

## DIGITAL EXISTENCE AND HUMAN ESSENCE: THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITY IN GISH JEN'S *THE RESISTERS*

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### Abstract

*The dystopian exploration of how advanced technology reshapes identity, relationships, and societal values, in Gish Jen's *The Resisters*, is provided in this paper. Set in AutoAmerica, a near-future world governed by the pervasive AI system Aunt Nettie, the novel depicts a society where human agency is diminished, and lives are controlled by surveillance and dependence on automation. This paper applies post humanist theory to analyse the intersection between humans, technology, and the nonhuman, highlighting how these interactions redefine individual and collective identity. Through the experiences of a mixed-race family surviving the tensions between the privileged "Netted" elite and the marginalized "Surplus," the traditional humanist ideals that view identity and autonomy as exclusively human, are critiqued. Instead, it is highlighted how human existence is increasingly entangled with nonhuman entities, raising questions about agency, ethics, and the essence of humanity in a technology dominated world. The *Resisters*' overall message of hope lies in technological rejecters and supporters' potential to resist and regain agency and humanism. This study focuses on the themes of digital existence and human essence in the novel, emphasizing the human essence in the post-humanist era. Jen's work is a lesson and a testimony to the fact that the human spirit will always rise to the occasion and fight no matter the advancement in systems.*

**Keywords:** posthumanism, technology, human identity, freedom, technology, surveillance, automation

### Introduction

Literature in the era of ever-growing technological development reflects changes that take place in human existence and about existence. This paper presents an interesting discussion on a dystopian near future governed by technology in *The Resisters* where human experience has been mechanized. From the post-humanist perspective, this research aims to evaluate how this novel represents the effects of technology on relations and subjectivity in a world of surveillance and digital dominance that problematizes the notion of being human.

In *The Resisters*, Gish Jen paints a picture of a society where technology overpowers people's lives. This study inquires, what happens when humans and technology meet. The novel represents AutoAmerica, a world starkly divided between the "Netted" elites and the "Surplus" outcasts, and it depicts how AI, surveillance, and genetic engineering rewrite the social order, relationships, and individuals. By evaluating the role of Aunt Nettie in the lives of AutoAmericans, the study captures a world where algorithmic reasoning tries to control human unpredictability and emotions.

Initially, this analysis of *The Resisters* concerns the philosophical opposition between human spirit and technology. Post humanism as a theoretical framework, emphasizes the entanglement of humans, technology and non-human agents. It opposes traditional humanitarian views of an autonomous subjectivity. Critics such as N. Katherine Hayles and Rossi Braidotti suggest that in the posthumous era, human identity becomes fluid, intersecting with technical systems, digital networks and constant interaction with Artificial Intelligence. (Hayles, 1999), especially, criticizes the Cartesian separation of the mind and body, and estimates that human conscious material is inherent in technical contexts. This theoretical lens proves vital for understanding Jen's depiction of AutoAmerica, where the self is no longer defined solely by internal consciousness but by data streams, genetic codes, and AI monitoring.

The human body becomes a site of technological intervention and algorithmic governance in AutoAmerica. The RegiChips that are implanted in Surplus citizens demonstrate this posthuman condition, operating as bio-surveillance devices that track physical movements, adjust access to resources, and quantify individual worth. The RegiChip transforms the body into a data-producing being, lessening human existence to measurable outputs within Aunt Nettie's vast digital network. This resonates Hayles' theory that "the body" in the posthuman era is not a fixed, biological entity but an active information system which is programmable, hackable, and ultimately controllable (Hayles, 1999). For characters like Gwen, the protagonist, and her family, resisting Aunt Nettie thus becomes a fight to reclaim their identities from the technological control that seeks to define their humanity merely through data.

The study further explores, through the theme of genetic augmentation, the fluidity of identity in *The Resisters*. While the Netted class is susceptible to genetic modifications to enhance physical and intellectual abilities, Gwen, deliberately chooses not to alter herself, preserving her human essence. This decision becomes a form of resistance against AutoAmerica's posthumanist ethos, which associates biological enhancement with moral and social superiority. In contesting the AI-led notions of value, Gwen defies the attempt to genetically modify her on the basis that human worth capitalizes on technological enhancement. This corroborates Braidotti's interpretation of a posthuman subject as a decentered figure—they are not rooted in the remarkable nature of a human, but rather in a fusion of biology and technology (Susen, 2021). In AutoAmerica, however, such an intervention is not apolitical. The algorithms that guide the procedure perpetuate deep-seated structural violence, implying that the technology and human identity nexus is fundamentally political.

