

Meekness is not Weakness:
Memory as Resistance in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-)

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Abstract

Speculative fictions and dystopias provide insightful criticisms to current world order by showing artificial yet possible social contingencies. *The Handmaid's Tale*, a book written by Margaret Atwood, first published in 1985, is one of those speculative fictions that portray a society of totalitarianism by providing reflections on what if there was an infertility plague for the human species. Following the female protagonist, June, this article explores how memory, irony and ridiculing are used as resistance tactics in the first season of the television series (Hulu, 2017-) based on the above-mentioned book. In order to do that, the article first elaborates the power mechanisms represented in forming new docile bodies. In this new knowledge and power regime, it is argued that the production of new subjectivities goes hand in hand with the production of new spaces. Secondly, on the resistance side, memory and ridiculing storytelling are used as endurance tactics by the leading character of the series. June uses irony, jokes, and metaphors while denouncing the authority blocks in order to build a ground of *dissensus* and resistance. She recalls her past experiences subjectively, partially, fragmented, discontinuous, and involuntarily, so in a way her present, past and future collapse in a Bergsonian *durée* in the series' narrative. Following the Foucauldian trajectory on "resistance against power", the article also investigates how June's particular experience provides insights on feminine tactics in order to break with the masculine symbolic order.

Keywords: memory, resistance, power, television series, production of spaces, storytelling

Uysallık Zayıflık Değildir:

Hulu'nun *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-) Dizisinde Direniş Olarak Hafıza

Özet

Spekülatif kurmacalar ve distopyalar gerçek olmayan, ancak gerçekleşme olasılığı olan toplumsal durumlar üzerinden mevcut dünya düzenini eleştirme imkanı yaratırlar. Margaret

Atwood'un 1985'te yayınlanan *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* romanı da bir kısırlık salgını neticesinde insan türünün yok olma tehdidi karşısında kurulan totaliter rejimi anlatan spekülasyonlu bir kurmaca kitabıdır. Bu makale, kitaptan uyarılma olan televizyon dizisinin kadın ana karakteri June'u takip ederek hafıza, ironi ve alay etmenin nasıl direniş taktikleri olarak kullanıldığını tartışmaktadır. Makalenin ilk kısmında, uysal bedenler kuran güç mekanizmaları incelenmiştir. Hikaye evreninde kurulan yeni bilgi ve güç rejiminde, yeni öznellikler ve yeni mekanlar birlikte kurulmaktadır. İkinci bölümde ise, direniş tarafında hafıza ve alaycı hikaye anlatımı tekniklerinin June tarafından hayatta kalma taktikleri olarak kullanılışı tartışılmıştır. June, karşılaştığı otorite bloklarını geçersiz kılmak, *disensus* ve direniş ortamı yaratabilmek için ironi, şaka ve metaforlar kullanmaktadır. Ana karakter geçmişini kişisel olarak, kısmi, parçalı, kopuk ve gayri ihtiyari hatırlar ve bir anlamda dizide Bergson'un *durée* kavramındaki gibi geçmiş, gelecek ve şimdiki zaman birbiri içine geçen bir şekilde temsil edilir. Foucault'cu bir yerden "gücün karşısında direniş" kurulumlarını inceleyen bu makale, June'un dişil özgün deneyiminin aynı zamanda eril sembolikte nasıl yarıkları açtığını da araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: hafıza, direniş, güç, televizyon dizileri, mekânın üretimi, hikaye anlatıcılığı

Introduction

In her well-known book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (1951) underlines that Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism were not exclusive aberrations that came out of unusually dysfunctional national characters or political histories; rather, they were phenomena made possible by a particular arrangement of events and tendencies within modern European history and culture. To her, these new forms of governing were built on terror and ideological fictions dedicated to perpetual destruction (Villa, 2001: 2-3). Instead of attributing all societal dynamics to natural causes such as the pathology of the leaders or deducing events to a kind of evil that exists *a priori* in human history, understanding human history as an artificial construction (rather than natural, or supernatural) is crucial for Arendt. Speculative fictions or dystopias serve to reflect on such artificial yet possible social contingencies by asking questions on "what if the world order changed not for the better but for the worse?"

