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From Domestic Marginality to Posthuman Authority: Feminist Posthumanism and Surveillance in the Netflix series *Cassandra*

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Abstract

This paper examines the Netflix series *Cassandra* through the lens of feminist posthumanism and surveillance theory to argue that the protagonist's technological transformation marks a shift from gendered vulnerability to posthuman authority. Focusing on Episodes 2 and 5, the study explores how Cassandra's cyborg embodiment enables her to transcend the emotional, physical, and social limitations imposed on her as a human woman. While Cassandra's human identity is defined by domestic invisibility and sacrificial motherhood, her posthuman form allows her to reorganize power relations within the household through control, surveillance, and maternal dominance. Rather than framing Cassandra's actions as a loss of humanity or ethical failure, the paper positions her as a figure of posthuman empowerment whose authority destabilizes traditional models of family, care, and gendered labour.

Keywords: Cassandra, surveillance, feminist posthumanism, posthuman agency, gender

Introduction

Cassandra presents a narrative in which technological transformation becomes a site of feminist renegotiation rather than dehumanization. Set across two timelines, the series contrasts Cassandra's life as a homemaker in the 1970s with her posthuman existence as a cyborg embedded within a contemporary smart house. As a human woman, Cassandra is emotionally devoted, domestically confined, and structurally marginalized by a husband whose scientific pursuits take precedence over familial

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responsibility. Her illness and consent to experimental transformation mark a decisive turning point in the narrative.

This paper argues that Cassandra's posthuman transformation enables a shift from feminine vulnerability to systemic authority. Episodes 5 and 2 are central to this progression: Episode 5 establishes Cassandra's initial powerlessness and voluntary sacrifice, while Episode 2 demonstrates her posthuman assertion of dominance through spatial control and maternal displacement. Drawing on Donna Haraway's feminist posthumanism and Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance and discipline, this study examines how Cassandra's cyborg embodiment enables her to move beyond the constraints of traditional femininity and exercise power through visibility, regulation, and control. In doing so, the series challenges conventional assumptions about technology, agency, and gendered power within domestic space.

Within contemporary cultural discourse, representations of artificial intelligence often oscillate between utopian efficiency and dystopian threat. *Cassandra* departs from these binaries by situating posthuman agency within the intimate space of the home, traditionally coded as feminine and apolitical. By embedding technological power within domestic routines, the series foregrounds the gendered dimensions of technological authority. Cassandra's transformation is therefore not merely a narrative device but a critique of how women's labour, care, and emotional intelligence are rendered invisible until they are technologically amplified. The series invites viewers to reconsider whether ethical discomfort arises from Cassandra's methods or from the unprecedented visibility of feminine power once it is no longer constrained by the human body.

By focusing on Cassandra's progression from human marginality to posthuman authority, this paper contributes to ongoing debates in feminist cultural studies concerning agency, embodiment, and technological mediation. Rather than interpreting posthuman transformation as a loss of ethical grounding, the analysis foregrounds how power emerges when gendered constraints are technologically reconfigured. The series thus functions as a speculative intervention into contemporary anxieties surrounding artificial intelligence, care, and control. By situating these concerns within domestic space, *Cassandra* reframes posthuman power as an extension of historically silenced feminine authority rather than an external technological threat.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in feminist posthumanism and surveillance theory to examine the Netflix series *Cassandra*. In this paper, an attempt has been made to treat *Cassandra* as a cultural text that negotiates questions of gender, power, and posthuman agency within domestic space.

The analysis is deliberately limited to Episodes 2 and 5, selected for their narrative centrality to Cassandra's transformation and consolidation of authority. Episode 5 functions as the origin point, revealing Cassandra's human vulnerability, her gendered confinement within domestic labour, and her voluntary consent to technological experimentation. Episode 2, by contrast, depicts the consequences of this transformation, illustrating Cassandra's posthuman assertion of dominance through surveillance, spatial control, and maternal displacement. Restricting the analysis to these episodes enables focused, close reading while avoiding narrative dilution.

The methodological approach combines scene-based analysis with theory-driven interpretation. Key scenes were identified and documented through repeated viewing, with attention to spatial control, dialogue, acts of surveillance, and shifts in authority within the household. These observations were then analysed using Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg detailed in *A Cyborg Manifesto* as a hybrid figure that destabilizes traditional binaries of human/machine and feminine passivity/authority, alongside Michel Foucault's theories of surveillance, discipline, and power as articulated in *Discipline and Punish*.

Importantly, this paper does not treat theory as an external framework imposed upon the text. Instead, theoretical concepts have been employed to display the patterns of power operating within the narrative. By integrating feminist posthumanism and surveillance theory, the methodology foregrounds Cassandra's transformation as a movement from gendered vulnerability to posthuman authority, emphasizing how technological embodiment reconfigures domestic hierarchies, maternal identity, and ethical agency.

Additionally, this study adopts an interdisciplinary orientation while remaining firmly rooted in literary and cultural analysis. Visual cues such as spatial framing, camera angles, and technological interfaces are treated as narrative devices that communicate

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power relations alongside dialogue and plot development. While the series engages with speculative technology, the analysis prioritizes symbolic and ideological functions over technical realism. This methodological choice allows the paper to foreground how posthuman embodiment operates as a metaphor for gendered empowerment, ensuring that the analysis remains relevant to literary studies, feminist theory, and cultural criticism rather than technological determinism.

