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跨越邊界：論《使女的故事》中的空間敘事

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Crossing the Boundaries: The Spatial Theory in The Handmaid's Tale



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碩士論文摘要

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論文摘要內容：

本論文旨在討論瑪格麗特·愛特伍的小說《使女的故事》中的「空間實踐」，「空間再現」，以及「再現空間」。本文藉由空間理論社會學家昂希·列斐伏爾《空間的生產》一書提出的空間三元論，檢視《使女故事》的空間架構。本文第一章為緒論，介紹瑪格麗特·愛特伍的寫作理論以及創作背景，此外提出了當代關於愛特伍小說的反烏托邦文類之探討，並檢視小說敘事中呈現的現代及後現代性。本文第二章介紹了昂希·列斐伏爾的空間三元論如何定義空間的生產。本章檢視《使女的故事》中女主人公的敘事，如何建構的空間實踐，以及探討愛特伍呈現在基列國空間再現。本論文的第三張檢視了昂希·列斐伏爾空間三元的最後一環，「再現空間」如何透過《使女的故事》裡的角色中的日常生活，再現並重新建構空間。透過重現日常生活的敘事及論述，本文總結基列國的空間源由空間中的居住者生產，製造，並重建。

關鍵字：《使女的故事》、《空間的生產》、瑪格麗特·愛特伍、昂希·列斐伏爾



Abstract

The thesis aims to adapt Lefebvre's spatial triad so as to examine the space produced in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. *The Handmaid's Tale* fictionalizes the coup d'état overthrows the United States and constructs the theocratic government of Gilead. The history of the Early Gileadean Era is recorded in the tapes of the protagonist, the handmaid Offred. The study focuses on the oral records that reveal the landscape of the city, the construction of the regime, and the everyday life of the individuals. Applying Lefebvre's spatial triad, the thesis targets on the representations of the space "perceived" by the viewers, "conceived" by the government, and "lived" by the inhabitants. Chapter one provides the introductory literature survey on Atwood's novel, including feminist, postmodernist, and dystopian critiques. Based on the analysis of Lefebvre's spatial theory, chapter two aims to explore the "physical" space of the Republic of Gilead. This chapter targets on spatial practice of the regime represented in city planning, buildings, and physical landscape. Following the analysis on spatial practice, the chapter advances to the conceived space in the representations of spaces of Gilead, exploring conceptualized codes and signs. Emphasizing on the space "lived" by Gilead's civilians, chapter three embodies representational spaces of Gilead that is constructed and reconstructed by its actual inhabitants and users. Thus, I draw to the conclusion that what constructs Gilead is not the political power, but the ways of living among all habitants dwelling in that space.

Key words: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of space*, spatial practice, representations of spaces, representational spaces.



Introduction

1.1 General Background and Information

This thesis aims to interpret Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) according to Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, arguing that Atwood's construction of the urban space exemplifies Lefebvre's spatial theory. Atwood fictionalizes the theocratic regime constructed in the landscape of United States that usurps the American government and banishes capitalism. With the collapse of democracy and economic freedom, fertile women are categorized into a specific social class. The narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale* records her everyday life and presents a dialectical document of the historical background of Early Gilead Era. "Told" by the narrator, Offred's tale reveals her struggles to survive in the fundamentalist regime, the Republic of Gilead, where she is distributed to a ruling class family, serving as a "handmaid," a breeding vessel belonging to the government. Published in 1985, the novel has aroused public awareness and gained a new readership in recent years because of public discussions on sexual harassments, such as the #Me Too movement, female abortion, and female reproductive rights that are regarded relevant to contemporary society. Suffering from patriarchal doctrines, female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts women's confinements and oppressions that still exist and regulate women in the twenty-first century.

The Handmaid's Tale shows not only subservience of women but also female resistance. Scholarship focuses on women's oppression under the totalitarian controls and dystopian satire of *The Handmaid's Tale*. These critiques discuss on the

interactions between the marginalized protagonist and the designs of social structure. This study applies Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory and examines the "social" space as a given totality into discussion. To this end, I try to answer the following questions: how the rulers of the city construct its own urban space? To what extent is the urban space "perceived," "conceived," and "lived?"

To answer the above research questions, this thesis adopts Lefebvre's spatial theory from *The Production of Space* (1991), targets on everyday life of the protagonist, Offred, and examines a society as a urban space which includes ruling class and lower class. The study interprets the construction of the city, the urban, and the society in a totalitarian country via a Lefebvrian reading through Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Applying Lefebvre's three concepts of space, the discussions advance on the productions of the urban space, Gileadean power relations, and the reproductions of the social relations of the city.

1.1 Literature Review: Postmodernist and Feminist Readings of Atwood's Novels

Margaret Atwood's literary works exemplify her observation of the contemporary world as a woman, Canadian, feminist, and a postmodernist writer. *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a dystopian totalitarian country in a near future. The design of the Republic of Gilead is recorded by a handmaid, the protagonist Offred. The central part of the novel revolves around the rebellion and struggle of the female protagonist. Nevertheless, Atwood not only articulates feminism, she also reveals her interests in history as a postmodernist, such as her notable historical fictions, *The*

Robber Bride (1993) and *Alias Grace* (1996).¹ Atwood sets historical background of her fictions in specific period with fragmented narratives of female protagonist. Provided with postmodern techniques, Atwood shows the readers the reconstruction of the world as well as history “from fragments of the past which are available to us” (Vevaina 86). Furthermore, Atwood’s novels question “macro-history,” the history recorded from the perspectives of the authorities and political dominators. She unveils the shifts between macro-history to micro-history, challenges the central value, and casts her vision through the voices of the marginalized characters in her novels. Margaret Atwood started her career as a novelist in the late twentieth century, embracing contemporary theory in her works with “one foot in modernism and the other in postmodernism” (Vevaina 94).

Atwood’s fictions show her attempts to postmodern writing. Atwood applies experimental techniques to her fictions and creates spaces for the marginalized voice. Influenced by Susanna Moodie (1803), Atwood notes “the other voice” is “running like the counterpoint through her works” as she was working on *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). In Atwood’s novels, the other voices from female characters reveal the construction of epistemology in her fictional worlds. Atwood’s fictional representation in the writings underlies her challenges to totalizing systems of power. As Vevaina says, “narratives of ‘History’ have now given way to the pluralist notion

¹ Both of *The Robber Bride* and *Alias Grace* focus on historical contents. *The Robber Bride* reveals the history of the three characters: Roz, Charis, and Tony. The novel is set in Toronto, Canada. After the publications of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Robber Bride*, Atwood presents the historical fiction, *Alias Grace*, in 1996. Based on the factual murder of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery in 1843, Atwood fictionalizes the story of Grace Marks and sets the story in Ontario, Canada in the middle nineteenth century.

of ‘histories’—or even “her-stories” (84). Atwood grows her interest in history while she was a graduate student who “recalls the historical situation of late-19th-century and Modernist England and alters it with reference to contemporary issues” (Hengen 154). Atwood entitles the thesis as “Nature and Power in the English Metaphysical Romance of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” Besides the interests in history, Atwood outlines the contemporary issues, represents “American imperialism and nationalism” in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and establishes “the repressive order which becomes the Republic of Gilead in Atwood’s novel” (Hengen 155). Atwood provides the “her-story” of female protagonists in her works such as *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace*.

Margaret Atwood reveals the postmodern notion with the emphasis on multiple selves. She not only shows a variety of voices through her characters in novels but also points out the multiplicity of the author’s identity. At the International Library Festival in 1999, Atwood asserted, “neither the characters nor the authors can be anything but plural” and “there is too many of me”. Atwood’s works mark multiple and decentered selves represented in her own literary works. While providing the picture of the fictions, Atwood depicts the fact with uncertain and ambiguous language so that “languages become a tool lay bare the fact that reality is essentially surreal, absurd, inchoate and ambiguous” (Vevaina 90). Atwood’s novel presents realistic phases of the society that reconstruct the historical fictions supported by fragmented, ambiguous, and absurd narratives of these female protagonists. Also, by presenting narrations from multiple perspectives, Margaret Atwood includes multiple

phased selves into her historical fictions.

Atwood's writings on the female protagonist, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, reveal her feminist concerns. Offred documents her interior monologue in the posthumous tape. Offred records her everyday life, her prompt thoughts, flashback, and memory from the past and leaves her tape to the unanticipated readers and listeners. Scholars develop feminist and dystopian critiques on Atwood's work from the three epigraphs taken from the book of Genesis, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, and a Sufi proverb. In "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal," Karen F. Stein sees these passages as an "abundance of preliminary matter" that establishes frames of female bodies (57). As opposed to the solution of "overpopulation" in Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, Atwood's "proposal" seeks to solve "underpopulation," conduct "sexual politics, and foreground sexuality as reproduction" (Stein 64). In *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, P. L. Thomas explains that Atwood's focus of satire is not only on women but also on the corruption of religious ideology, defining *The Handmaid's Tale* as "Atwood's immodest proposal" (74).