The Handmaid's Tale is one of those speculative fictions that portray a society of total domination providing reflections on "what if there was an infertility plague for the human species".¹ In the former United States, Gilead's regime is established after a civil war. This is a result of a fertility rates' collapse generally in the world due to sexually transmitted diseases

¹ Infertility seems to be a popular issue of dystopian fiction also tackled in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006). Moreover, in the television series *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007) in the 4th and 5th season the superior aliens called Aschen mislead humans by rendering them infertile while they cure them from every known sickness. Similarly, the conspiracy thriller television series *The Lottery* (2014) also takes place in a dystopian future where global infertility reigns. Last but not least the film *Dystopia* (aka *Mad World*, 2018) directed by Paul Tanter takes place in 2037 when the world is dying due to a virus that has rendered mankind infertile.

and environmental pollution. Gilead is a totalitarian regime in which men hold the leadership and women are subjugated and limited to very few roles. Particularly, fertile women are enslaved and assigned to the homes of the ruling elite where they have to submit to forced intercourse with their male masters in order to bear children for their masters and their wives. These women are called Handmaids and they assume a name created by the addition of the prefix Of- to the first name of their master.

Gilead is a strictly hierarchical society where fanaticism and theonomy reign. Along with the Handmaids, there are also other groups of women signified by dresses in particular colors. Handmaids wear plain long red dresses whereas the Wives of Commanders wear tailored blue dresses. The Aunts on the other hand, whose job is to train and discipline the Handmaids, wear brown dresses and the Marthas, the housekeepers and cooks wear light grey-green dresses. Finally, the Unwomen, female prisoners, wear rags and work to death in the Colonies. Gilead's society includes also the Eyes, men who are spies for the totalitarian regime, reporting on any attempt for rebellion, the Hunters, men who prevent people from fleeing Gilead and the Guardians, men who function as civil police. All men regardless of the group they belong wear black.

The protagonist of *Handmaid's Tale* is June Osborne, renamed Offred. She is the Handmaid assigned to the home of Commander Fred Waterford and his wife Serena Joy. The Waterfords are key players in the rise and permanence of Gilead. During flashbacks, the audience learns June's backstory, before Gilead, when she was married to Luke and had a daughter, Hannah. As they all three attempted to flee Gilead, June was captured and forced to become a Handmaid, while her husband managed to escape to Canada and her daughter was also captured and given to a leading family in Gilead. The plot of the series evolves around June's memories of "the time before" and her powerful desire to reunite with her family.

In this speculative dystopian world², a new form of governmentality is established in order to overcome infertility, relying on religious premises. Similar to Baron Hausmann's³ envision of Paris, Gilead is built from scratch, and in this new setting, women who have healthy ovaries are assigned to the commanders of the new regime to bring up "healthy fruits" to the nation. Legitimized based on the discourse that human reproduction quality had diminished due to moral decay, a new understanding of governing is established based on imprisoning and reallocating female bodies who can still give birth. In this new

² It might be claimed it is utopian for some; such as the Commander Waterford and his wife Serena Joy, who imagined such a form of reorganization in the society as perfection and god-like.

³ Baron Hausmann was a French official assigned by Napoleon the 3rd to redesign Paris's urban planning in the mid-nineteenth century.

regime, a grand cleansing and purification in the society from the “morally corroded” segments such as homosexuals (gender traitors), worthless “sluts”, adulterers, drug users, academicians etc. also take place. The “sacrifices” are legitimized by the discourse of restoring a moral and healthy way of life. This new power regime is a total domination, is a redistribution of the sensible⁴, sayable and visible; and is very productive in terms of creating its new institutions, paramilitaries, spies, spaces, subjectivities, history, regimes of truth, surveillance techniques as well as its new docile bodies; the Handmaids.