Apart from the physical body, *The Resisters* further shows how AI surveillance alters emotional and relational identities. Aunt Nettie's all-seeing watchful gaze does not only monitor conduct but also manipulates emotions and relationships, creating an environment of suspicion and emotional detachment. Ondi's betrayal is a case of how mutual relations collapse due to the influence of technology. Her behavior is not completely her doing, but a construct of technological intervention. The constant surveillance of Aunt Netti, blurs the line between self-determination and algorithmic control. In this regard, the post humanist theorists suggest the idea of "distributed subjects" - self which is no longer in isolation, but relative to digital networks, AI and bio-

informatics. Thus, Ondi's betrayal is not just a moral violation, but the result of living in the world where identity and relationships are set by digital technologies.

Nevertheless, Jen does not consider technology as the ultimate almighty power. The novel accounts the dystopian world showing how to adapt, resist and reconstruct the identity in this digital world. The act of Grant's, hacking of RegiChips represents a reclamation of physical autonomy, and Gwen's use of messenger pigeons serve as an analog reaction to Aunt Nettie's digital attention. These defiant actions underscore the representation of post humanism that while technology fundamentally alters human life, it does not eradicate human agency. Instead, this study contends that resistance is found in reasserting emotional complexity, unpredictability, and organic relations—factors that AI seeks to dominate.

In due course, this research provokes critical reflections on the defining attributes of the human essence in the context of artificial intelligence and surveillance. It makes the reader ponder if the remains of human essence, (emotions, relationships, and identities) can endure the incursion of a digital being. This research will analyze *The Resisters* using post humanist theory which concerns itself with how technology is used to construct identity and relationships in AutoAmerica. It will additionally examine how the novel depicts the resistance not as a rejection of technology, but rather as an endeavor to protect humanity within a system that dominates every aspect of life. In doing so, *The Resisters* poses an urgent question on the relationship between humanity and technology, imploring readers to reclaim their self in an increasingly digitized and technology-driven society.

## Literature Review

An area of focus across contemporary literature is positioned at the intersection of humanity and digital technology. Gish Jen's novel, *The Resisters*, considers the immense effects that technology wields on personal and social identity. Jen's story critiques the automaton, surveillance, and AI-controlled society, warning about the damage inflicted upon human identity in the context of technology determining the nature of interpersonal connections, self-determination, and autonomy. The literature review compiles available insights on *The Resisters*, including posthumanist theory and other associated dystopian narratives, respectively, placing Jen's novel in the broader discourse on the impact of technology on digital existence and human essence.

When investigating how technology affects human identity, scholars have focused on surveillance and control by technology as forms of domination. Foucault's theory of surveillance, especially the concept of the "panopticon", has been used in interdisciplinary approaches to dystopian literature concerning the existence of technological behaviour observing and controlling systems (Foucault, 1977). In *The Resisters*, Jen imagines a dystopian future where surveillance shapes citizens' actions and self-perception. As noted in *The Human Condition* (Ardent, 1958) and *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019), surveillance not only controls people but also encourages them to monitor themselves, which strips away their freedom. This is evident in Jen's

novel, where the surveillance system restricts the characters' freedom and capacity to create genuine connections.

(Hayward, 2017), looks at the intersection of surveillance in dystopian fiction with automation and AI, characterizing these technologies as both liberating and oppressive. More importantly, in this prospect, control is equated with surveillance, privacy is eradicated, and people are increasingly relying on artificial intelligence. Hence, the humanist principles that define human characters are endangered. According to Hayward's accounts, Jen's novel the dual aspect of digital technology is critiqued. It offers convenience and efficiency yet it poses threat to identity and liberty.

The post humanist theory is therefore useful in explaining *The Resisters*. Haraway and Hayles are among those scholars who have been at the forefront in the development of posthumanism to question anthropocentric approach to human beings and their relations with technology. (Haraway, 1990), affirms that humans and machines are closely interlinked, a factor that can be seen in Jen's novel. The characters in *The Resisters* strive in a society in which their subjectivity is mediated by technologies and their social interactions are orchestrated by AI. The use of the term "cyborg" by Haraway allows for considering these characters as being in-between human and machine and refusing to decline to both.

(Hayles, 1999), elaborates on the concept of posthuman body and consciousness in the age of technology as an extension of Haraway's ideas. Hayles referred to post human as a 'hybrid being', as it is seen with the characters created by Jen struggling to balance between the technological world and the human aspect of themselves. The family's rejection of technology is in accordance with Hayles' post human view of the negative effects of technology, such as disembodiment and dehumanization. Hayles' theories place the characters' conflicts within the broad spectrum of discussions regarding postmodern identity and technology.

It is also important to point out that the theme of resistance to the technological colonization is also present in Jen's novel. (Braidotti, 2013) suggests that posthumanism is not predetermined but provides opportunities for subjects' contestation and reconfiguration. The idea of the 'nomadic subject' highlights the aspects of agency within the state of flux, which can be interpreted when observing how Jen undermined the characters' attempts to counter the growing dominance of technology. The resistance depicted in *The Resisters* indicates that while the technology integrates into human life, there is still space for humanity to be preserved and for personal or collective resistance to exist.