Focusing on Offred, Madeleine Davies analyzes the narrator's struggles and oppression. Davies notes Atwood's novels are "consistently concerned with the stories of women," especially for the "powerless" female figures; here, the term of "power" is defined as "traps" set in *The Handmaid's Tale* (61). "The state of Offred's imprisonment" embodies repetitive "incarceration and surveillance in Atwood's writings on female body" (62). Stephanie Barbé Hammer also criticizes Gileadean oppression, saying that, "specifically men's domination of women by means of other

women [...] within male regime” (39). Nevertheless, Hammer regards Offred as a “romantic heroine” because of her predicament (41). Desired by Nick and Fred, one from ruling class while the other from lower class, Offred demonstrates her will and chooses to escape. The final escape from the Commander’s imprisonment and her “choice of the younger man seems romantically validated by the novel’s ending” (Hammer 42).

On the other hand, although Offred manages to escape and leaves her story unfinished, Nina Auerbach considers Offred’s as “neither coward nor turncoat” (185). Offred is “simply, as Atwood imagines her, a woman with country” and her tale is “less hopeless than the siren isolation of the woman with no country”(185). Barbara Ehrenreich specifies the danger of Gilead’s women for being both actors and victims. Atwood’s “dystopian feminism” warns the readers more than the coup d’état against theocratic politics but about the “a repressive tendency in feminism”(84). Elisabeth Hasot points out female resistances to social hierarchy and class division. Offred displays her disobedience under cover of her everyday life, such as shopping, cleaning and cooking. She develops “hidden transcripts, short fragments of speech, small deviations in posture and glance” (54). *The Handmaid’s Tale* shows confined female bodies of Gilead’s women. Offred’s violation of the laws implies her careful controls and manipulation of her room, her mental space, and her escape.

1.2 Literature Review: Dystopian Discussions on *The Handmaid’s Tale*

The Republic of Gilead’s conquest poses a dystopian warning of political ignorance in a near future society. Offred as a previous American citizen maintain an

ignorant and indifferent attitude toward feminist protests. The tape that records her suffering arouses the listeners' fear of the totalitarian oppression on women in the near future. Atwood declares her intention behind *The Handmaid's Tale* in her article, "*The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake in Context.*" She composes the dystopian novel "from the female point of view" in comparison with George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Thus, Atwood calls *The Handmaid's Tale* a "feminist dystopia" and wish to "[gives] a woman a voice and an inner life" (516). Atwood's work inspires many critics to develop discussions on Atwood's unconventional writings on the genre Atwood creates.

David Ketterer notes *The Handmaid's Tale* is "worthy of serious attention when it is about something," for it not only underlies "the muted feminist pole" but also points out "the central theme [...] human survival" (Ketterer 209). Also, Ketterer shows the unique core in Atwood's dystopian Gilead in which Atwood creates "rather more original, plot possibility" of her tale (211). At the center of the tale is the "act of betrayal" that the protagonist is forced to commit (211). The success of *The Handmaid's Tale* depends on the "indirection, irony, and understatement" of Offred's narratives (211). Ketterer interprets on the concluding chapter of the novel, "Historical Notes," and argues the "generic status" of the novel as "a particular kind of Contextual Dystopia" (216). Ketterer indicates the novel "unlike traditional dystopias," it provides narratives within the context of Offred's record. Ketterer sees the "preceding context" of Offred's tale as the "historical development" that is either "continuous or discontinuous" (213). Dominick M. Grace shows Atwood's

unconventional use of dystopia. In “Historical Notes,” Atwood presents the transcript of the historical conference in which Offred’s tape is reorganized and published. The chair of the conference, Professor Pieixoto reminds the anticipated audience of the credibility of the tape. Grace specifies Atwood’s denials of “this purported historicity,” and argues that Atwood “does so in ways that subvert the convention of pseudo-documentary devices in science fiction” (481).

Lee Briscoe Thompson agrees with Ketterer and points out that Atwood’s feminist dystopia “moves circularly, rather than linearly as [...] ‘traditional’” dystopias (26). Raffaella Baccolini further identifies the feminist dystopian features in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Baccolini defines traditional dystopia as a “depressing genre with no space for hope,” but Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “resists closure and allows readers and the protagonist to hope” with “open endings that maintain the utopian impulses within the work” (520). Atwood ends Offred’s tape with uncertainty that violates the conventional genre of dystopia. In addition to the “anti-closure” of Atwood’s dystopian fiction, *The Handmaid’s Tale* presents the protagonist’s dialectical record which “features the present and the possible horrors of the future” (Murphy 25). Atwood utilizes “pseudo-documentary framing” in her tale that “reduces the dystopian distance” and “plunges the reader immediately into a near future presented in the form of a first-person diary” (33). Patrick D. Murphy points out the distance Atwood creates in her dystopian fiction so as to arouse readers’ fear and terror in the near future.

Besides the narratives of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Danita J. Dodson notes the

irony in Atwood's dystopia that Atwood "illuminates the deplorable irony that a nation established upon the Utopian principle of 'liberty and justice' for air has also been a dystopia for those humans sequestered and tortured because of differences from main stream culture" (66). The marginalized female civilians pose the irony to the notion of the Republic of Gilead. Besides Baccolini's emphasis on Offred's resistances and Dodson's focus on Atwood's dystopian irony, Libby Falk Jones focuses on women's voices in male-dominated Gilead in which "women are objectified and repressed" (Jones 7). "The dominant metaphor" in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the female characters forced to subside into "silence" (7). However, the protagonist as well as to the female characters in the tale "have begun to break silences, to find their individual and collective voices" (7). Jeanne Campbell Reesman points out the voice of Offred and considers the protagonist to be the heroine of the tale. Offred's verbal record "offers a moving testament to the power of language to transform reality in order to overcome oppressive designs imposed on human beings" (Reesman 6). Offred documents her interior monologue that "[maintains] freedom of imagination of places" in the Republic of Gilead (6). Offred's tape shows the suppressed conditions of previous American citizens but also suggests subversive resistance under the dominance of Gilead's regime. Atwood's dystopia proposes coercion and despair, resistance and hope.

Apart from Jones's and Reesman's emphasis on Offred's female voice resisting patriarchal society, Linda Kauffman thinks of Offred's records as a "purely interior discourse of the heart" (224). Following Kauffman's emphasis on "narrativity," Dunja

M. Mohr offers two major themes of Offred's narratives—"victimization and survival" (230). Both motifs "dominate the poetic narrative discourse of mental liberation" (230). Stressing on the function of Offred's narration, Mohr defines Atwood's usage of language as "a dystopian and utopian tool" (230). Eleonora Rao describes Offred's narrative of "psychological struggle" which chronicles her suffering from "obliteration of consciousness and sense of self" as the key of Atwood's dystopian writings (16). It exposes the "contradictions and entanglements of power politics" and Offred's mental chaotic state (16). Manuel Benjamin Becker foresees that Offred's retrospective reflection "may come from an age which could be our present" (25). Becker shows a "development of our societies" in Atwood's dystopia where "definitive moment" may arrive (25). Ann Coral Howells specifies "a particular urgency" of Offred's tale in "contemporary situations of cultural crisis" (161). Both Becker and Howells describe Atwood's dystopian satire as an allegorical fiction that predicts and represents modern societies. Researches of feminist discourses elaborate oppressions and confinements imposing on marginalized women. The feminist critique represents Offred's female subjectivity of Offred's suffering and identity. Dystopian reading on *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals power politics, the authorities and divinity, the civilians and rebellion.

1.4 Methodology: Lefebvre's spatial triad

Previous researchers show the designs of state apparatus, the establishment of the totalitarian society, and people under surveillance and coercion. However, this thesis targets on the characters' deprived, regained, and reconstructed subjectivity

from physical space to mental space. By applying Lefebvre's triad from *The Production of Space*, this study aims to represent the space and the "production" of Gilead from the perspectives of "all" inhabitants. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre develops Marxist spatial theory in consideration of the "making" of space. He defines space as a social product that has "taken on, within the present mode of production [...] as a sort of reality on its own" (26). To further this framework, he provides three stages of the shifting focuses in the process "producing" space from the "physical," then the "mental," and finally to the "social" (19). In response to the three states, Lefebvre introduces conceptual triad of space: "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "representational spaces" to epitomize how the space is "perceived," "conceived," and "lived" (33).