The Handmaid's Tale is Margaret Atwood's original novel published in 1985. The novel has two known adaptations on screen; the first one is a movie released with the same title in 1990 directed by Volker Schlöndorff (USA, Germany), and the second one is a television series of three seasons (36 episodes) produced by Hulu (2017- , USA). This article mainly focuses on the first season of Hulu's production of *The Handmaid's Tale* television series⁵, which actually is the adaptation of the novel since the following two seasons as well as the fourth one to be released next year, depart from the book and are based on original material. This article is particularly interested in how June's (a.k.a. Offred, played by Elisabeth Moss) past memories are actualized in her present and entangled to her future and how all this leads to her resistance. June's unconscious and conscious; past, present and future, inner voice and outer speech all collapse onto each other and form a collaged integrity, or rather a fragmentary constellation in the series' narrative. June recreates and reforms a new subjectivity in the web of these new power relations materialized in her body, while always remembering, “There has to be an us, because now there is a them!” As Foucault puts it, where there is power there is always resistance (1998: 95-96).

The Power Imprinted on Bodies and Spaces in *The Handmaid's Tale*

For Foucault, subjects are constructed through discourse. In his works, Foucault examines the construction of extreme subjectivities in specific periods of history, such as the criminal, the pervert or the lunatic. Foucault emphasizes that power regimes and knowledges (truths) produced in the power regimes “carefully fabricate” the subjectivities (docile bodies)

⁴ Rancière (2009) calls the “distribution of the sensible” as the general aesthetic, wherein places, identities, space, time, the visible and the invisible, the noise and speech merge. To him, politics consist of reconfiguring and redistributing the sensible in order to render visible what had not been seen and to make heard those who are perceived as mere noises (Ranciere 2009: 24-25).

⁵ Schlöndorff's adaptation of the novel to the movie *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), besides receiving poor reviews upon release, does not involve much past memories or events, and does not apply it as a motif of forming resistance, therefore is disregarded in this article. There are plenty of issues to be compared with the TV series though, chiefly; the differences between the discourses on nation building, gender construction, portrayal of sexuality or desire, usage of mass media, aesthetics of forming a warlike state of exception and exclusion of black characters associated with the moral decay of society.

in and through discourse within the power structures. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1986) discusses how the disciplinary power of modernity works through visibility, individualizing and normalizing (1986: 167, 177). Examining the management of the plagues in the 19th century, Foucault underlines that first, the contaminated towns are turned into frozen spaces; then they are segmented and transformed to sterile, immobile, purified places. The centralization of an omnipresent gaze is crucial for all these organizations, where each individual is clearly located in the binary opposition between the sick and the dead. This disciplinary mechanism itself turned to be an omniscient power regulation, a technology wherein the power and constant surveillance were exercised in a distinct way over all individualized bodies (1986: 164-169).

He continues his analysis by the examination of Bentham's panoptical prison. Although such a prison model is not used, the Panopticon model shows us the mentality of permanent visibility for the workings of disciplinary power during the 19th century. Foucault clearly states that "visibility is a trap", where one can be seen at any time, indifferent to whether he is really observed or not (Foucault, 1986: 200). The system of the Panopticon shows us the logic and the technologies behind the disciplinary power and the automatic functioning of power mechanisms. This machinery or mechanism of power assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium and difference. Furthermore, unlike the sovereign power, it does not matter who exercises the power. Being subjected to such a visibility creates a mechanical subjection, without using any force. Through centralization and surveillance, individuals are carefully fabricated not by direct force but by effects and techniques of power mechanisms. Disciplinary power targets bodies, or rather it is inscribed on bodies, it flows through the bodies of those who are subjected to it (1986: 201-202).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, we can see how visibility becomes a trap and how Gilead's society is divided to clear-cut segments with particular dress codes, and distinct division of labor. Everyone's duty, place and attitude in the society are made visible by just checking out their dresses-uniforms. Handmaids have a very limited access to observe their surroundings when they are outside, they have to keep their heads and eyes always down, they are not allowed to eye contact or talk to random strangers except other Handmaids. Guardians of the faithful are everywhere, and they have no tolerance to even tiny mistakes of misbehaving. Each Handmaid has a steady shopping partner. They watch, take care or sometimes even spy on and report on each other. The Eyes, undercover spies at each segment of the society, have as their duty to report any misbehaving or transgression secretly. The Eyes serve the function of panoptic surveillance, an omniscient gaze everywhere and anywhere. One can never know