(Virilio, 2006), also addresses the combination of technology, speed, and control, which offers another prospect to understand the themes of the novel. For him, technology accelerates time and severs the individual from his physical and social surroundings. This is the case in *The Resisters* where the characters constantly try, and fail, to establish meaningful relationships in a world that is overly technologically advanced. The novel critiques the myth of speed and efficiency in a technologically advanced society, suggesting that such progress is often achieved at the expense of emotional and relational depth.

*The Resisters* is set within a broader tradition of dystopian literature that evaluates the relationship between humanity and technology. *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1986) and *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2005), examine topics of identity disintegration, autonomy, and monitoring in a similar manner. There are similarities in Atwood's analysis of gender and power relations in a technologically driven society and Jen's criticism of a society in which computer technologies govern interpersonal interactions. *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2005) also scrutinized, merging with the idea of technology's hold over existence, in this case, of clones reduced to their biological roles. Jen's novel has these issues, but frames them in a narrative of active defiance against technological oppression.

The available works on posthumanism, surveillance, and dystopian fiction offer a short overview of *The Resisters* as a narrative. The study critiques the intertwining of technology and human identity through a post-humanist perspective. It examines the delicate balance of self, defiance, and the continuity of humanity in the face of encroaching digital systems. Jen furthers discourse on the significance of technological influences regarding social life and human connection.

### Research Methodology

This research explores the merging of the technological realm with the human sphere in Gish Jen's *The Resisters*, specifically in regards to technology's impact on interpersonal relationships and selfhood. Using qualitative literary analysis framed in posthumanist theory, this study aims to understand the ways in which Jen's novel critiques and reconstitutes human identity, relationships, and resistance in an age of artificial intelligence and pervasive surveillance. It applies the methodologies of close reading, theoretical analysis, and reading of secondary literature as they relate to the questions posed by the study to fully answer the research questions.

### Research Design

The study took a broad interpretive and analytical approach with a focus on qualitative literary analysis. Such analysis focuses within the text on its themes, plot, characters, symbols, and narrative style which allows for the consideration of the impact of technology and posthumanism in the text. The study is structured around three research questions:

1. How does *The Resisters* explore the intersection of digital technology and human relationships?
2. In what ways does *The Resisters* critique or redefine individual and collective identity in a world dominated by surveillance and AI?
3. How do the characters in *The Resisters* adapt or resist the erosion of human essence in a technology-driven world?

### Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by post humanist theory, which examines the evolving relationship between humans and technology, challenging traditional notions of identity, autonomy, and embodiment. The study employs concepts from:

- Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory: Analysing how the novel's characters navigate the blurred boundaries between human and machine.



- Katherine Hayles's Posthumanism: Investigating the redefinition of identity and embodiment in technologically mediated contexts.
- Michel Foucault's Surveillance Theory: Exploring how surveillance functions as a mechanism of control and its impact on autonomy and agency.

### Data Collection

The primary data for this research is Gish Jen's novel *The Resisters*. Secondary data includes:

- Academic articles and critical essays on *The Resisters* and related dystopian literature.
- Foundational texts on post humanist theory and technological ethics.
- Interdisciplinary studies on digital surveillance, AI, and human relationships to contextualize the novel's themes within real-world concerns.

### Methods of Analysis

Close Reading:

The primary method involves a close textual analysis of *The Resisters*, focusing on key passages that address relationships, identity, and resistance in the context of technology.

Specific attention is given to recurring symbols, such as baseball, and character dynamics, such as the Chin family's interactions, as sites of resistance and humanity.

Thematic Analysis:

The text is analysed for recurring themes, including surveillance, autonomy, resistance, and dehumanization. These themes are mapped onto post humanist concepts to identify intersections between literature and theory.

Intertextual and Contextual Analysis:

Comparative references to other dystopian texts (e.g., Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*) are used to situate *The Resisters* within the broader literary discourse on technology and humanity.

Contextual analysis includes connecting the novel's speculative elements to real-world technological trends, such as AI governance and digital surveillance.

### Scope and Delimitations

This research focuses only on Gish Jen's *The Resisters* as the primary text. While references to other works and real-world facts are made to provide context, the analysis remains grounded in the novel's narrative, characters, and themes. The study does not include empirical data collection, such as reader response studies. It uses scholarly judgments and evidence from literature to answer the research questions.

### Ethical Considerations

Since this is a qualitative literary study, there is no direct ethical engagement with human subjects, which removes any possible ethical issues. All secondary materials are above board and cited properly.