Published in 1974, then translated into English in 1991, Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* is not the pioneer to subsume sociology and economics into spatial theory. David Harvey brings out the urban political-economic theory earlier than Lefebvre. In *Social Justice and the City*, published in 1973, Harvey touches on recent social science in urban geography and focuses on the dynamic development of metropolises. Harvey defines that space is "neither absolute, relative, or relational in itself, but it can become one or all simultaneously depending on circumstances" (13). On the basis of theoretical spatial triad: the absolute, the relative, and the relational, he represents the concretization of space and the city with the three spatial states. After the publication of *The Production of Space*, Harvey develops the spatial triad into the general matrix of spatiality in responses to Lefebvre's triad of space

perceived, conceived, and lived. Sociologist Mark Gottdiener points out Lefebvre's Marxist readings on space and thinks of it as "a material, externalized realization of human labour and the condensation of social relations of production" (128).

Manuel Castells raises questions on the possibilities to "offer a theory of production of space on a strictly philosophical basis" (71-72). On the other hand, he shows sociological emphases on everyday life of inhabitants opposed to designer of the urban space. Castells argues the government dominates designs of city in the political and capitalist terms. City planning, applying design principle, is governed by "economic efficiency and standardisation's of production," leaving no room for "cultural values of the dwellers"(43). The fitness of the dwellers' "patterns of behaviours" is forced and adopted into "relatively rigid schemes of the housing authority" (44). In spite of the doubts on Lefebvre's philosophical interpretation of space, Castells agrees with sociological concerns on space with the emphasis on the inhabitants of the urban space.

Notwithstanding "engagement with sociology, architectures and urbanism," Lukasz Stanek agrees with Castell but argues Lefebvre by noting Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe's argument on the lack of a "direct knowledge of the terrain and sufficiently deep exchange with architects" in Lefebvre's philosophical discourses on space (Stanek vii). Focusing on modern society and the "global urban condition," Stanek develops Lefebvre's focuses on the urban into the globe and involves "the social obligations and political ambitions" in his theoretical spatial readings (vii).

Rob Shields redefines Lefebvre's theory and provides a "wide range of

conflicting usages of the word, 'space', [...] designating the ongoing social construction of the spatial" (Shields, "Spatial" 188). Shields affirms Lefebvre's engagement with philosophical readings that the study of space incorporates "concrete actions, constructions and institutional arrangements" (188). Understanding Lefebvre's spatial theory, he argues that Lefebvre provides not only "a social practice, in the sense of its social construction," but he also emphasizes the "representations of it and discourse about it" (Shields, *Lefebvre* 154). Agreeing with Shields, Andrzej Zieleniec notes, "space is a determining factor in the framing of social relations" (150). Edward Soja has adapted Lefebvre's triad but develops his own theoretical spatial triad by turning the focus of spatial theory into the study of social sciences, humanities, and linguistics. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real- and Imagined Places*, Soja, while adapting Lefebvre's spatial triad, reclaims the duality of space: the real, the imagined. He advanced the "third existential dimension," defining as "thirthing-as-Othering" (3). The term signifies the transcending spatial dimension among dual transition. Henri Lefebvre shows ambitions to offer a sufficient scale of spatial theory on the basis of philosophical, socialistic, and Marxist concerns.

By offering the three components of space, Lefebvre breaks the binary debates on space. His spatial triad not only echoes David Harvey's concept of "absolute, relative, or relational space" but also inspires Edward Soja's spatial triad, introducing "the real, the imagined, and the thirthing-as-Othering." Moreover, Lefebvre's triad not only brings about three states of space but also envisions the spatial matrix on the

basis of his spatial triad. He explains the matrix by showing various comparisons and contrasts posed by the physical against the mental space, the mental against the social space, and the physical as opposed to the social space. By including the third dimension and offering the three states of space, Lefebvre offers more room for critical discussions beyond the physical and mental space, the concrete and abstract space, and the ideal and lived space.



Chapter II

Spatial Practice and Representations of Spaces in the Republic of Gilead

2.1 Lefebvre's Spatial Theory

This study aims at Margaret Atwood's fictional characters' deprived, regained, and reconstructed subjectivity in the urban space of Gilead. Following with the analysis of physical space of the country and the mental space amongst civilians of The Republic of Gilead. This thesis aspires to represent the space lived in accordance with everyday life of the protagonist, Offred. By applying Lefebvre's spatial triad, this study aims to represent the space and the "production" of Gilead from the perspectives of Gileadean inhabitants. In accordance with *The Production of Space*, this study develops from Henri Lefebvre's Marxist spatial theory in consideration of the "making" of space. On the basis of Lefebvre's spatial schemes, the public urban space of Gilead is a social product that has "taken on, within the present mode of production [...] as a sort of reality on its own" (Lefebvre 26). To further this framework, I provide three states of space with the shifting focuses on three spatial statuses: the physical space, the mental space, and the social space in the course of "producing" the urban space of Gilead.

The Handmaid's Tale describes the construction of totalitarian theocracy in the near twenty-first century. The fundamentalist regime, Gilead, secures the political controls by means of constraints over Gileadean urban space. Published in 1974, then translated into English in 1991, Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* subsumes sociology and economics into spatial theory. Henri Lefebvre shows ambitions to offer

a sufficient scale of spatial theory on the basis of philosophical, socialistic, and Marxist concerns. By offering the three states of space, Lefebvre breaks the debates on binary opposition between physical and mental space by involving the social space into discussions. On the basis of the spatial triad, Lefebvre provides the matrix by showing various binary oppositions posed by the physical against the mental space, the mental against the social space, and the physical as opposed to the social space. Adapting Lefebvre's spatial theory, this study develops critical discussions of the physical and concrete space constructed by Gilead's administration. This chapter represents the spatial practice through everyday life of protagonist Offred, and also furthers to epitomize the representations of spaces of the Republic of Gilead.

Lefebvre, on the one hand, introduces three spatial states orderly, firstly from "the physical-nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the social"(11). On the other hand he denies the distinctions, breaks, and disjunctions posed in between the binary opposition, emphasizing that the three states of space "involve, underpins, and presuppose" one another (14). In response to the three statuses, Lefebvre introduces conceptual triad of space by defining the first, second, and third as "spatial practice," "representations of space," and representational spaces" (33). This study aims to apply the spatial triad in order to interpret the spatial structure planned in Atwood's work, to disclose the construction of space in the dystopian country, Gilead's regime, and to amplify the production of Gileadean society through the everyday life of the protagonist Offred, her related

acquaintance in the “Early Gilead Period” (Atwood 300).²

2.2 Spatial Practice Presented in the Republic of Gilead

With the aid of Lefebvre’s systematic framework, I embark on spatial analyses with textual evidence in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The study begins with “spatial practice” to disclose how the physical space is perceived by adapting Lefebvre’s triad. Introduced in *The Production of Space*, “spatial practice” compasses the physical phases of the public urban space in everyday life (Lefebvre 33). Later, Lefebvre details the terms on the interaction between social subjects and the urban space. Spatial practice reveals social formation and coercion that appear in particular locations, such as churches, schools, libraries, public squares, daily supply stores, and prisons. “Spatial practice” in Gilead represents daily life of the regime’s inhabitants in visual state, embodies the space perceived, and embraces physical locations and social formations. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre defines the functions and elements of spatial practice. Spatial practice includes production and reproduction in particular locations and sets of spatial characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures social continuity and cohesion. By securing relationship between members of society and social space, the social continuity and cohesion “imply a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance” (Lefebvre 33). Through Offred’s narrative, spatial practice of Gilead offers a cohesive understanding of social space of

² Atwood provides a transcript of a seminar held in 2195. In the final chapter, “Historical Notes,” the documents of Offred’s the tale, is recognized as a record and reference to “early Gilead Period,” defined by historical scholars from Gileadean Research Association. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood concludes the novel by offering an extra chapter, “Historical Notes,” giving evidence to convince readers the dystopian fiction.

the regime. Offred's record embroils herself in the everyday life of Gileadean dwellers, showing spatial practice of the space perceived.

As a member of the social space, Offred sketches the city planning in her daily life that reveals the construction of the Republic of Gilead. In Offred's record, physical landscapes and buildings are categorized into public and private space by functions and naming systems of the Republic. The boundary of space is not only defined by political controls but also created by daily activities of inhabitants. Gileadean government secures the public space with armed forces and dominates manipulation of the domestic space. Based on the understanding of manipulation of the urban space, this section aims to detect social formation and cohesions of society within both public and private space so as to represent the spatial practice of the totalitarian society.

Offred introduces her tale by telling daily walking around the city and revealing the monologue of being an actor³ of the society. The daily purchases routine of Offred, implied in the second chapter "Shopping," presents Offred's first encounter of the urban space. The daily routing of handmaids are constrained by the laws of Gilead. As a handmaid, Offred is required to follow specific route towards "shopping" for the daily supply of the household of her Commander, Fred. She is designated to do daily purchases at two appointed supply stores: All Flesh, and Milk and Honey. After shopping, Offred takes the route toward the Walls. On her way home, she passes by

³ The term "actor" here denotes subjects who engage in particular social activities in the space. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre notes "social space 'incorporates' social actions" of the actors (33). Social actions of these actors/subjects are both "individual and collective" (34). Thus, these actions and actors serve as a tool of analysis of social space and society.

