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## The Xeno-Interface: Xenofeminist Subversions and Metamodern Oscillations in the Cultural Dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale*

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### Abstract

This paper argues that Offred's survival isn't just psychological—it's a technological intervention. By combining the upcoming literary theories of Xenofeminism and Metamodernism, it proves that she uses her own alienation as an 'interface' to sabotage the state. While Gilead tries to render her as a biological machine, she responds by becoming a 'Glitch'—maintaining a sovereign, encrypted self through the linguistic play and the emotional oscillation. Ultimately, the 'Historical Notes' prove that she successfully transcended her biological cage to become autonomous data.

**Keywords:** Xeno-Interface, Xenofeminist Subversions, Cultural Dystopia, Handmaid's Tale.

### Introduction

The literature of the late twentieth century often framed the female body as a site of biological tragedy, a territory to be either colonized by the state or reclaimed through a return to a lost, "natural" innocence. This binary, however, is increasingly insufficient; it presumes that "nature" is a static sanctuary rather than a construct weaponized by the oppressor to justify subjugation. In truth, there is no "pure" nature left to return to; there is only the way power labels the body to better manage it. As Donna Haraway argues in her foundational essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), the

boundary between the biological and the technological is fluid, asserting that we are all "chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (p. 150). Haraway's point is that by embracing this hybridity, we can escape the "natural" traps set by patriarchy.

In Gilead, however, this fluidity is frozen into a rigid, state-controlled mechanism. In the hyper-mediated landscape of the twenty-first century, the nature of power has shifted from the theological to the algorithmic, necessitating a revised critical vocabulary. We must move past seeing Gilead as a simple religious cult and start seeing it as a data-driven regime. In the Republic of Gilead, functionality is the sole currency of existence; to be a Handmaid is to be a biological machine whose output is "the Child." This reduction of the human to a single-use utility reflects a proto-algorithmic logic where the body is stripped of its "excess" humanity to serve a cold, reproductive output. The state does not see a woman; it sees a biological processor performing a singular task. Offred's resistance, therefore, lies in her occupation of the "non-data" zones of the system—the areas that remain un-rendered and uncaptured by the state's logic. As the narrative establishes:

We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories... We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 56)

This research posits that Offred's survival is not a retreat into the "natural" but a leap into the "Xeno." By synthesizing Xenofeminism (XF) and Metamodernism, we decipher her internal monologue as a strategic "refusal to be rendered." She becomes what Legacy Russell (2020) defines as a "Glitch"—a productive error in a system that demands total biological subjection. While traditional readings view her detachment as a symptom of trauma, this paper argues it is an active sabotage of the state's data-gathering mechanisms. She adopts what Rosi Braidotti (2013) describes

as a "posthuman" subjectivity, moving beyond the traditional humanist "self" to survive a system that has already declared that self extinct. By rejecting the victimhood narrative, we uncover a blueprint for resistance that thrives within the very alienation designed to crush it.

### **Theoretical Framework: Xenofeminist Rationalism and the Metamodern Pendulum**

To engage with this resistance, one must recognize the Xenofeminist imperative (Laboria Cuboniks, 2018). XF is a rationalism that insists nature shall no longer be a refuge of injustice (Holt, 2018). It posits that if "nature" is being used to enslave, then we must transcend the natural through the artificial and the alienated. In *Gilead*, the state justifies its atrocities through a weaponized "Naturalist" theology, reducing the Handmaid to a "two-legged womb" (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 136). Helen Hester (2018) argues for the "repurposing of technologies" for liberation; here, the technology being repurposed is alienation itself. Rather than viewing her distance from her own body as a loss, Offred utilizes it as a firewall, protecting her inner "data" from the state's "hardware" intrusion. Parallel to this is the Metamodern framework: a continuous oscillation between modern sincerity and postmodern irony (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Offred exists in this middle-space, maintaining a pendulum swing that prevents her from collapsing into the total cynicism that led to her predecessor's suicide.

### **Serena Joy and the Failure of Biological Essentialism:**

Serena Joy represents the tragedy of "Biological Essentialism." Having advocated for the very system that eventually imprisoned her in domesticity, she is a "Modernist" who found her utopia to be a "Postmodern" cage. She is trapped by her own insistence on the "natural" order, a logic that eventually rendered her obsolete once her biological function—fertility—was absent. As Shulamith Firestone (1970)

argues in *The Dialectic of Sex*, the "natural" reproductive family unit is the very site where female subjection begins; Serena Joy's failure lies in her refusal to see that "nature" is not a neutral ally but the primary tool of her own disenfranchisement. Offred observes Serena's gardening as a desperate attempt to maintain a connection to the "natural":

There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting forth. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 152)

However, from a Xenofeminist perspective, Serena's garden is a failed interface. As Sadie Plant (1997) suggests in *Zeros and Ones*, women have historically been relegated to the "organic" and the "soft" as a way to keep them away from the "hard" centers of technical and linguistic power. Serena is desperately trying to nurture life in a soil that has been poisoned by the very ideology she helped seed. She attempts to find agency in the biological (flowers/fertility), but she remains "rendered" by the state. Offred, conversely, rejects the garden's naturalist trap, choosing the "Xeno" path of mental abstraction over Serena's futile biological labor. By choosing the "artificial" space of the mind over the "natural" space of the soil, Offred achieves a mobility that Serena lacks. Where Serena attempts to beautify her cage, Offred focuses on hacking the lock from the inside. This contrast proves that only those who "hack" the system through alienation can maintain sovereignty.