## Textual Analysis

### 1. The Representation of Digital Technology's Influence on Social Relations in Gish Jen's *The Resisters*

Gish Jen's *The Resisters* takes a critical look at a dystopian future characterized by digital devices, social stratification, and constant surveillance. The novel scrutinizes the impact of digital technology on human relationships, most vividly illustrated by Aunt Nettie, the all seeing and all knowing AI. In Jen's writing, technology is portrayed as a cunning force that watches over, controls, and separates people. It also reveals the personal relationships, especially those of defiance, that embody both weakness and strength. This paper explores the consequences of digital technology on interpersonal relationships—within families, among friends, lovers, and in broader social contexts globally.

The government surveillance AI, Aunt Nettie, personifies the dangers technology poses to society in regard to relationships through the erosion of trust and promoting paranoia. Aunt Nettie oversees the Cannon-Chastanet family from the start, spying on them through RegiChips placed on all citizens of Surplus at birth. (Jen, 2020) “. . . we Surplus were now RegiChipped at birth and easily trackable.” (p. 28). The omnipresence of this surveillance casts a shadow over the family's daily lives, not only forming their behavior but also distorting their interactions with each other. The technological control is so deep rooted that it even directs the right of having children, (Jen, 2020) “.....for us Surplus, the limit was one pregnancy per couple,” (p. 9)

Grant and Eleanor's parenting of Gwen is deeply shaped by the fear of Aunt Nettie's gaze. The surveillance is a constant factor in their lives, (Jen, 2020) “Of course, our house was automated—as all Surplus houses were required to be, by law” (p.10). While they encourage Gwen's passion for baseball, their baseball matches are conducted in secret, with Grant hacking RegiChips and holding practices and matches in abandoned locations to avoid detection. This concealed existence fosters a constant sense of anxiety, as the family must weigh the risk of exposure against their desire to nurture Gwen's talents. Their interactions become coded, careful, and laced with unspoken fear. Digital surveillance, therefore, not only limits their physical freedom but also forces them to self-censor, compromising the authenticity of their familial bonds.

The most striking betrayal of trust facilitated by Aunt Nettie occurs through Ondi Nickelhoff. Once Gwen's closest friend, Ondi's relationship with the Cannon-Chastanets deteriorates after Aunt Nettie intervenes in her family's life and they are Cast off. Ondi's role in her grandfather's death, an event linked to digital rule and punitive policing, makes her harbor resentment, blaming Gwen's family for the consequences they escaped but she endured. (Jen, 2020) “Because it wasn't just her parents who believed we had steered her wrong— because she blamed us, too. For her family being Cast Off. For her grandfather's death.” (p. 39) Aunt Nettie's invisible hand worsens the rift between the two girls, transforming a once-intimate friendship into a site of betrayal. Her betrayal is filled with animosity and petty tactics to humiliate Gwen, (Jen, 2020) “How could she do this? Ondi was egging them on! She was! She was getting them to boo!” (p. 38).

When Ondi later exposes the Underground Baseball League by playing with an unaltered RegiChip, it is a digitally mediated act of revenge, a grim reminder of how technology not only monitors relationships but manipulates them by deepening fault lines of mistrust. Ondi's reply to the confrontation of betrayal by Gwen's family was, (Jen, 2020) "Because we told Aunt Nettie we would have nothing else to do with you." (p. 48)

Technology's impact on relationships in *The Resisters* is also emphasized by the class divide between the Netted and the Surplus. Digital technology reinforces this division, creating social hierarchies that infiltrate interpersonal interactions. The Netted, with their privileges and technological integration, live in a world of luxury and convenience. The Surplus, by contrast, are subject to constant digital monitoring and control, their lives dictated by Aunt Nettie's algorithms. (Jen, 2020)

"Then came DroneDeliverers and FridgeStockers, KidTrackers and RoboSitters, ElderHelpers and YardBots, all of which reported to Aunt Nettie as dutifully as any spy network—recording our steps, our pictures, our relationships, and (back when we soon-to-Be-Surplus still had them) our careers." (p. 11)

When Gwen and Ondi enter Net U, they become anomalies, two Surplus girls surviving in a space designed for the Netted elite. Their interactions with their classmates are tinged with both fascination and disdain, as their mixed-race identities and Surplus status render them exotic outsiders. Technology intensifies this social stratification: the Netted students use their access to genetic augmentation and advanced data streams to elevate their athletic skills, while Gwen's refusal to undergo augmentation becomes a form of resistance. The stark contrast between Gwen's organic talent and her teammates' artificial improvements states the novel's larger commentary on how technology not only widens class divides but also infiltrates relationships, turning human interaction into a calculated, transactional exchange.