Soul Scrolls, the printing store of franchise for upper class. Offred's everyday life in the public space is continuously under the surveillance of armed forces, the Angels and the Eyes, as well as her handmaid companion, Ofglen. The record not only records Offred's monologue and her everyday life but also gives evidence to the urban space of Offred's presence as well as the existence of the "tenants" of the republic, Gileadean civilians.⁴

The record serves as a "historical notes" so as to represent "the society's space," involving the city sites, buildings, stores, public space, churches, schools, and houses of Gileadean inhabitants (Lefebvre 38).⁵ The theocratic government serves as landlords while the inhabitants survive as tenants of the urban space. "Spatial practice" of the republic is embodied and defined in the association between the perceived physical space and the daily life of the spatial inhabitants of Gilead (Lefebvre 38). Gileadean society produces its spatial practice "slowly and surely, and appropriates it" (38). Spatial practice of the republic is produced in the course of history. Besides the emphasis on the present "participants" of the social space, Gileadean spatial practice involves and revolves into collective memory of the urban space. The memory of former handmaid of the Commander Fred is disclosed as a mysterious and unreadable carved sentence "*nolite te basrardes carborundorum*"

⁴ Lefebvre considers the inhabitants of a social space "tenants of government-subsidized high-rise housing project," regarding the civilians as dwellers of the political governance, the inhabitants who embarks their daily life by means of the governmental constructed city sites (38).

⁵ Offred records her interior monologue in the tapes, including her prompt thought, events in her handmaid's everyday life, the structure of the city, and the social order of the regime. Post-Gileadean historians reorganize Offred's tapes and publish her journal in a lineal order. The tapes serve as the record of early Gileadean period. In the following section, I borrow the term, "record," so as to refer Offred's tapes.

(Atwood 186). The Latin sentence, meaning, “don’t let the bastards grind you down,” represents the short period of former Offred’s history (Atwood 187). Offred sees the past and inherits the past memory from the words “on the wall of the cupboard” hidden in her limited space in the house (187). Collected and reorganized by Gileadean historical scholars, Offred’s record is “not the first [...] discovery” of historical documents in comparison with early documents discovered around the same “Early Gilead Period,” such as “The A.B. Memoir” and “The Diary of P.” (Atwood 301). The posthumous materials constitute the Gilead’s society that produces Gilead’s spatial practice. The visual state of Gilead is reconstructed in Offred’s recorded tape, serving as historical documents to spot in the Early Gilead Era.

2.3 Representations of Gilead’s Public Urban Space

Gilead’s society, considered as a social product, is interpreted as conceptualized codes and signs in accordance with the second elements of Lefebvre’s spatial triad. To offer representations of Gilead’s public urban, I shift my focus from physical space to spatial codes that are represented in Gileadean society. The Gilead’s regime constructs a theocratic social network restores “the capacity of powerful agents to realize their will over the will of powerless people” (Somacarrera 291). The formation of power politics and spatial practice of Gilead are further explained in “representations of space.”

On the basis of second state of Lefebvre’s spatial triad, “representations of space” shows “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (Lefebvre 38). The designers of the

urban space identify “what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (Lefebvre 38). The space conceived is tied to the relations of production and to the order. The authorities, including Gileadean officials, politicians, and doctors dominate the conceptualized abstraction by enacting laws in the conceived phase of space. Governed by Gilead’s law, Offred is not only the tenant but also the “ward” under Gilead’s law that specifies her handmaid identity (Myrsiades 232). As Mario Klarar argues “*The Handmaid’s Tale* is clearly in the tradition of American dystopia,” the Republic of Gilead exercises totalitarian control and uses “military and secret police, manipulation through organized use of media, re-writing of history, re-education and terror” (Klarar 131). The regime constructs totalitarian theocracy, the conceived social codes, on the basis of the Bible. Nevertheless, the Bible is limitedly available to “the initiated,” the initial authorities and founder of the Republic of Gilead. Dorota Filipczak argues “the role of Bible depicted in the state is [...] ambiguous;” it provides the “echo of cultural origins” that haunts Atwood’s *Tale* and demonstrates the “insidious presence of biblical images in the text” (171). The male aristocrats set the theocratic orders of naming system of the city and the functions of urban buildings so as to exercise power to determine the space of social practices.

Offred reveals the orders of society in her introductions to the “names” of the locations and “functions” of these sites. The names are the terms of everyday discourse that serve to “distinguish, but to isolate particular spaces, and in general, to describe a social space” (Lefebvre 16). On the basis of Lefebvre’s spatial triad, the urban space incorporates social practice that shows the uses of spatial terms in

Gileadean everyday life are political. To detect what the “syntax” governs the organization of naming system, Lefebvre determines that “reflection will enable us” to decode and *read* space “on the basis of the words themselves and the operations that are performed upon them, to construct a spatial code” (16). The application of naming these sites of Gilead represents the space of Gilead’s society that is dominated and overwhelmed by political armed forces within the social space. The success of Gilead’s conquest not only lies in the armed forces and wars but also the “production” of the space of the land that used to be called as “North America.”

Gilead’s theocracy dominates the “names” of buildings, public space, and squares in the urban space. Offred’s record discloses training back to The Rachel and Leah Center. Named after the biblical story of Rachel, Leah, and Jacob, the Center implies the other woman in an official marriage—the Handmaids, who serve as breeding vessels. Used to function as a gymnasium of the university, Red Center accommodates women prepared to be handmaids that are guarded by Aunts, the lecturers and mentors of the Handmaids. The gymnasium is nicknamed as Red Center by the handmaids who are required to dress in red gowns. The color red symbolizes blood denotes that Red Center functions as the public execution field in the public urban space. In Red Center, the handmaids develop a clandestine “whistle” language to communicate under the surveillance of Aunts and the armed guards, the Angels. Red Center, regarded as a “shelter” of the handmaids, educates previous American women to become handmaid. At Red Center, the handmaids are required to study the

Old Testament to become qualified handmaids as Bilhah, Rachel's maid.⁶ Red stands for the color of handmaids. On the one hand, red symbolizes sex, blood, and sins; on the other hand, the color represents fertility, the rare but precious ability to Gilead's people.

The public square at Red Center serves for "Participation." Participation means participation in execution. The sentence refers to the ceremony of public execution carried out by the handmaids. The types of sentences vary from the genders, determined by the crimes of the sinners. As a handmaid, Offred once attends the Participation, where a male criminal is accused of rape. The handmaids surge forward to the man "like a crowd at a rock concert" (Atwood 279). Offred feels "permitted anything" at the moment, "reeling" while "red spreads everywhere" (279). Besides the sentences punishing men, mostly political criminals, Women's Salvaging is conducted in public so as to penalize women from upper class, the Wives, and the Handmaids from lower class. Women are dragged "on the stage" waiting "to be salvages" with "white [bags] placed over the head" (273-276). Women show "unity with the Salvagers" with both hands on the rope in order to "salvage" the women from the crimes they commit (276). The "names" of punishments and places in the social space address theocratic meaning and symbols under the regime's dominance; thus, Red Center "describes" spatial space of Gilead as well as Offred's everyday life.

⁶ Quoting *Genesis 30*, Atwood introduces *The Handmaid's Tale* with the scriptural story of Rachael's handmaid, Bilhah. Being infertile, Rachel desires to bear children for her husband. She offers her handmaid's womb and persuades Jacob to "behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her, and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Atwood x). The prophecy is adapted in Gilead's laws to solve the crisis of low birth rate. Based on the reference from *Genesis*, Gilead practices the "ceremony" of the intercourse between Handmaids, the Commanders, and their wives.

Offred's tape reveals the naming system that carries biblical meanings; her record also shows how political controls function over the stores, buildings, public spots, and private houses—the urban space. The two supply stores, All Flesh and Milk and Honey, are the only stores that Offred does daily purchases, a part of her duty, after the fall of the United States, democracy, and economic freedom. All Flesh refers to biblical allusion, means all human and animals in the Christian tradition. In the *Old Testament*, the phrase, “the way of all flesh,” firstly appeared in that translation: “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:13). “The way of all flesh” signifies human life is fragile and transitory. The religious phrase denotes the determined death and the fate of all humans and animals.

