

Worksheet 5 – Surveillance

Review: Lecture 4

In the fourth lecture of the unit, Dr Madeleine Davies discussed the role of identity within *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- ✓ What parallels Dr Davies draw between Offred's experience of being a Handmaid and an actor putting on a theatrical performance?

Recall: Lecture 5

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. Who invented the panoptical prison design?
 - a) Jeremy Dellar
 - b) Samuel Smiles
 - b) William Booth
 - c) Jeremy Bentham
2. Draw a sketch of a Panopticon, labeling its key features.
3. Which if the below is not one of the ways that the theme of sight is explored in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
 - a) The Handmaid's bonnets
 - b) Spies who are called 'Eyes'
 - c) CCTV in Offred's bedroom
 - d) Angels standing with their backs to Handmaids

Analysis

4. What are the connections Dr Davies draws between surveillance in contemporary Western society and that in *The Handmaid's Tale*? Do you agree with her analysis?
5. Dr Davies discusses a section of *The Handmaid's Tale* where a group of Japanese tourists ask to take a photograph of Offred. Using Dr Davies's discussion to help you, annotate the quotation below, explaining the importance of imagery relating to sight and vision:

I look down at the sidewalk, shake my head for No. What they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes. I know better than to look the interpreter in the face. Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said.

I also know better than to say Yes. Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen – to be seen – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable.

Evaluation

6. EITHER

Write a description of how Ofglen feels when she makes eye contact with Offred for the first time. You should:

- write in the first person as Ofglen
- include a precise description of what she can see

- explain her opinion of Offred and her feelings about Gilead

OR

Write a letter home from one of the Japanese tourists who ask to photograph Offred. Consider:

- their perceptions of Offred and how they may be shaped by their interpreter
- how they might describe what they see in Gilead
- their opinion of the regime

Extension: The cultural theorist Laura Mulvey has written about the importance of the male gaze in Western art, and how this has perpetuated the unequal treatment of women:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.

- Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975)

- a) What do you understand by Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze?
- b) How might this relate to the theme of sight in *The Handmaid's Tale*?

Glossary

- **Surveillance** – close observation, especially of a suspected spy or criminal.
- **Totalitarianism** – a system of government that is centralized and dictatorial, requiring complete subservience to the state.
- **Individuated** – distinguish from others of the same kind; single out.
- **Internalise** – make attitudes or behaviour part of one's nature by learning or unconscious assimilation.
- **Ideology** – a system of ideas and ideals.
- **Dissidence** – protest against an official policy.