In addition, the use of RegiChips symbolizes how technology converts personal relations into data points. RegiChips monitors not only the physical hideouts of individuals, but also their associations, and emotional reactions. This monitization of human experience shrinks complex relations for algorithm patterns, confirming the idea that technology in restores does not only control relations, distorts them and decontrols them.

Jen also uses romantic relationships to portray intersection of technology, control and emotional intimacy. Gwen's relationship with Coach Woody Link serves as an example of how digital technology shapes power dynamics and emotional bonds. Initially, their connection appears rooted in mutual admiration, Woody recognizes Gwen's extraordinary talent, while Gwen finds herself drawn to his mentorship. However, as Woody becomes increasingly absorbed in the institutional pressures of Net U and the AutoAmerican Olympic team, their relationship becomes a position of conflict.

Woody's insistence that Gwen undergo genetic augmentation reflects the eroding influence of technology on their bond. His plea is not about improving Gwen's performance; it is about aligning her with the technological expectations of their society. (Jen, 2020) "Net U knows you didn't Upgrade. And they're not okay with it." (p. 117). Gwen's refusal to alter herself depicts a



fundamental ideological rift between them: for Woody, technology represents progress and opportunity; for Gwen, it symbolizes submission and betrayal. He tries to persuade her through emotional blackmail, (Jen, 2020) “And what about us? Do you not care about us?” (p. 117). But her resolve doesn’t falter. Their breakup is, therefore, not just a personal rupture, it is a rebellion against the digitized conformity that AutoAmerica demands.

Ondi’s relationship with Winny Wannabe offers a contrasting view. Unlike Gwen, Ondi succumbs to the temptation of technological enhancement, undergoing multiple procedures, including PermaDerm. She does this in a desperate attempt to embrace the Netted class. The augmentation to enhance her skills is an act to stay in the Autoamerica team. Her romance with Winny becomes a strategic alliance, one intended to boost her social standing and facilitate her CrossOver. This is a transactional relationship controlled by the same technology through which they are governed. Jen defines their relationship as fake and based on social media rather than affection and true love. Finally, Ondi’s and Winny’s relationship reveals that even affection between two people is mediated by technology, and love becomes a mere search for status.

At the same time, *The Resisters* also presents the beauty of human connection as something that can overcome technological tyranny. The Underground Baseball League represents much more than baseball; it is a rebellion against the diminishing value of human life by technology. By hacking RegiChips and assembling in clandestine places, the Cannon-Chastanets and their people regain their power, creating relationships of mutual opposition rather than official structures.

The manner in which Gwen relates to her parents also depicts this rebellious streak. Eleanor’s fight against toxins in the Surplus fields and her legal struggle with Aunt Nettie emphasize the novel’s main themes; technology may override human connection, but people can unite against it. Despite, the device that is implanted on her head leading to her thoughts being interfered with, Eleanor does not lose the connection she has with her family. It is an important lesson that although technology affects behavior, it is unable to eliminate real affection.

This theme is also well illustrated in the conclusion of the novel when Gwen’s grief, after Eleanor’s death, becomes a source of inspiration for others across the country to rally against Aunt Nettie. This shows that technology may monitor and regulate feelings but it cannot dominate the raw power of human emotions. That is why the characters of the Aunt Nellie’s All-Star Resistance League and their tattoos of Eleanor symbolically indicate that people’s interpersonal relationships, which originated in the conditions of technological slavery, can only grow and become stronger.

Here, Gish Jen provides a subtle exploration of people’s relationships as influenced by technology. Aunt Nettie fractures the trust while RegiChips and gene enhancements change the relations between people. In the setting of exploitation through technologies, Jen threads the true human values of relationships, which have not been lost. This is evident through Gwen’s unyielding love for her family, her rebellion against technological domination and the unity of the Underground League.

Based on this, it can be concluded that relationships are still omnipotent in the hearts of people, even if the contemporary technology is capable of creating fake relations and control them. The best way of countering the advanced form of oppression, both physical and emotional, is turned into the main focus of this story. Jen's characters convey the message that despite the fact that technology reigns over the world, human relationships are capricious and deeply felt. They provide solace and give power that even Aunt Nettie is unable to manage.

## 2. The depiction of identity construction and transformation in a society shaped by technological advancements and pervasive surveillance

*The Resisters* offers a perspective on selfhood and collective identity under surveillance through three characters, namely Gwen, Ondi, and Eleanor, and it relates to identity in relation to resistance. This paper examines how surveillance technologies eliminate personal identity, impose collective identity and instigate rebellious behaviors that alter these identities at the individual and mass level.