whether s/he is watched or not at any moment. Without using any physical force directly, the threat of the Eyes as a power technology produces submissive bodies, which behave as they are told. Handmaids have to behave meekly and gentle, should not speak unless they are asked to, they have very limited vision, and a very limited vocabulary to talk about restricted topics such as the weather. When finally, they are having a real conversation beyond weather, orange shortage or fresh eggs after months, Ofglen⁶ tells Offred “They do this really well, making us distrust each other”. Because there are Eyes everywhere, there is no private time for individual activity under this constant panoptic surveillance.

In this universe of the commanders’ utopia and the handmaids’ dystopia, everyone’s identity from the past is carefully erased. Actually past is constantly and dynamically rewritten. History and memory are dynamically manipulated, erased or reshaped (Finigan, 2011: 437). No one uses their names from before and it is forbidden to mention them. One can start her day as being Ofglen while end up being called Ofwarren like Janine’s character that attempts suicide on the bridge.⁷ Rather than the subject’s personalities, or particular histories, their sole function in the society is constantly emphasized.

These de-individualization techniques such as erasing and rewriting of history, and evaporation of memories, go hand in hand with the disappearance of past spaces. The monumental buildings from before, the burning of books and magazines, the cancellation of any usage of any kind of mass media from the past, the deletion of subway station names, street tags, as well as the demolishing of places of consumption and socializing such as cafes and restaurants is a common practice in Gilead. “This used to be an ice cream store”, says once Ofglen, for a place that had turned into a uniform tailor. In his book *Flesh and Stone*, Richard Sennett shows that both the body and the stone are formed together throughout history (1994: 15), just like in Gilead’s universe, particular bodies and their particular attitudes, as well as duties are organized parallel to the reproduction of new spaces. In *Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym (2001) analyses how city sphere is constantly rebuilt in Berlin, Moscow or St. Petersburg due to political changes. The same spatial reshaping occurs in Gilead with the establishment and gradual reinforcement of its totalitarian regime. Gilead is a

⁶ Dr. Emily Malek Ph.D. / Ofglen / Ofsteven / Ofroy / Ofjoseph, is one of June's shopping partners. Emily is a lesbian, a fact punishable by death in Gilead but she is spared and converted to a Handmaid because she has two viable ovaries. From “the time before” she has a wife and son living in Canada. She was a university lecturer in cellular biology. After changing many houses in Gilead and therefore many names, she manages to flee to Canada with Nicole, June’s second baby daughter, where she is reunited with her wife and son.

⁷ Janine Lindo / Ofwarren / Ofdaniel / Ofhoward, is a Handmaid who considers June a friend due to her kind treatment. Initially she was rebellious and had her right eye removed as a punishment. She became mentally unstable and thus often behaves unpredictably and temperamentally. She gives birth to a child as Ofwarren and then she moves to other houses and changes names.

space with no history; its past is far and distant whose trace cannot be found in the present, possessing a perfectly looking façade.

The violence in society is legitimized with divine causes, and the sacrificing is justified for the sake of everyone's interest. Commander Waterford states: "It is better for everyone, it might feel worse for some" to his Handmaid Offred, when she feels upset one night. Similarly, Aunt Lydia⁸, in her long famous lectures states, "This might not seem ordinary right now, but this will become ordinary". And it really does become the ordinary. Handmaids have an extreme routine in their daily lives that are strictly planned, organized and controlled. They do shopping in couples for their houses with their special tickets. In Gilead, there is no monetary transaction between people, as we know it. Once a month the "ceremony" takes place, when the Handmaid is producing her ovaries. The ceremony starts with the commander's reading of religious passages, and then he ejaculates in the Handmaid without touching or looking at her, while his wife is holding the Handmaid. As Stillman and Johnson state:

"Otherwise, she (the Handmaid) leads a boring life in which vast spaces of time repose unfilled. Lacking friends in the household, where every woman is of a different rank and every man is officially off-limits (except for the prescribed monthly ceremony), condemned to public silence except for official platitudes or surreptitious whispers with the Handmaids with whom she is paired for shopping expeditions, she has little to do." (Stillman & Johnson, 1994: 75)

Power is materialized on Handmaid's bodies, "we are two legged wombs" says June (Offred). Elaine Scarry in her book *Body in Pain* underlines that pain achieves "in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language" (1985: 4). The interrogation and torture are not made for gathering information from prisoners, since the infliction of pain is itself language destroying, rather they are used for the unmaking of the body (19-20). June is kept imprisoned isolated for two weeks in her room, when it is understood that she is not pregnant in the first month. Similar to the torture experience that Scarry describes, June loses her speech, her inner voice, the sense of time, she cannot eat and finally she faints. Her time perception, memory, relation to the outer world, body and voice are all unmade during her isolation.

⁸ Aunt Lydia / Miss Clements, is responsible for the sexual reeducation and the discipline of Handmaids. She believes wholeheartedly in Gilead's principles and applies brutal force and physical punishment on the Handmaids. In "the time before" she was a religious elementary school teacher named Miss Clements.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* a particular regime of sexuality is produced with its effects. Male Commanders are not denounced as sterile; it is only women's fault not to succeed in getting pregnant. The girls are servants of the leaders that are faithful. Once, a case of a gang rape that Janine experienced is discussed in a ritualistic confession session during the Handmaids' trainings in order to curse the past. There, Aunt Lydia asks the girls: "Whose fault is it?" referring to Janine's rape incident, and everyone screams "her fault!" while pointing to Janine at the center of the circle. In this sexuality regime, there are also underground whorehouses in a place called *Jezebel's* where Commanders and the elites of the new regime enjoy all kinds of excessive sexual experiences. Once, one of the Commanders states: "We gave them (women) so many rights, academic pursuits, jobs, and they forgot their main purpose" (implying being mothers).

Interestingly, the unseen woman leader of this revolution, Serena Joy, Commander Waterford's wife, writes a book entitled "A Woman's Place" while reclaiming domestic feminism back to its place with the motto "meekness is not weakness" in "the time before". The rights gained in the history of feminism, all claims for freedom, equality, free sexuality etc. are all wiped off in this new regime. Women's sexuality is defined as degenerate; women are labeled as "sluts" who are leading men to moral decay. Lad magazines that praise such women are devilish and all of them are burned. June, when she is given an old magazine as a gift by Commander Waterford, remarks: "These models in the magazine are like zoo animals that have been extinct". The women's new place in society is regressed the way it was centuries ago.

Resistance through Storytelling and Memory in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Storytelling can be imagined as a performance related to the body; it is also a relational and collective memory deriving from practical and useful experiences. Storytelling is an active process of sharing in a dynamic fashion. In *Storyteller*, Walter Benjamin underlines that with modernity, the ability to exchange experiences is taken from people's daily habits. Benjamin states that after the First World War, the men who returned to their homes from the hellish battlefield remained silent instead of sharing their strong and painful experiences. He describes that the only thing remaining after the war was fragile human bodies wandering in the remnants (Benjamin, 1968: 84). June is a storyteller in every sense of the word, and we hear her unique version of a fragmented story. Unlike the silent soldiers, June tells her story, but inwardly, and her storytelling is a performance that transgresses the limits of the sayable. June transgresses the norms and resists through her storytelling.

During her imprisonment in her room she finds strength through the hidden Latin

words scratched in her wardrobe, that she cannot understand due to language barriers, but remind her of her best friend Moira,⁹ because Moira used to write on the walls of the toilet at the training center. She travels to her past memories through a scratch on the wall that reminds her of the past involuntarily. Back then, Moira had told June that someone would see that writing on the toilet's wall and understand what they both went through. Finally, connecting to her best friend through the scratch, June remembers Moira's strength while travelling in her memories. She remembers how Moira told her in a firm manner to compose herself in order to have hopes to see her daughter Hannah again. With her inner speech and remembrance of her past, June finds a way to survive her imprisonment and go on.