In The Republic of Gilead, All Flesh functions literally the retail meat store selling fleshy parts of animals. Honey and Milk provides dairy supplies as its “wooden sign: three eggs, a bee, a cow” introduces (25). However, Offred exposes the shortage of the goods during her visits to the stores rather than signify biblical doctrines. She notices that rare and attractive oranges are occasionally available in Milk and Honey since “Central America was lost to the Libertheos” (25). Offred sees having these oranges make “a small achievement” for bringing appetite and desire to her handmaid's life. Nevertheless, she is not allowed to buy the oranges and beef without enough coupons while her “companion,” Ofglen, “gets steak, though, and that's the second time this week” in All Flesh because of a superior rank of her master (27). Gileadean government controls supply chain of the goods due to the lack of

food. Gilead's totalitarian measures not only dominate the naming system and the public space of Gileadean everyday life but also constrain the availability of everyday supply. The authorities of Gilead control the demand and supply, the production of space through everyday life. The totalitarian regime reconstructs new social orders and formations so as to ensure the social stability. By means of political constraints over daily life in necessary supply stores—All Flesh and Milk and Honey, Gileadean government builds “spatial practice” of the new country.

The controls of everyday life over Gileadean civilian are also epitomized by human legacy in public space. The political measures that Gileadean administration takes on architecture and public space pervade into everyday life of Gilead. The churches function as museums and preserve “paintings” of “ancestors,” exhibiting “women in long somber dresses, their hair covered by white caps, and of upright men, darkly clothed” (Atwood 31). The regime celebrates Gileadean Christianity and enacts laws to establish theocracy while the new administration diminishes “traditional” Christianity that previous “Americans” used to believe in. The football stadium is reserved for the purpose to hold the “Salvaging,” the ceremony to salvage male criminals from sins including adultery, rape, or desecration. The priority of hospitals is to take charges of the female bodies and birth rate, albeit the doctors are excluded from bedroom for childbirth but staying in the Birthmobiles. The constructions of city sites carry biblical symbols, function specific political purposes, and imply social practices of Gileadean everyday life.

The Walls outside of the stadium hang the dead bodies of the prisoned criminals

for days “until there’s a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them” (Atwood 32). Within limited choices, Offred is allowed to take the route toward the Walls. Offred and her companion, Ofglen stops “as if on signal, and stands and looks” (32). Offred and her handmaid companion routinely stop by the Walls with proper and “official reason” in their small journey.⁷ As a handmaid, she is “supposed to look” at the displaying corpses so as to fear, but she checks out every time if her “previous” husband is one of hanged criminals. Instead of feeling “hatred and scorn,” Offred sees these dead bodies of the criminals as “time travelers, anachronisms” for bringing her back to her life as an American woman (33), for the executed prisoners are sentenced of violating Gilead’ theocratic doctrines. Gileadean government poses threats by the armed forced censorship, rebuilds naming system and reorders the public construction. On the one hand, the hanged bodies arouse the public panic and anxiety of totalitarian forces; on the other hand, the civilians dwelling the urban space incorporate the theocratic and totalitarian social order and develop into conceptualized codes of the urban space.

Offred shops across the “heart of Gilead,” where “doctors lived once, lawyers, university professors,” but now “the university is closed” (Atwood 23). Located inside of the Walls, the universities used to preserve cultural heritage and human legacy, the place where Offred “used to walk freely,” but now they are banished for the purposes of Women’s Salvaging (166). The Library is preserved in honor of the

⁷ Offred is allowed to stop by the Walls with the official reason but forbidden from riding public transportation. “There’s no official reason” for Gileadean women, especially handmaids to “go down those steps, ride on the trans under the river, into the city” (31).

victory of Gilead instead of providing written paper and publication to Gileadean civilians. “There are angels” statues decorated on the walls to the either side of the Library; the sculpture of “Victory is on one side of the inner doorway, leading them on and Death is on the other” (Atwood 166). To celebrate devout Gileadean administration, the Library is painted in white and decorated with a mural painting of “men fighting, or about to fight, looking clean and noble, not dirty and bloodstained and smelly the way they must have looked” (166). The Library function “like a temple,” signifies nobility of Gilead’s government, and deprives availability of published materials from all civilians (166). Offred reconstructs the visual state of the church, embodying divinity while ironizing the “mural in honor of” the wars (166). She tries to create narratives in her tape despite inconsistent thinking and inability of writing; nevertheless, her attempts to transcribe the building represent holly symbols created by the Gileadean authorities.

Gilead regime controls freedom of the press and publication industry. Soul Scrolls, a printing store Offred routinely passes by that used to be a lingerie shop with “pink color,” publishes political franchise, the prayers, for the upper class women (Atwood 167); the prayers, ordered by the Wives of the Commanders, signify “piety and faithfulness to the regimes” and help “their husband’s career” (167). The printout machines in Soul Scrolls “talk” with a “toneless metallic voices repeating the same thing” while printing out the prayers on the paper rolls (Atwood 167). The officials wives can “go inside to listen” the doctrines (167). Offred, as one of the pedestrians, “can’t hear the voice from outside” since the consistent broadcasting serve women

from upper class; Nevertheless, Offred constantly pauses at the store and listens to “a murmur, a hum” of the unheard rhythm “like a devout crowd” while “watching the prayers well out from the machines and disappear again” (167). The repeated texts printed on the roll paper fade out with the voices. The publication of prayers brings “conceptions of space” that tends towards “a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs” (Lefebvre 39). The conceptions of space epitomize “representations of space” with the prayers published without readers. The purpose to publish is to maintain the totality of theocracy. The specific location, Soul Scrolls serves as a part of publication industry for the government.

2.4 Space of Gileadean Inhabitants

Gileadean totalitarian controls of space transgress the threshold from the public urban to private and domestic space. The government exercises political power from the public urban space to domestic spaces. Despite the identities as the aristocrats, the Commander, Fred and his Wife, Serena Joy perform the duty of being obedient and qualified citizens. Serena Joy’s private domain is introduced for the first time when Offred visits the Commander’s mansion; that is, the garden at the back yard. As one of the Wives, Serena Joy has one of such garden; “it’s something for them to order and maintain and care for” (Atwood 12). Besides the garden at the back yard, “the sitting room,” the particular room to conduct the intercourse ceremony between the Commander, the Wife, and the Handmaid, is “supposed to be Serena Joy’s territory” that the Commander should knock to “ask permission to enter it” (Atwood 86). The domestic sitting room “serves as the tool,” the fertile ground of

Gilead (Lefebvre 26). On the birth days of new born babies, the Wives of aristocrats “with a little drunk [...] gathered in the sitting room” without the presence of the Commanders (116). As opposed to the Wives’ the sitting rooms, the Commander’s office is the sacred territory of men.

The sacred office is the territory of The Commander Fred. Reading, the limited privileged activity, is only granted to men of high social status. Serena Joy is not allowed to step into her husband’s study. Women from the upper to lower class are forbidden from reading newspapers, magazines, novels, and any other published texts. Inside the house of the Commander, the patriarchal government limits Serena Joy as well as the Martha, Rita, Cora and the Handmaid, Offred within the restricted space. After Serena Joy accomplishes enacting Gileadean Constitution to regulate Gilead’s women to fulfill duty, she is forbidden from reading the Constitution. Serena Joy, as well as all the other women in the house, is excluded from her husband’s office. Gileadean male authorities exert cultural hegemony and reserve the legal rights of reading to men. Inside the household of the Commander, Offred’s illicit act of reading is permitted under the constraint of Fred’s surveillance. The patriarchal sovereignty imposes cultural and geopolitical dominance of the urban space to the domestic terrain.

Atwood establishes the “space” through Offred’s everyday life by showing the limits of privacy and coercion over her body. Offred drafts the historical documents in appointed locations and tells her stories along within the public space and her limited private space. Gileadean surveillance performed by the Angels and Guardians

“produce” the public space and transgress into the private space. The domination of the public urban shows the representations of space in these physical locations. Under the controls of city planners, representations of Gileadean space grounds Offred’s steps at public locations from Red Center, the Walls, Milk and Honey, the hospitals, the Particicution ground. The government wages theocratic political controls over domestic domains. In the Commander’s house, Offred, Marthas, and Serena Joy are not allowed to offend men’s fields. Offred is limited in kitchen, the ceremony room, and “the room.” Spatial domination constrains everyday life of Offred, as well as all the other inhabitants of Gilead.

2.5 Conclusion

As the “product” of Gileadean public urban space, spatial practices of the nation embody the space within everyday life of Gileadean inhabitants, the construction of the public space, and the restrained and limited privacy in domestic space. That is, the authorities who dominate the conceptualized abstraction exercise power to determine the space of social practices. Offred’s record provides the visual state of the Early Gilead Period that epitomizes Gilead’s spatial practice. On the one hand, the record reveals the urban space perceived and “serves, thus produces, as a tool of thought and of action” of Offred as well as Gilead’s civilians (Lefebvre 26). On the other hand, representations of Gileadean society that Offred reveals in her record “have taken on a sort of reality” on the basis of everyday life. The urban space dominated by Gilead’s government is represented as a set of spatial characteristics in the record. Offred’s narratives show the dominant spatial concept on top of the visual

state of the country.