Then there is Aunt Nettie who turns into a mental projection that hinders the characters from attaining personal identity. The novel shows how, when people are under constant surveillance, they develop duality in self, which is the self that conforms to what is expected of them by digital domination, and the desiring self which yearns for liberation from surveillance. Grant and Eleanor are representatives of this double life. Being in the Surplus class they are fully aware of the fact that Aunt Nettie always watches them, a reality that makes them conform to docile subordination, while inwardly rebelling. This duplicity reminisces Michel Foucault's concept of the "panopticon," where the fear of constant surveillance forces individuals to self-regulate, leading to a fissured sense of self (Foucault, 1977).

Grant, for instance, is a former teacher whose profession was made obsolete by automation, a loss that strips him not only of his job but also of a core part of his identity. Technology's control over Grant's life is such that even his wife cannot differentiate between him and Aunt Nettie, (Jen, 2020) "Indeed, Aunt Nettie had so much data on me that not even Eleanor could tell it was not I who had composed the messages she received from my account." (p. 13). His shift from an educator to an "Unretrainable" to working on techs to disrupt technological control, represents a reclaiming of selfhood, an act of resistance that allows him to rebuild his identity beyond the roles Aunt Nettie imposes.

Gwen's struggle to maintain her sense of self under Aunt Nettie's watchful eye further deepens this theme. As a gifted pitcher, she holds a unique position, both a potential threat to the system and a valuable asset for AutoAmerica's nationalistic ambitions against Chin, Russia. The government's continuous attempts to recruit Gwen for Net U's baseball team and eventually for the national Olympic team depict how surveillance-driven societies exploit individuals, plummeting their identities to their advantage for the state. Gwen's refusal to undergo genetic augmentation is not only a rejection of physical enhancement; it is a symbolic stand against the technological elimination of her original self. (Jen, 2020) "But now the question was, Would I do it? Yes or no. "I would prefer not to," I said." (p. 117)

By preserving her natural abilities, Gwen proclaims control over her body and mind, resisting the state's efforts to redefine her identity fitting to its own ideals of technological superiority. She reclaims her identity by transforming it the way she wanted. As Grants states, (Jen, 2020) "For she had returned Gwen 2.0, as Eleanor and I joked—a version of herself even stronger and more beautiful and more affectionate than the Gwen we had known." (p. 123)

Ondi's trajectory presents a more complex portrait of fractured identity. As Gwen's childhood friend and catcher, Ondi initially embraces the community developed by Gwen's parents. However, after her family suffers repercussions for resisting authority, including her grandfather's death, Ondi becomes prone to Aunt Nettie's influence and molds herself to its will. (Jen, 2020) "If she was once rebellious in a feisty way that spoke of youth and beans, she now seemed belligerent, a girl with a chip on her shoulder. To go with her RegiChip, a kind of PermaChip." (p. 44). She undergoes genetic alterations to improve her athletic performance, adopts the skin-lightening PermaDerm, and distances herself from her Surplus roots. (Jen, 2020) "Why should I look coppertoned?" (p. 94). Ondi's transformation reflects the psychological toll of living under constant surveillance and control. Her choices are not simply about personal ambition; they are desperate attempts to build a new identity within a system that punishes disobedience. Yet, her growing hostility toward Gwen and her longing to "Cross Over" into the Netted class expose the internal fragmentation caused by surveillance, a struggle between self-preservation and authenticity. (Jen, 2020) "Maybe I was myself personified," said Ondi. "And maybe I am still." (p. 94)

Beyond individual identities, *The Resisters* critiques how AI and surveillance impose stubborn collective identities, reinforcing systemic divisions. AutoAmerica's population is split into two classes: The Netted and the Surplus. This technological discrimination creates collective identities rooted not in genuine community but in artificial, state-imposed hierarchies. The Netted's identity is shaped by their affiliation to technology. They are, in essence, products of Aunt Nettie, their social status directly linked to genetic modification, AI-driven career placement, and state-sanctioned privileges. Their collective identity relies on the marginalization of the Surplus, an act that fosters a false sense of superiority. Instead of the formation of real relationships, the Netted gel is around algorithmic justification, and their worth is defined by technology.

For the Surplus, collective identity is formed by technology, in the negative sense, not in the way that one is privileged but in the way that one is oppressed. The Surplus are not only excluded from the privileges of AI; the Surplus can be defined by their reliance on it. Aunt Nettie reduces them to mere statistics who are monitored through RegiChips and given rations depending on the value calculated by the machine. The Surplus are dehumanized through this identity since it makes them look more like a homogenous mass than a group of individuals.

