred/June's completely in the frame, the audience is provided with an obscured view. The camera rather remains in the same position, focussing on the red cloth. Offred/June, however, moves, while the camera is still in that same position. As a result, she literally steps out of the frame and thus out of the audience's gaze. This would indicate that she has escaped the eyes of the camera and audience but also the Eyes of Gilead. She is going to a place where Eyes are unable to follow her.

In season two, however, the show uses the gaze in an entirely different way. As previously argued in chapter two, in season two of Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred/June is exposed to a series of spectacles after her escape failed. Offred/June seemed to be completely indoctrinated after being exposed to these spectacles. This first becomes apparent when Offred/June burns the letters containing the stories of all the different Handmaids in Gilead. These are the same stories, that initially brought Offred/June elation and strength to resist the regime, they are now torched because "I'm not allowed to have these" ("Seeds" 03:16). As argued in chapter three, the letters are the embodiment of power of language. The fact that Offred/June burns them seems to suggest that she is completely broken by the regime. Furthermore, the fact that she admits to Nick that she should not have these letters in her possession further reiterates that she truly believes this to be her transgression. During the entire length of the episode, Offred/June is compliant and she has become meek. Her spirit has been broken to such a degree that even Serena Joy notices this: "'Yes, Mrs. Waterford.' 'No, Mrs. Waterford.' What is the matter with you?'" ("Seeds" 15:01-15:04). Serena Joy even tries to look Offred/June in the eye, but she keeps her gaze downward. Serena Joy, who has gotten used to Offred/June frequently making sarcastic comments and consistently resisting to adhere to the stock phrases, notices the change in Offred's behaviour.

The audience, similarly to Serena, is lead to believe that Offred/June has completely succumbed to Gilead's power. Whereas in the episodes preceding her exposure to the

spectacles, Offred/June was able to act as if she were compliant to the outside world, while conveying to the audience her true state in her internal monologue, the episode following the spectacles contain no internal monologues in any form. Offred/June's strength in her internal monologue was that she was able to think and analyse outside of Gilead's discourse. However, that seems to have been stripped away completely. Offred/June becomes docile and silent. Throughout the episode, Offred/June has hardly been left alone. It is only when Offred/June wakes up in the hospital after Nicks finds her lying in a foetal position in the rain, covered in blood, that she is able to escape the ubiquitous institutional gaze. Aware of the fact that a Guardian could be watching her; she crawls under the covers and talks to her unborn baby. Under the covers, and being outside of the institutional gaze of Gilead, Offred/June is speaking in a language outside of the mechanical stock phrases for the first time since her exposure to Gilead's spectacles. Not only that, but also she promises her baby:

I will not let you grow up in this place. I won't do it. Do you hear me? They...they do not own you. And they do not own what you will become. Do you hear me? I'm going to get you out of here. I promise you. ("Seeds" 48:50-50:17)

As she promises her baby that she will resist and escape Gilead, she defiantly looks straight into the camera. Through the gaze that has attempted to oppress Offred, she has found the strength to resist. The series seems to suggest that even after such horrifying spectacles, Offred is able to stay true to her own identity and not the one prescribed by Gilead.

Moreover, the series as a whole is also a voice of resistance. The novel is told purely from Offred's point of view. One of the modes of resistance for Offred is through language. She is able to create alternatives to certain events, which illustrates how Offred is not compliant with "Gilead's attempt to create a unified subject" (Verwaayen 47). The show illustrates something similar in part with the letters written by the Handmaids. However, due to the fact that the novel is written from Offred's point of view, the only perspective the reader is allowed to see is Offred's. Although the narrative consists of Offred's different interpretations of situations, it is still Offred's story. The series, however, explores more points of view. Even though the series' main point of view is still Offred/June's narrative, it explores more female voices such as Ofglen/Emily and Serena Joy. Their stories are told in both flashbacks and in present time. For instance, episode three of the first season, is partially focussed on Ofglen/Emily's story after being caught by the Eyes. This is not possible in the novel, because this story takes place outside of Offred's literal point of view. Through Ofglen/Emily, the adaptation demonstrates how Gilead's coup affected a gay professor. The series even decided

to include Serena Joy's backstory. Through her story it becomes clear how the regime came into place. By providing Ofglen/Emily and Serena Joy with new storylines and backstories that were not present in the novel, the creators of the show seem to suggest that there is not one truth. There are more ways of viewing this same story. Similarly to what the novel suggests, the adaptation seems to maintain that women cannot be degraded to one unified identity. Each story and each point of view is "a different interpretation of what happened. This is in stark contrast to Gilead, whose "directive is to imprint one mode of thinking, to stamp self/identity as uniform, generic, unitary-in-anonymity" (Verwaayen 47).