Chapter III

Representational Spaces of Gilead

3.1 Representational spaces in Lefebvre's Triad

Applying Lefebvre's spatial triad, I examine the space of Gilead and decipher the urban space as a product of the authorities. The focus of this chapter shifts from the space conceived to the space lived that is represented in everyday life of Gileadean inhabitants. *The Handmaid's Tale* shows not only subservience of women but also female resistance. Based on Lefebvre's theory, the thesis regards the urban space of a society as a given totality, including the physical landscapes, the conceptualized signs and symbols, and the space of the inhabitants. With the focus on the individuals of Gilead's urban space, this chapter brings out Offred's uncontrolled autonomy and conflicting struggles by interpreting Offred's interior monologue so as to represent the space Offred lives. To this end, I develop the research question in this chapter: to what extent is Gileadean urban space "lived?"

Applying Lefebvre's spatial triad, the discussions advance the articulated and acted space that is "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Lefebvre 39). In the "making" of space, the spatial practice of Gileadean political power "seeks, but fail to master" space completely around the country and mental space of its civilians (26). The Gileadean dwellers are being controlled under the bailiwick of power politics; that is, representations of spaces show the way power of Gilead's government work to construct and control the space. Apart from the double state of being controlled and

controlling, Lefebvre offers a possibility out of the binary opposition, the state of being uncontrolled; that is, the state of representational Gileadean spaces that epitomizes the space in which Offred lives and creates the record of her everyday life.

Gilead's government embodies representations of Gileadean spaces.

Representations of Gilead's spaces combine "ideology and knowledge within a social spatial practice" under the "bailiwick" of totalitarian government (Lefebvre 45). In accordance with Lefebvre's second concept, representations of spaces refer to the space created and constructed by city planner, architects, and authorities in the conceived phase; representations of spaces show the frontal, legal, and official relations connected within the social space. In comparison with the second state, I provide the third concept, "representational spaces" by denying the totalitarian control and surveillance of representations of Gilead's spaces. In this chapter, I aim at the everyday life that civilians create and construct as opposed to the society space made by Gilead's government in previous chapter.

Besides the dwellers of the social space, representational spaces are associated with "some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers" who describe with verbal language and aspires with non-verbal symbols and signs (Lefebvre 39). Lefebvre defines the third concept that refers to "clandestine or underground side of social life" in comparison with frontal and official side of space embodied by representations of spaces (33). Lefebvre links the third concept of spatial triad with the second concept, showing the double interaction and binary opposition between the second and third spatial elements. Representational spaces embody

complex symbolism and carry coded spatial signs as well as non-coded symbols. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, not only the Gilead's government but also the civilians construct the Gilead's society. To further the discussion on Gileadean citizens, I include the frontal as well as clandestine, official as well as hidden and underground social network of human relations. Representations of Gilead's spaces are on the one hand "a means of control, and hence of domination of power;" on the other hand, the political state of control "forces [...] to seek, but [fails] to master space completely" (Lefebvre 26). The uncontrolled autonomy runs into the ground of the lived space of the civilians' everyday life. Thus, in this chapter, on the basis of Lefebvre's spatial theory, I aim to show the "dominated" social space that is described in Offred's tape, coded and revealed in her imagined symbols and signs, and experienced in Offred's everyday life (39).

3.2 Representational Spaces in Offred's Room: Freedom and Coercion

Under the scheme of power politics presented in the double states, Gilead shows the duality of Space, coercion and freedom, in Gileadean spatial practice. In Offred's record, she reveals both freedom and coercion in a handmaid's everyday life. She discloses the construction of the "model towns" of Gilead while walking around the streets (Atwood 23). She is allowed to walk around the urban space as she does everyday shopping, a part of the handmaids' duty. In her small travels, Offred affirms the rights she still preserves as a handmaid in her daily life; she and her companion, Ofglen, still "have a choice" to "go straight back, or [...] walk the long way around" the (30). On the one hand, Offred is aware of the threat of surveillance under the Eyes

and Angels.⁸ On the other hand, she attempts to maintain her sanity and free will through expressing her thoughts and actions within limited conditions. By asserting the right to make decisions, Offred reveals her fear for the armed forces and also her rebellious acts that she performs in her everyday life.

Nevertheless, even though the protagonist intends to preserve sanity and autonomy, flashback and memory from the past compared with the present guarded subway station that reminds Offred of the limits of her choices. “There’s no reason” for handmaids to “go down those steps, ride on the trains under the river, into the main city” (Atwood 31). Offred is aware of “being given freedom from” Gilead where women are “protected” from men’s harassments.⁹ Men from the upper to the lower class are not allowed to speak, communicate, and contact with women by law. Aunt Lydia, one of Offred’s teachers in Red Center, warns the handmaids the danger of freedom and argues, “there’s more than one kind of freedom” (24). Before the days of Gilead’s anarchy, previous American “women were not protected” from men but free to “having such control” of earning money and choosing clothes (24). On the one hand, Offred exemplifies the freedom she obtains in handmaids’ everyday life; on the other hand, her record shows the monarchy recognizes freedom as insecurity and danger so as to justify suppressions on women. Offred shows her complicity in her

⁸ The Eyes are Gilead’s secret police hidden at houses and government associations. The Angels are the armed forces against rebellious group for Gilead’s government. The Angel is the male class second to the top class of the Commander. They are Gilead’s soldiers at the front lines of wars. The Angels guard around the corners on street at the censorship stations.

⁹ There might be three possible interpretation of the phrase “being given” freedom. The women of Gilead are “being given freedom” away from the danger of men’s harassment in comparison with women of the previous States (24). Gileadean women still possess freedom permitted and authorized by Gilead’s government. In addition, women are “being given” freedom to do things depending on their free will.

record that she is not only “a sympathetic narrator” but also “not a pansy for the current regime” (Stillman and Johnson 72). In addition, she is “apprehensive” of the danger to talk with Ofglen about the rebels and “recognize the social and power relations” of her affair with the Commander (72). Offred reveals in the lived space in which she demonstrates the conflicting inner state of being a submissive but also a transgressing handmaid.

Offred’s interior monologue discloses her confessions, prompt thoughts, memory from the past in confined everyday life of a handmaid. Offred’s mind that is free from the power of politics shows the uncontrolled autonomy in representational spaces in the cabinet of a handmaid. She spoils her thoughts wandering undecidedly to contemplate the terms of everyday commodities. The random thought about the term, “chair,” drives Offred’s mind to contemplate related definitions, such as “the leader of a meeting,” “a mode of execution,” “the first syllable in *charity*,” and “the French word for flesh” (Atwood 110). Considering the chaotic mind as “paranoid delusion,” Offred records her stream of consciousness in the tape that shows her mental state within the limited space (109). Offred’s private space of mental state is excluded from the dominance of space under Gileadean forces and preserved the uncontrolled autonomy of her female body.

Offred’s uncontrolled autonomy is also disclosed in the tape. The document Offred leaves that records her dreams represents her previous life as a mother and a wife. Offred’s dreams embody uncontrolled autonomy. She could get out of her room, touch the face of her daughter, and stay at her “home.” Noting in first person

narrative, she dreams about being awake, “[getting] out of bed and [walking] across the room” (Atwood 109). She dreams about her daughter running in “her small green nightgown with the sunflower on the front” and she is able to “pick her up and feel her arms and legs go around” (109). Offred’s dreams reveal her inner desire to break the boundaries of her room and escape from the Commander’s house. The power of uncontrolled autonomy is stopped as Offred wakes up at the moment, and she “[begins] to cry” (109). Offred possesses her uncontrolled autonomy to transgress the threshold of physical walls and doors of her room in her dreams.

The Republic of Gilead imposes the prohibition against women’s right to literacy. Under the coercion, the Commander manipulates Offred’s craving for reading to fulfill his desire. The Commander asks Offred to be his mistress and turns the old magazine into a reward so as to invite Offred into his office, the private and sacred space of the patriarch of the family. Notwithstanding danger of violating Gilead’s law, Offred surrenders to the temptations of magazines and novels. She reads through a “*Mademoiselle* magazine, an old *Esquire* from the eighties, a *Ms.*” magazine “voraciously, almost skimming, trying to get as much before the next long starvation” (Atwood 184). The space of the Commander’s is the conceived space of the male patriarch of the house. Nevertheless, the space turns into the lived space of Offred. Offred’s act of reading shows the underground of the social life. Offred’s everyday life is represented in the space of the office. She redefines the daily spatial practice and embodies representational spaces as a Gileadean civilian.