June's room is her only private place. It is occasionally her prison cell, however, sometimes it is also the corner where she can hide from everything. Although not designed by her, June has a room of her own. It is rather her temple. She can have time for free imagination and nighttime is her own time; there she can time travel as she wishes. June tells her story to the viewers mostly when she is in her room at nights while thinking about the past, the present and the future all together.

June's storytelling is a performance, and she prefers usage of irony, jokes, and metaphors while remembering the past or talking to someone with the prescribed memorized lines. In her inner voice, she dialogues with herself, she travels to her past, to her feelings, to her body and to her unconscious. She ridicules the law of the system, and language while using language itself. June's tongue slips inwardly. She can contrast and ridicule the particulars while recognizing their relation to the whole. Her humor and irony become her fiercest weapons for resistance since they are useful weapons to denounce the authority blocks she always encounters. Through humor, she ridicules the whole situation and finds strength inside. As George Orwell stated (1945), "every joke is a tiny revolution" and it is indeed for June, because a joke that ridicules an oppressive institution can help to undermine it. With the power of humor she criticizes the law of the order, tells what is forbidden, breaks the rules, and connects to her past and to her future. Furthermore she feels clever, and more self-esteemed. Although she seems meek outside, she is not weak inside.

June uses her inner speech as a disruptive tool to the signifying process, to the laws under which Gilead's language operates. Hélène Cixous sees a revolutionary potential in female writing to break with the patriarchal language. She states "writing is woman's" in her

⁹ Moira Strand is June's best friend since their teenage hood. She manages to escape the training center before being assigned to a home as a Handmaid. When she is recaptured, she becomes a prostitute in Jezebel's. Finally she manages to escape to Canada.

theory of *écriture féminine*, Cixous claims that language is the site of resistance against the production of gendered meanings (Easthope & McGowan, 2004: 160, 255-256). June talks to herself most of the time; she resists through stating her desires and needs. What she says with her inner voice and outer voice always contradict each other with humor and irony. She does not act like a victim she is rather a performer. Her speech and storytelling are close to *écriture féminine*, a fact that breaks Gilead's *mansplaining* language and the consensus within the distribution of the sensible.

As Rancière would have claimed, June breaks the consensus and performs a *dissensus*, which is the manifestation of a gap in the sensible itself. Rancière (2010) argues that aesthetics is inherently political and politics is inherently aesthetic. To clarify his argument, he defines his main concepts of *police* and politics. *Police* is the distribution of the sensible in which spaces, functions, emotions and senses are regulated and hierarchized. In a way *police* is a totalizing arena of consensus. But the main deficiency of the *police* is the absence of the supplement of *demos* (people). The *police* regulates the shared common, the sensory experience, what is visible, what can be heard and what cannot (Rancière 2010: 36).

Dissensus is the manifestation of a gap in the sensible itself. It is a “clash between two partitions of the sensible, is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two different separate worlds, is a division inserted to the common sense, a dispute over what is presented” (2010: 69). The ones separated from public life to domestic space are left alone and *expected to express* suffering, hunger, anger or groaning rather than actual speech. This makes their voice as mere noise (2010: 38-39). Rancière argues that consensus is the reduction of politics to the *police* and it is the end of politics (2010: 42). Rather a political subject is a capacity for staging scenes of *dissensus* (2010: 69).

June stands right on the area of *dissensus*. She merges the contradictions of the paradoxical worlds of the past and the present perceiving them in her current memory. She speaks up the “mere noise” silently. June redistributes Rancière's notion of the *sensible*, her inner voice speaks of what cannot be said, her inner voice rewrites and re-perceives while remembering what should not be remembered, and invites her new resisting subjectivity to the arena of *dissensus*, where real politics, change and resistance take place.