However, this state of affairs is quite nightmarish and cannot be acceptable to *The Resisters*. It rejects it by demonstrating how authentic community occurs in response to technical domination. The underground baseball league becomes a powerful symbol of this redefinition. Within the league, Surplus players form a community based on mutual trust, shared risk, and

collective hope. The league cultivates a new kind of identity, one rooted in human connection rather than algorithmic classification. (Jen, 2020) "...this was a family—a group in which, as my mother used to say, everyone has a part of you and you have a part of everyone" (p. 36)

The renaming of the league to the "Aunt Nellie's All-Star Resistance League" after Eleanor's death cements this transformation. Eleanor's activism and ultimate martyrdom inspires a collective identity based on resistance which turns her into a symbol of human agency. This identity changes captures the collective imaginations of Aunt Nettie's oppressive class technology spectrum. It proposes a form of unity based not on imposed division, but instead on common adversity. *The Resisters* proposes that both personal and social identities are, (or at least should be) open to change. It is through change that one actively challenges and struggles against the grip of technology. In this case, the novel does not define the concept of resistance as the mere act of rebellion, but as the process of self-actualization as well as collective bonding.

Gwen's story best elucidates this type of resistance as a form of transforming others. This change of identity is because she rebels against genetic modification, rejects Net U's belief and turns back to the Surplus community. Gwen chooses to be herself instead of being a mere product of technology; therefore, she takes a stand on what makes a person human instead of the common notion that one is a product of the environment – in this case, the technology.

In the same way, Eleanor shows how the concept of resistance can change one's identity. Eleanor is portrayed as a silent justice fighter who becomes more active as the novel progresses. The act of her arrest and brain implant depicts the lengths that Aunt Nettie is willing to go to stop rebellion and defiance. Aunt Nettie's systematic oppression burns to water any dissenting voice. But this violation is only one of the many layers of harm done to Eleanor's being. In death, she transforms into an identity that brings together the Surplus and in doing so enables them to forge a collective identity built on defiance.

Even Ondi's struggles, though filled with betrayal, suggest the possibility of transformation. In spite of her early turn toward Aunt Nettie's promises, her return to the underground league points to an uncertain reclaiming of self. Ondi's journey features the novel's subtle depiction of identity under surveillance, a reminder that even those complicit in technological control can resist, rebuild, and transform themselves. The community's understanding of the reason for betrayal shows that everyone is susceptible to the manipulation of authority, (Jen, 2020)

"You're not the first one to seek to appease your captors," said one person.

"The desire to submit to authority is as old as mankind," said another. (p. 56)

And they deserve a chance to reclaim their identity.

Through *The Resisters*, this study critiques the AI-dominated world not only for its surveillance but for its distortion of identity. The novel reveals how technological control fractures individual selfhood, imposes artificial collective identities, and promotes systemic oppression. However, it also redefines identity as something fluid, formed in resistance, strengthened by human connection, and reclaimed through acts of defiance. Gwen, Eleanor, and even Ondi prompt

this ongoing struggle, each showing that identity is not dictated by AI algorithms but by the human tendency to resist, adapt, and create.

In this sense, the novel depicts the identity of an individual in a surveillance state as fractured but enduring, vulnerable but ever-changing. It proposes that although technology attempts to dictate who we should be, true identity is forged in the margins of where resistance is possible and people reclaim their agency, communities mobilize, and there is collective action to overpower the forces that seek to render them peripheral.

### 3. The strategies employed by characters to navigate and resist technological control.

Gwen Cannon-Chastanet is the most powerful representation of resistance in the novel. She epitomizes the indomitable human spirit that will not succumb to automation or be “optimized” for political or technological gain. Gwen’s gift, her natural talent for pitching, becomes a struggle in itself, as AutoAmerica’s government seeks to negotiate her acceptance into Net U and genetically augment her to take advantage of her abilities. That said, in the case of Gwen, she is adamantly opposed to this form of technology. Performing enhancements using technology is something she abstains from, because to her these are not mere ‘upgrades’ but an affront to her original being. Her struggle embodies a core idea of the novel, which is that the essence of being human is found in untouched, organic potential. In refusing to “Cross Over” into the Netted class and preserving her natural talents, Gwen enforces that, technology should not define identity, but rather, identity should be rooted in one’s originality.

Even with her increased fame as a star player for Net U, her defiance is of a more personal nature. Gwen lives in an AI governed world, but there are times when she chooses to challenge the system and other times when she chooses to follow it. She does not join the team until her mother is released, yet does not submit to the system's genetic compliance. This represents her deeply individualistic struggle. Her return to the underground league and SurplusVille, at the novel's end, highlights the choice to reject AutoAmerica's digitized ‘success’ – and embrace a narrative of cultivated originality.