Offred displays her intentions to dominate her own private space by claiming

the upstairs handmaid's room as "her room." She discloses the process to dominate her own private space. Denying the identity as a handmaid, she calls the space of cabinet as "the room," but she starts to regard "the room" as "her room" and admits her possession toward the space after being the handmaid in another part of her tape. In chapter two, Offred refuses to say "my" room at her very first encounter with the space (8). After staying in the room and being the handmaid for days, she claims, "my room, then. There has to be some space, finally, that I claim as mine" (50). Offred sees "her" room as waiting room when she's "waiting in [her] room" (50). Also, she claims "when I go to bed, it's a bedroom" (50). Offred distributes the space by addressing the bedroom and the waiting room with different functions. The space "used" by Offred is redefined by its functions in terms of Offred's free will. She occupies the space by naming the divided sections of her room. In addition, Offred finds the miswritten and unrecognizable message on the wall. Her desire for freedom is driven by her obsession with the unreadable message carved inside her closet. The sentence, "nolite te bastardes carborundorum," means, "don't let the bastards grind you down" (Atwood 187). The message implies the underground relationship between the Commander Fred and his previous handmaid and also the former Offred's hatred toward her master.¹⁰ Offred's record represents the duality of spatial domination and implies uncertainty of the government's political power upon the spatial practice.

Offred's life of a handmaid leaves her limited space but infinite time to spend in

¹⁰ The name of a handmaid is given as the label that identifies her as a handmaid specifically to be bred by the Commander Fred. The name would pass from the former to the latter handmaid.

the physical space. She reveals her sensation and emotions toward the physical space with the comparison between “her” room and the hotel room that Offred’s husband and her have stayed. She explores this room, “not hastily, then, like a hotel room, wasting it” (51). She saves her sanity dealing with the restricted space that she tried to “[divide] the room into sections” and allows herself “one section a day” (51). By composing language to record in the tape, she shows her ambitions to transgress the physical limits of space and social constraints imposed on her identity. She takes over the control of physical space and responds with a reasonable mental state in her lived everyday life experience.

3.3 Rebellions and Resistance in the Lived Gilead’s Space

The rebellion against and resistance to the Republic of Gilead is under the cover of the frontal human relations. Representational space of Gilead embodies the illegal, unauthorized, or improper social network, relations, and activities. In Gilead, the authorities arrest and punish the underground rebel group members by means of public execution. Compared with representational space, representations of space in Gilead “are shot through with a knowledge and ideology,” constructed under the power politics (Lefebvre 41). The conceived space shows the frontal relations that impose in knowledge, signs, social codes, naming system, language, and hegemony. Representations of space are tied to the relations of production and also to the regular social order. By contrast, “representational space needs to obey no rules of consistency of cohesiveness” (42). In comparison with the conceived space constructed by the officials, authorities, and planners, the lived space of Gilead

signifies the space made by the members of the social space. The space lived and experienced is represented in arts. In addition to arts, the experts like “ethnologist, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts, are students of such representational spaces” (42). Offred’s tape serves as an arranged document shows the everyday life of a handmaid and provides her readers to imagine the representational spaces. Offred is “a victim of a society for which the ruthless control and suppression of women constitutes a ‘return to traditional value’”—to bear children for Gilead’s next generation (Burack 280). On the contrary, she offers “not a predictable tale of victimization and defeat” but a story of survival “by speaking about her experience” in the tape (280).

Representational spaces of Gilead overlay the perceived spatial practice of the regime. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the rebellious network, Mayday Resistance, which is the underground association appears not only in Offred’s dialogue with Ofglen but also in Gilead’s lived space. Mayday rebel group shows the “fluid and dynamic” uncertain symbols hidden in the politically constructed government. The conceived space incorporates the rebellions that challenge the regime’s totality. In Offred’s tale, the social network of Mayday Resistance is partially exposed through Ofglen’s revelation. Ofglen tries the password, “the grapevine,” on Offred. The password is the “that cannot be told, people with secret identities, dark linkages,” not in the conceived space but in the lived space (202). Offred refuses to join in the network nor does she answer Ofglen’s request, breaking into the Commander’s room. The disappearance of Ofglen causes no sense of guilt but brings her “relief” despite her close relation with

her companion. In spite of ignorance and distance, Offred's record discloses the lived space of Gilead in which the rebellion and protests coexist in the representational spaces of Gilead.

Offred's closest friend, Moira, is a rebellious female figure in her tale. Used to be a handmaid, she possesses the uncontrolled autonomy in her character that drives her to break the law, escape from the Red Center, and chooses to work at the night club. Moira, as one member of the experienced and lived space, whose existence is illegal and unofficial, links to "the clandestine and underground side of social life" (Lefebvre 33). Moira claims, "I had my choice [...] this or the Colonies. Well, shit, nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies. I mean, I'm not the martyr" (249).¹¹ Moira affirms her decision she makes despite the fact that Offred deciphers the indifference in her voice. Moira rejects to be neither a handmaid nor an exile woman in the Colonies. She chooses to stay in the underground space of the republic. She poses as an opposite figure against Offred, the submissive handmaid. Nevertheless, Offred reveals her dual identity of being a handmaid and a mistress of the Commander. Offred doubts Moira's decision to struggle in the underground world of the regime. On the other hand, Offred also realizes her experience of being a mistress is similar to Moira's job, working in the nightclub. Both of the characters reveal the hidden lived space of Gilead.

3.4 Frontal and Clandestine Relations in Representational Spaces of Gilead

¹¹ The Colonies is the place that the Gileadean government exile criminals, mostly infertile women, to clean the polluted nuclear waste.

Representational spaces of Gilead show the experienced and lived space of Gilead's dwellers. In comparison with representations of Gilead's spaces, representational spaces include not only frontal but also clandestine human relations among the people inhabit in social space. On the basis of Lefebvre's spatial triad, representational spaces are linked to the double interaction with the space conceived, the second spatial status in the triad. "Representations of spaces are certainly abstract but they also play in social and political practice" that symbolizes the frontal and official spatial codes of the Gilead's society (Lefebvre 33). On the other hand, representational spaces of Gilead, the lived space of Gileadean citizens, epitomize the experienced space, associated with the clandestine and underground side of social life. Offred's three relationships with her husband Luke, the Commander, and Nick embody the hidden and underground opposition against Gileadean law. Offred's relationships with the three men show the way she subverts the regime in the representational spaces. Madonne Miner argues Offred's tale only brings "a cautionary vision of what might happen if certain attitudes are carried to extremes," but it also "[posits] love as a force subverting Gilead" (149). Also, Coral Ann Howell asserts the totalitarian control "neither accommodate nor suppress [...] heterosexual love" in Gilead (69). The survival of love "subverts the regime's claims to authority" and creates "imaginative spaces within the system" of the power politics (69). Offred's clandestine relations not only show her uncontrolled autonomy but also build up her resistance to the regime in the lived space.

Offred introduces three clandestine relationships among three men, her

husband Luke, the Commander Fred, and the chauffeur Nick. The relations are shown in the representational spaces of Offred's everyday life. Offred records the process to develop the three hidden and unofficial relationships in the tape as well as characterizes her everyday life of being not only a handmaid, but also as a women, a alive character in her story. Offred's interior monologue reveals her marriage with her husband, Luke, before the republic of Gilead takes over the Unites States. She admits that she is involved in an adultery with Luke when he is "in flight from his wife when [she] was still imaginary for him. Before [they] were married and [she] was solidified" (50). At the moment contemplating her room of being a handmaid, Offred reckons the memory of space "wasted" in the hotel room in which they "lie in those afternoon beds, afterwards, hands on each other, talking it over" at the present moment when she stays in her handmaid's room (51). Offred's love affair with Luke is the root cause of the judgment that sentences and assigns her to be a handmaid. She is fertile but immoral, for she develops an adulterous relation with a married man. Offred represents the immoral and unofficial relations in terms of Gileadean Christian doctrines. She depicts the image and sketches the scenes back to pre-Gileadean Era. Her interior monologue recorded in the tape provides a comparison between the space she owns as a wife and as a handmaid.

Besides the previous marriage, Offred is also involved in the clandestine love affair with the Commander Fred. She records the inner struggle to be the Commander's mistress, the ways she violates Gileadean law, and the awareness of the danger of their relationship. The fatal relationship that Offred continues with the

Commander leads to her final escape. Gileadean law forbids the adulterous love affair between a handmaid and her master. Offred foresees the consequences of improper relations. She describes her anxiety to enter the Commander's office "like a child who's been summoned, at school, to the principal's office" (136). She is aware of her "presence here is illegal" and "it's forbidden for [handmaids] to be alone with the Commanders" (136). The handmaids should be regarded as "two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" instead of desirable women to men (136). Offred is bewildered by the purpose of the Commander's invitation. She chooses to "raise [her] hand, knock, on the door of this forbidden room" as she is contemplating "there must be something he wants, from [her]" (136). Offred points out the desire and names that impulse as "weakness," but "what ever it is, that entices [her]" (136). Offred justifies her act to break the law and transgress the threshold of identities, as a male official and a handmaid. She is on the one hand inevitable to refuse the Commander's invitation as the order from the person "who holds the real power" (136); on the other hand, she is unable to refuse the presents Commander offers, such as the soap, the hand lotion, novels, magazines, and the game of Scrabble.