The portrayal of personal experience of time and fragmented editing structure of the television series' narrative remind us the Bergsonian concept of *durée* that basically suggests the present, past and future collapse onto each other in the present. For Bergson, memories are not conserved in the brain, but exist in time. Memory takes place in the present moment and it synthesizes the past and the present with a view of the future. For Bergson, virtual memory

images are carried to the present through memory and perception. Consciousness is both memory and anticipation of the future, and there is no perception, which is not full of memories. Memories are actualized, materialized, embodied in the present time and there is no such thing as pure memory (Ansell-Pearson, 2010: 62-70). Likewise, June's memory is activated involuntarily when she encounters a color, a sound, a word or a smell that is always fragmentary. She recalls her past experiences subjectively, as Bergson claims virtually, since they are partial, fragmented, discontinuous, and involuntary. These fragments are also non-reliable since they are extremely partial and subjective perceptions in the present. June's past coexists in her present, her virtualized images of past are actualized only in the present, and then they all can be connected to the future and her will to resist for a better future.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* television series, the audience follows June's point of view most of the time and experience the limited space, the world within Gilead like June does. The audience also travels within her time and perception of memories, with parallel editing between past events and the present. Her storytelling performance makes us active listeners of her story that is not in linear progression but rather fragmented, involuntary, with disconnected ups and downs. Her testimony and memory break the repetition and routine.

The parallel editing technique is often used for time travelling in the series. For instance, when Janine gives birth in the present time, June remembers her daughter Hannah's birth and the problems of "the time before". When a secret arrangement is made for June to have intercourse with Nick,¹⁰ she remembers for the first time how she flirted with her husband and had sex in a hotel room with him. Similar experiences are remembered and the relationship between the past and present is thematically bounded. Occasionally, external stimuli like the sound of water, or the color blue, or a scratch in the wardrobe triggers June's memories and connects both her and the viewers to the past events. In her time travel to the past, often slow motion, extreme close ups, fragmented body parts, blurry background, remembering fragmented sounds, photographic facial expressions are used. Interestingly, there is a change in the color pallet and the lighting during the flashbacks, creating thus a dreamlike effect and nostalgia for the past events. Like Bergson claims, brain is not a storage with full capacity to remember every detail, rather fragments of memory, or a sense of remembering comes to the present and becomes actualized and perceived in the present (Ansell-Pearson, 2010: 62-70). June always recalls fractions, partial expressions, traces of

¹⁰ Nick Blaine is Commander Waterford's driver and a former vagabond from Michigan. He develops an intimate relationship with June and is most probably the father of June's second daughter, Nicole. June eventually discovers that he is an Eye spying for Gilead.

feelings, affects and discontinuous sounds that are not complete. She recalls memory-images, and invites what she needs to the present in order to construct her own collage.

On the other hand, the audience also experiences three other characters' flashbacks in the series. These flashbacks are used to inform the audience of the past situation and to give depth to the characters. In an episode about Luke¹¹ the viewers are informed on how he escaped the totalitarian regime, the events outside Gilead town, the solidarity among the fugitives. Meanwhile, Nick's back-story flashbacks inform the audience on how he became an Eye and how he was hopeless and unemployed back in "the time before". In the episode about Serena the audience learns how Gilead's regime was imagined in the first place. In these back-story flashbacks the same techniques with June's flashbacks are not applied; rather they are more informative lacking an inner voice. They are less personified, the camera is objective and the sound editing is continuous. Since there are no voice-overs in these flashbacks, they do not constitute performances of storytelling.

Conclusion

Benjamin underlines that the oppressed class is the depository of historical knowledge. In order to disrupt progressive understanding of history, or 'blast open the continuum of history', historical materialist should see the dialectic relationship of the past, present and the future, and grasp the events as a constellation (Benjamin, 1968: 255). *The Handmaid's Tale* represents how the series' main character, June, perceives the past, present and the future like a constellation virtualizing them like Bergson suggests in her present time. She becomes self-aware through storytelling and time travelling in her memory. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that June resists through her memory. She builds her new subjectivity in the present where past, present and future all fold onto each other. She uses her inner voice with a ridiculing or ironic language to resist the official and suppressing law order. What can be perceived as silence and meekness for June is power and ability to survive.

¹¹ Luke Bankole is June's husband from "the time before". Because he is divorced his marriage with June is nullified in Gilead making June "an adulteress" and their daughter, Hannah "illegitimate". Luke manages to escape to Canada when June is captured.

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