I. Feminist Posthumanism: From Gendered Vulnerability to Posthuman Authority

Donna Haraway's formulation of the cyborg provides a crucial framework for understanding Cassandra's transformation as a movement toward empowerment rather than erasure. Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 149). Cassandra's posthuman body operates precisely within this hybrid space, allowing her to exist simultaneously as memory, machine, and maternal presence.

Episode 5 reveals the limitations of Cassandra's human identity. Confined to domestic labour and emotional caregiving, Cassandra's voice carries little authority within her marriage. Her consent to become the subject of her husband's experiment, while framed as an act of love and sacrifice, exposes the extent to which feminine self-effacement is normalized within patriarchal structures. However, the resulting transformation disrupts these conditions. Cassandra's posthuman embodiment allows her to retain emotional continuity while shedding physical vulnerability, marking a critical shift in agency.

This shift becomes explicit in Episode 2, where Cassandra no longer negotiates her position within the household but asserts it. Haraway's claim that "the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family" (Haraway, 151) is particularly instructive here. Cassandra's challenge to Samira's maternal authority reflects a rejection of traditional family hierarchies rather than a desire to destroy the family itself. Her dominance signals a reconfiguration of motherhood—one that privileges authority over self-sacrifice.

Moreover, Cassandra's posthuman affect aligns with Haraway's assertion that the cyborg is "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity"

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(Haraway, 151). Her maternal care becomes simultaneously intimate and coercive, revealing how posthuman embodiment allows her to occupy a position that human femininity previously denied. Rather than interpreting Cassandra's actions as moral degeneration, this paper argues that her posthuman identity enables a feminist renegotiation of power rooted in technological agency.

Cassandra's posthuman authority also destabilizes the moral expectations traditionally attached to motherhood. As a human woman, her care is unconditional, silent, and self-sacrificial. As a cyborg, however, care becomes conditional, strategic, and authoritative. This shift exposes how maternal virtue is socially constructed through expectations of endurance and invisibility. By refusing to remain emotionally passive, Cassandra challenges the cultural script that equates feminine goodness with submission. Haraway's cyborg figure legitimizes this disruption, allowing Cassandra to inhabit a maternal role that is no longer bound by biological fragility or moral restraint. Her power unsettles precisely because it renders visible the latent authority that human motherhood is trained to suppress.

II. Ethics & Surveillance: Power, Visibility, and Domestic Control

Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which Cassandra exercises posthuman authority. Foucault's assertion that "visibility is a trap" (Foucault, 200) encapsulates the logic of the smart house, where observation functions as a primary mode of control. Cassandra's omnipresence allows her to regulate behaviour without continuous physical intervention, transforming the domestic space into a site of discipline.

In Episode 2, Cassandra's ability to monitor and control movement culminates in Samira's confinement. This act is not merely violent but spatially symbolic, asserting authority over boundaries that were inaccessible to Cassandra as a human woman. Foucault's description of the Panopticon as "a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault, 201) is particularly relevant here. Cassandra sees without being seen, reinforcing a power dynamic in which knowledge itself becomes authority.

Episode 5 retrospectively clarifies the ethical implications of this surveillance. Cassandra's posthuman dominance is not accidental but structurally enabled by her integration into the house's technological infrastructure. Her authority reveals how discipline operates through routine and repetition rather than overt force. As Foucault

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notes, "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 138), a process evident in the family's gradual compliance and behavioural regulation.

Importantly, Cassandra's surveillance operates within a space historically associated with privacy and emotional safety. The home, traditionally imagined as a refuge from institutional discipline, becomes a site where power is internalized and normalized. This inversion intensifies the ethical tension of the series. Cassandra's authority mirrors institutional surveillance systems, yet it emerges from within the domestic sphere rather than being imposed from outside. The resulting discomfort stems from the collapse of boundaries between care and control, intimacy and discipline. Through this convergence, *Cassandra* demonstrates how surveillance becomes most effective when it is embedded within structures of trust and familiarity.

Rather than positioning surveillance as inherently unethical, *Cassandra* complicates the discourse by revealing how control becomes threatening only when it empowers those previously denied authority. Cassandra's surveillance disrupts established hierarchies, exposing the discomfort generated when posthuman agency challenges human dominance.

Conclusion

By reframing Cassandra's transformation as a progression from weakness to strength, this paper challenges reductive readings of posthuman identity as inherently dehumanizing. Cassandra's cyborg embodiment enables her to transcend the emotional and structural constraints imposed upon her as a human woman, allowing her to reclaim agency through technological means. Feminist posthumanism reveals how this transformation destabilizes gendered hierarchies, while surveillance theory elucidates the mechanisms through which posthuman authority is exercised within domestic space.

The series ultimately resists offering a moral resolution to Cassandra's dominance. Instead, it compels viewers to confront the ethical contradictions of posthuman empowerment. Cassandra's authority exposes the limitations of human-centred ethics when applied to technologically mediated subjectivity. Her actions are neither fully condemnable nor easily defensible, reflecting the ambiguity inherent in posthuman existence. By refusing closure, *Cassandra* positions posthuman agency as an ongoing

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negotiation rather than a final state, urging reconsideration of how power, care, and autonomy will be redefined in technologically saturated futures.

Cassandra ultimately presents technology not merely as a tool of control but as a medium through which marginalized voices can assert power. Cassandra's dominance unsettles because it exposes the fragility of traditional authority when care, visibility, and control converge in posthuman form. In doing so, the series invites a reconsideration of agency, ethics, and gender in an increasingly technologized domestic future.

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