Her first encounter with the Commander arouses her fear that Offred thinks "quick as staccato, a jittering of the brain" (137). She is conscious of the danger to be caught either to be delivered for "Serena's tender mercies" or to be sentenced to death based on Gileadean constitution (136). Offred keeps reminding herself the deadly result of the Commander's invitation to the Office. She is aware of "the possibility of [her] own death" that the affair brings about. The Commander proposes to play

Scrabble game with her. Offred is so astonished that she screams, “that’s what’s in the forbidden room! Scrabble!” (138). Thanks to the anti-literacy law imposed on women, the proposal of Scrabble game is now “forbidden,” “dangerous,” “indecent,” “conspiracy,” and “desirable” (139). The game is “something he can’t do with his wife” and the appointment is “like being on a date” (139). The Commander plays the forbidden game within the forbidden room. Both of the Commander and Offred know the affair is not only unofficial and clandestine but also dangerous and mortal. Offred defines her documents at the beginning of the relationship as “reconstruction” (134). She stresses the reversal of “normal life” of a handmaid as “reconstruction” of her everyday life (137). Noticing Offred’s reconstruction, Patricia F. Goldblatt argues that Atwood creates “situations in which women, burdened by the rules and inequalities of their societies, discover that they must reconstruct, braver, self-reliant personae in order to survive” (275). Offred steps out of her room and intrudes the Commander’s territory. The prohibition within the lived space is reconstructed in the lived space of both Offred and the Commander.

Despite the fact that Offred is terrified by the potential danger of being caught, Offred repetitively indicates the Commander’s smile. Offred shows the Commander’s growing affections on her. The smile she catches at their first date “is not sinister or predatory. It’s merely a smile, a formal kind of smile, friendly but a little distant” (138). Offred eases her tense anxiety while the Commander and her grow intimate to each other. She “no longer [sits] stiff-necked, straight-backed, feet regimented side by side on the floor” but feels cozy with body’s lax, takes red shoes off, and places her

“legs tucked up underneath [her] on the chair” (183). Also, the Commander is “casual to a fault” with “jacket off, elbows on the table” (183). The intimacy they share increases while the Commander puts more attentions to Offred. He “sits and watches” Offred reading “without speaking but also without taking his eye off” her (184). When Offred raises her question about the unreadable sentence carved in cupboard, the Commander answers with “smiles; this time you could call it a grin” (185). Offred thinks of the grin and imagines the “freckles on him, a cowlick” and states “right now [she] almost [likes] him” (187). Offred admits her temporary and fluid fondness for the Commander. The experienced space of the study incorporates and involves the clandestine relationship. Offred’s affair with the Commander embodies representational spaces within the reconstructed lived space.

Offred discloses the third relationship she develops with the chauffer, Nick. Offred exposes her interests in the male figure who also serves the Commander. She is cautious but curious as she, at the first time, seeks to explore the house. During the middle of the night, Offred is “out of place. This is entirely illegal” (97). She is “doing something on [her] own” that drives her to feel “tensed” (97). The feeling of transgressing boundaries of spatial limits and the principles arouses Offred’s excitement. The sense is urged by her first encounter with Nick who “is too illegal here [...] he can’t give [Offred] away. Nor [she] him; for the moment [they’re] mirrors” (98). The occasional coincidence for Offred and Nick is “too dangerous,” but Offred is also pleased “to be touched by someone, to be felt so greedily, to feel so greedy” (99). Offred confesses, “Luke, you’d know, you’d understand. It’s you, in

another body” (99). She compares her intense desire for Nick with her affection for her husband. The first unofficial encounter impresses Offred that implies her future affair with the man. Serena Joy forces Offred to bed with Nick and so as to bear a child for her. Also, she is attracted to the man and the clandestine relationship. She goes back to Nick’s room time after time, sensing the illicit act with “the thud of blood in [her] ears” (268). The impulses drive her to violate the physical limits of a handmaid’s everyday life. Offred lives in Nick’s room, as “one of the most dangerous places” she could stay (270).

Offred reckons the history of her marriage with Luke, reveals her adulterous affair with the Commander, and exposes her intense fondness for the Commander’s chauffeur, Nick. The narrator not only “falls” for Luke but also “falls” for Nick. Offred thinks of herself as “falling women,” for she also falls for Nick (225). Offred defines that loving a “particular man beside us” is to believe in “Love, abstract and total. The word made flesh” (226). Offred shows her understanding upon love when she compares the love she “falls” into between Nick and Luke. She notes the senses of guilt, safety, and satisfaction she simultaneously experiences while staying with Nick. Narrating inner struggles with impulses and rationality, Offred expresses her “fall” for Nick is love.

The narrator reveals the process to be seduced by the Commander, who offers presents such hand lotions and magazines. She shows the way to be cautious and obedient “mistress” to disguise as the Wife to avoid check up at censorship station. Moreover, she puts on a glittering dress with feather shawls to pretend as a prostitute

at the “club.” The Commander offers the late night day and brings Offred to the forbidden room at the club. The intercourse is not for the ceremony that is conducted under Serena Joy’s eye. The violation of law and the association with the underground Gilead’s society fascinates Offred. She broadens the limits that spatial practice imposes on the everyday life of a handmaid. Not only does Offred trespass the physical boundaries of the Commander’s study and the underground nightclub, she is also addicted to the readings and the Scrabble game. Under the ban of Women’s right to literacy, she desires to touch the book, to literate terms, and to browse through the lines written on paper. Nevertheless, her interests in the Commander, the night Club, and the study decrease as her increasing affection she feels for Nick. Besides, she confesses shifting her interests from the Commander to Nick. Offred documents the three clandestine, unofficial, and forbidden relationships that she develops and experiences in the lived space.

3.5 Conclusion

Representational spaces of Gilead refer to the lived space of the protagonist’s everyday life. Offred’s record reveals the formation of handmaids as well as the hidden secret of being a woman in the limited space of Gilead. The lived space of the Republic of Gilead is represented in Offred’s daily experiences that include her life of a handmaid as well as the ways she reconstructs within her representational spaces under coercion. As a member of the given totality, Offred reconstructs the lived space through her everyday life. She shows her manipulation of autonomy through the space of her room, the limited space allowed to her. Her choices of obedience and

disobedience disclose the clandestine human relations and unauthorized underground society of the regime. The three relationships with Luke, Nick, and the Commander, indicates her inner struggles between desires and rationality. Offred's record creates and constructs the visual state of the Republic of Gilead, the mental state of Gileadean government officials, and the actual lived space of Gileadean inhabitants.



Chapter Four

Conclusion

This study contributes a new understanding of the relationship between *The Handmaid's Tale* and Lefebvre's spatial theory as expounded in *The Production of Space*. The thesis aims at an explication of the various dimensions of space in Atwood's dystopia. By adapting Lefebvre's spatial triad, the study examines the space constructed in *The Handmaid's Tale* so as to represent the "perceived," "conceived," and "lived" space of the Republic of Gilead. The protagonist leaves her voice recorded in the tape to her unanticipated readers or listeners. Her tape constructs the landscape of Gilead's urban space, the structure and system of totalitarian theocracy, and also the everyday life of Gileadean inhabitants. The Republic of Gilead not only builds up its city planning, but the regime is also reconstructed by its dwellers in the everyday life. In accordance with these findings, this study proposes a spatial triad: spatial practice of Gilead, representations of spaces in Gilead, and representational spaces of Gilead. Relying on abundant textual evidence, this thesis explores how the heroine reverses the dominance of the suppressed and limited space.

This study makes its contributions by providing textual evidence to understand how the protagonist of Atwood's novel epitomizes the reconstruction of spaces through her narratives. With the aid of Lefebvre's conceptual triad, the thesis discusses how the inhabitants in the given totality construct the space. The study targets on two groups of readers: those curious about Atwood's feminist dystopia and those interested in Lefebvre's spatial triad. For anyone who is curious about Atwood's

feminist concerns and postmodern writings, the thesis serves as an introduction that points out the essential values of Atwood's and contemporary critics' reviews on *The Handmaid's Tale*. Many of critiques focus on Atwood's unconventional dystopian genre; nevertheless, this study provides a new perspective from Lefebvre's spatial theory to underpin the "discontinuous or continuous" narratives (Ketterer 213). In the light of the diversion of space, this study proposes a spatial discovery of retrospective relations between the oppressed protagonist and the act of making space in *The Handmaid's Tale*.



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