Finally, Offred/June resists the government by reclaiming the spectacle. Chapter two discussed how the government attempts to erase history through using the spectacle. They do that to force people to forget their life pre-Gilead and firmly cement them in present time. Gilead implements this method by for example, palimpsesting old buildings, and reassigning a new purpose them to. This is made clear in both the novel and the series. However, the series specifically focusses on the way the regime uses old buildings, such as *The Boston Globe* office, and turns it into a spectacle to remind everyone what could happen if one would think outside of the Gileadean discourse. After Offred/June escapes the Waterford's home, May Day brings her to an abandoned office building. This building used to be the office of *The Boston Globe*, the largest and oldest daily newspaper in Boston. Offred/June describes this building as "a slaughterhouse" ("Unwomen" 26:11), because it becomes clear throughout the episode that the entire staff of *The Boston Globe* was assassinated either by hanging or execution by firing squad in that very building. This building is re-purposed as a space of execution, as well as a threat and as a reminder of what happens if one were to resist. By conserving this space of execution, the regime creates a commemorative space of fear. However, Offred/June completely subverts this. As Offred/June walks around the office, it becomes clear that the newspaper was not prepared for the armed forces, because they were caught off guard. Through shots of scattered stacks of papers, and an abandoned shoe on the ground, as well as stray bags indicate that the invasion of the newspaper was very sudden. The staff's cubicles are all still decorated with their personal items, such as mugs and "Red Sox" flags. Owning personal objects is something that is not allowed in Gilead. The right to own objects is taken away by the regime because those items represent who someone is as an individual, and it furthermore is a reminder of the past. Offred/June comes to this realisation the moment she drinks out of someone else's mug after finding the place of execution. As she drinks out of the mug, she realises that she is appropriating other people's lives by using their objects. She does not want to do that, because this was done to her in Gilead. She decides to start gathering all these scattered objects in the

office and creates a shrine at the place of execution. The shrine that Offred/June sets up functions as a eulogy for the people that were purged at the newspaper. The objects transform into an epitaph for the people who have died there. The items tell these people's story. By placing these personal belongings at the place of execution, Offred/June reclaims the space that Gilead has created as a spectacle and transforms it into a space of remembrance. She even re-sanctifies this place through a Catholic prayer commonly used at funerals: "God, by whose mercy the faithful departed have found rest, please send Your Holy Angel to watch over this place. Through Christ our Lord. Amen" ("Unwomen" 53:07-53:25). This prayer is an important part of Offred/June's resistance, because she uses a Catholic prayer, which is not part of the scripture in Gileadean discourse, and thus has not forgotten the past. In fact, she consecrates this space of execution as a place of commemoration. Therefore, Offred/June appropriates Gilead's spectacle of fear and reclaims these lost souls and their stories. By doing this Offred/June ensures that the memory of these people are not erased by the regime and thus creates a space of resistance. In other words, she creates her own spectacle, which stands in opposition to the one that Gilead created. Her spectacle of remembrance has replaced Gilead's spectacle of fear.

In summary, both the novel and the series portray Offred/June's various forms of resistance by subverting the very tool that was used as a means of oppression. The way in which the novel and the Hulu adaptation depict these forms of resistances are quite different. The novel's focus on the resistance through the gaze is on Offred's ability to "read beneath" and escaping the "usual seeing" that Gilead has forced her to see. The novel secondly, focusses on how Offred inverts the male gaze to tool of empowerment, and lastly the novel demonstrates how through looking and being seen, a human connection can be established. By doing this, Offred resists Gilead's idea of de-individualisation. She asserts her space as a person. The series, however, does not refer to Offred/June's process of learning to "read beneath"; because it seems that she never lost that ability in the first place. Instead, the adaptation firstly reclaims Gilead's spectacle of fear, and transforms it into a commemorative space of all the different voices that were at *The Boston Globe*. Furthermore, the adaptation in itself can be viewed as form of resistance. The series portrays not one uniform story, but it portrays different gazes by different characters. Therefore, the show portrays a collection of female stories and it contends that one voice does not exist, but a group of multiple and individual voices.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the way in which Michel Foucault's interpretation of the concepts of power of discourse and power of the gaze can be used as tools of oppression and resistance by analysing Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the 2017 Hulu television adaptation. This focus of this thesis was firstly on how discourse and the gaze affected Offred when the regime used them as tools of oppression, and secondly on the way in which she appropriates those very same instruments as tools of resistance. The analyses used Michel Foucault's concepts of power of discourse and power of the gaze as a lens to investigate the two sources.