### **Productive Alienation: The Architecture of the Ghostly Self:**

Offred notes of her own physical form:

I do not want to look at my body. I don't want to see it. I don't want to see the something that determines me so completely... I am a room. It's what I've done with it. I've made it into a place. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 73)

Through a Hesterian lens, this is a biological hack. As Helen Hester (2018) argues in *Xenofeminism*, we must move beyond the "propaganda of nature" and find ways to repurpose our own alienation. By mentally transforming her body into an

architectural void, Offred denies the state "affective access." This is a crucial distinction: she does not merely "endure" her body; she de-territorializes it. By reframing her physique as a "room" or a "place," she creates a conceptual distance—a sovereign buffer zone—that the regime's physical torture cannot bridge. She is no longer a person to be violated, but a "place" that the state occupies without truly inhabiting. This shift mirrors what Rosi Braidotti (2013) defines as "nomadic subjectivity"—a way of being that refuses to be fixed or "captured" by the dominant power structure. This extends to the "Ceremony":

I am on the ceiling, looking down. I am a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am. I am a shadow now, far back, as if through the wrong end of a telescope. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 91)

By watching from the "ceiling," she refuses to provide the emotional validation the ritual demands. This disassociation serves as a radical act of non-participation that strikes at the heart of Gilead's theater of power. If the state requires the "soul" of the Handmaid to be broken for the ritual to be complete, Offred's mental exit ensures the ritual remains an empty, mechanical gesture. She effectively de-activates her own sensory input, making the state's ritual a performance for an empty house. She treats the Commander and Serena Joy as "malfunctioning parts" in a machine she no longer serves (Gordon, 2022). Her disassociation is not a psychological retreat of the weak; it is a tactical withdrawal of the self to a secure, encrypted location where the regime's surveillance tools are rendered obsolete.

### **Linguistic Sabotage: The Scrabble Interface and Technomaterialist Play:**

When the Commander introduces Scrabble, Offred treats the tiles as raw data bits:

The feeling of the tiles, the edges of them under my fingers... they were like candies, made of peppermint, cool and refreshing. I would like to put them into my mouth... I would like to swallow them, have them become part of me. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 138)

By treating language as physical objects, Offred performs a linguistic hack. As Sadie Plant (1997) observes in *Zeros and Ones*, the tactile nature of play can become a subversive interface for those excluded from the formal structures of logic. By bypassing the theological definitions imposed by Gilead and returning to the materiality of the signifier, Offred reclaims the "hardware" of her voice. She turns the theological alphabet into "Play," the antithesis of fundamentalism. Play is inherently unpredictable and non-utilitarian, making it a direct threat to a regime built on rigid, functionalist dogma. She spells words like *Larynx* and *Valance*, reclaiming her voice through the very tools the Commander uses for amusement (Laboria Cuboniks, 2018). This isn't just a game; it is a re-calibration of her own cognitive capacities, proving that the mind can still generate "forbidden" output even when the body is under total surveillance.

### **The Historical Notes: Transcoding the Subject into the Infinite:**

The "Historical Notes" provide the final victory. Offred "outsprints" her captors by transitioning from a flesh-bound slave to an autonomous data-stream. Her survival is not physical—it is informational. By converting her lived experience into a digital-analog hybrid (the tapes), she ensures that her narrative cannot be easily deleted or corrected by the state. Professor Pieixoto's attempt to reconstruct her is a failed reverse-engineering:

We must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History chooses to vouchsafe us... but we must also remember that our job is not to censure but to understand. (Atwood, 1985/1998, p. 311)

Pieixoto treats her life as a "document," yet her oscillating narrative remains resistant to his "formatting." He attempts to categorize and fix her into a historical box, but she remains a "Glitch" that defies his patriarchal academic "rendering." The irony of the Historical Notes is that Pieixoto believes he is the one in control of the data, yet it is Offred who has successfully "infected" the future with her subjective truth. She

has transcoded her biological trauma into a persistent cultural signal that refuses to be quieted by his condescending analysis.

### **Conclusion: The Blueprint for Future Resistance**

The empowerment of the marginalized in *The Handmaid's Tale* is found in the mastery of this Xeno-interface. This research achieves a critical breakthrough by synthesizing Xenofeminism and Metamodernism to decode narrative climaxes as sites of interface sabotage. It challenges the reader to look beyond the tragedy and see the tactical brilliance of what Legacy Russell (2020) terms the "Glitch"—an error in the system that "is not a mistake, but a correction" of a broken reality (p. 8). The gymnasium floor functions as a Metamodern palimpsest, smelling of "faint sweat" (p. 3) while serving as a cage. The "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum" graffito (p. 186) is a Xenofeminist logic bomb, functioning as a piece of "alienated" wisdom that survives the death of its creator.

This paper establishes itself as a trailblazer by proving that alienation is a strategic utility. As Laboria Cuboniks (2018) asserts in *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*, "If nature is unjust, change nature." It argues that in an era of total biological and digital surveillance, the only sovereign space left is the one we create through the refusal to be "natural." It is an essential stepping-stone for future scholarship, viewing dystopian literature as a technical manual for a future where the "Glitch" of the subject remains an un-renderable horizon of resistance. Ultimately, Offred's journey suggests that when the state tries to render the person into a mere biological function, the most persuasive form of revolt is to become a "Xeno-subject": someone who exists between the gaps of the state's code, proving that to survive Gilead is not to return to the past, but to outpace the future's attempts at total capture.

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