The previous chapters have argued and demonstrated how in both the novel and adaptation the Republic Of Gilead used discourse and the gaze to have complete control over society. The regime enforces their power of the gaze in the form of a ubiquitous panopticon. The second way in which the government enforces their power is through complete control over the discourse. The discourse Gilead has created, which acted as the only one that could exist in this society. Anything that deviates from this grand narrative was either deemed illegal or it simply did not exist. In both sources, the Gileadean society presented as a society that is completely divided into castes. Whereas the novel described these castes, the adaptation visually illustrates this division. This is conveyed not only in the costumes but also in the framing of the shots. Through these marginalising shots, the series visually illustrated how Handmaids are de-individualised, and are essentially dehumanisation. In both sources, the success of the Republic of Gilead relied on the regime's ability to completely erase and fully control women's memories. The novel has illustrated how the regime at least achieved this by either remoulding the women's memories in order for them to fit in the Gileadean discourse, as illustrated with Janine's shaming. The series, on the other hand, has demonstrated how repeated exposure to the spectacle can be used to shock Handmaids into fear and compliance.

Both the series and the novel have portrayed how Offred/June is struggling to defy the historical amnesia that the oppressors are enforcing on her. Offred in the novel seems to be only on the cusp of remembering. In the novel, Offred's memories have started to fade as her understanding of anything pre-Gilead becomes limited, as she is unable to name certain terms and is unable to recognise obvious cultural connotations such as a Playboy bunny. At one point Offred even starts to perceive the world as a Gileadean, as illustrated with example of the Japanese tourists. On the other hand, Offred/June in the adaptation is not on the verge of forgetting her pre-Gileadean life. Throughout the first two season she firmly maintains that she

is June and not Offred. However, she is shocked into compliance and silence by repeatedly being exposed to the spectacle.

Despite forgetting and being shocked into silence, Offred in both the novel and the series, have proven to not fully be indoctrinated by the regime. Both Offred and Offred/June are part of the “transitional generation” (Atwood 127) which means that she is aware of both the Gileadean and the pre-Gileadean discourse. Neither Offred in the novel nor Offred/June in the adaptation completely forgets her past. In fact, it is her past that reminds her that the Gileadean discourse does not have to her new normal. The most important tool for Offred in the novel is repossessing language. It is because Offred relearns how to use language to create a reality, that she is able to tell her story. Offred’s narrative is unfixed, ambiguous, and open to interpretation. For Gilead, there is only one discourse and one great narrative. By telling her story, Offred offers a story next to the grand narrative. In this narrative, she is not marginalised but is the main characters and is thus central part of the story. Furthermore, by telling her own story as well as possibilities of Luke and Moira’s stories, Offred proposes subjective and small narratives; narratives that according to Gileadean discourse do not exist. Offred’s story therefore subverts Gilead’s grand narrative. The adaptation also emphasises the subjective stories that exist outside of Gileadean discourse. However, the subjective stories in the adaptation are not provided by Offred, but this is done by portraying more than one point of view. In addition to portraying Offred’s viewpoint, the adaptation also focusses on other characters and their individual stories. Moreover, in the adaptation Offred/June reclaims all the individual stories of the men and women who have resisted the system, by appropriating the spectacle, as was illustrated in the example of *The Boston Globe*. By proposing these alternative narratives, both the novel and the series subvert the idea of the existence of a grand narrative. Through these stories, it becomes evident that individual stories claim a space that is their own even though the Gileadean discourse does not allow them to exist. By reclaiming the discourse and the gaze, Offred in the novel is able to relegate Gilead’s fixed “history” to the margins and make it only a part of Offred’s “herstory”. The series takes this even a step further by not presenting one small narrative, but several points of view and stories the adaptation proposes that Gilead’s grand narrative is diminished as only part of the women’s “theirstory.”

This thesis has argued that the use of multiple voices portrayed in the adaptation in itself is a form of resistance because it goes against the monolithic grand narrative that the government imposes on society. Each point of view, however, consists of the character’s own story of oppression and resistance. This thesis focusses mainly on Offred’s point of view and

the way she is both influenced by and simultaneously appropriates the power of the gaze and the power of discourse. Within the scope of this research, the different points of view could not be analysed in depth. Therefore, it might be conducive to look at characters such as Janine, Serena Joy, or Ofglen/Emily and analyse their stories of oppression and resistance through a Foucauldian lens.

This research has applied Michel Foucault's concepts of power of discourse and the power of the gaze on Offred's narrative, both in Margaret Atwood's novel and the Hulu adaptation. By comparing and contrasting the close reading analyses, it has become evident that in both sources Foucault's tools are used by the regime as a means of oppression, while at the same time, those very same tools can be appropriated by Offred to reclaim the space that Gilead seized from her.

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