Eleanor, Gwen’s mother, resists the erosion of human essence through her ferocious legal advocacy and moral clarity. A former lawyer and lifelong activist, Eleanor becomes a folk hero for the Surplus, using the law, a basic human system, to expose the state’s exploitations. She fights AutoAmerica’s environmental poisoning of Surplus fields and its mental impairment of Surplus citizens through NettieFood, handling both battles as more than just legal cases, they were existential struggles for the dignity and health of an entire population. Eleanor even resisted the prospect of becoming the Netted not once but twice. (Jen, 2020) “While Eleanor had been asked to Cross Over twice, she had refused twice, too, saying she would never be co-opted.” (p. 33)

Eleanor’s defiance goes beyond legal activism. She refuses to yield to Aunt Nettie’s authority even when threatened directly. (Jen, 2020) “We’re going to fight,” Eleanor promised. “We’re going to fight with everything we have.” (p. 58). Her final act of resistance, refusing to cooperate with Special Enforcers, ends up in her abduction and brain implant. This transforms her



into a martyr for the cause. Although Aunt Nettie physically modifies Eleanor, using technology to invade her very consciousness, she surpasses this violation. In death, she becomes a symbol of human willpower, her memory stimulating the rise of Aunt Nellie's All-Star Resistance League. Through Eleanor, *The Resisters* suggests that human essence stays even when the body and mind are disrupted by technology. Her transformation into a collective symbol reflects the belief that identity and human spirit can endure technological oppression.

Grant, Gwen's father and the novel's narrator, resists in quieter but equally impactful ways. As a former professor displaced by AI-driven automation, Grant deals with a deep sense of loss, not just of his career but of a role that once defined his identity. Stripped of traditional purpose, Grant repurposes himself as Gwen's coach, tutor and mentor, reclaiming his human essence through familial bonds and the act of teaching, a basic human exchange of knowledge, passion, and emotion.

Grant also adapts to AutoAmerica's surveillance by developing subtle methods of resistance. He hacks the RegiChips of Gwen's teammates, allowing them to elude Aunt Nettie's gaze during underground baseball games. The act, however risky and dangerous, was his way of resistance. (Jen, 2020) "If we wanted to play baseball, we were going to have to hack the chips—a daunting prospect." (p. 28). He also finds a way to communicate with Gwen without being monitored. "'Watch for the pigeon.' I closed the window. 'It will either have a little package attached to its leg or a bigger one strapped to its chest.'" (p. 77). His use of analog communication, becomes a small but impactful act of defiance, stressing the novel's belief that human ingenuity cannot be fully suppressed by technology. While Grant may not be as outspoken as Eleanor or as bold as Gwen, his quiet resilience reflects an important aspect of human essence: the capacity to adapt and resist through emotional bonds and creative problem-solving.

As Parents, Grant and Eleanor resisted the technological control themselves and for their daughter as, they wanted her to have the best in her life and to live freely. (Jen, 2020) "We want you to have what freedom you can," Eleanor finished. (p. 64) The acts of resistance may be small but their impact was profound. They were keen on giving Gwen a natural and authentic life. (Jen, 2020) "...we would not eat the food purveyed by the ubiquitous mall trucks. Of course, the mall-truck food—NettieFood, as we called it—was free. In fact, we Surplus received Living Points for eating it..." (p. 17). This act of growing their own food and not eating the food provided by Aunt Nettie, however trivial, was their way to preserve human essence. (Jen, 2020) "Let's just say that our household grew our own food, thank you, and that we shared it with our friends, who viewed it as lifesaving." (p. 17). They employed strategies to claim familial privacy, as the technology was constantly surveilling them and their conversations. (Jen, 2020) "...we had started running both a white noisemaker and a voice scrambler at night." (p. 32)

Ondi's journey is more complex, demonstrating the psychological cost of technological control. In the beginning, Ondi shares a deep bond with Gwen, joining her to play baseball and engaging in non-consumerist activities like knitting and gardening — acts of quiet defiance against AutoAmerica's hyper-automated culture. However, after her family faces brutal repercussions for resisting authority, Ondi turns to technology as a means of survival. She undergoes genetic improvements to enhance her athletic performance, lightens her skin with PermaDerm to fit in

with the Netted, and begins dating Winny Wannabe, a former Surplus desperate to "Cross Over" into the Netted class permanently. Ondi's internal conflict is reflected in these decisions. She adapts to the AI-dominated world, believing that it is the only path to safety and success.

Nonetheless, Ondi's story is not one of simple surrender. Her continued rift with Gwen, her return to the underground league, and her role in helping the Cannon-Chastanets after Eleanor's abduction suggest an enduring resistance. Ondi's character development illustrates how the erosion of humanity due to technological oppression forces conflict between existence and being. The wavering loyalty and moral ambiguity represents an overarching conflict that, in an epoch of AI-defined identity and opportunities, the struggle for identity and self-definition is decidedly not straightforward; it is complex and deeply human.

Apart from individual characters, *The Resisters* portrays the attempt to preserve humanity through collective resistance. The underground baseball league acts as a symbol of grassroots defiance, where trust, collaboration, and collective risk among the player's fosters reclaiming control (Jen, 2020)

"Eleanor and I looked at each other in amazement as the chanting morphed into,  
To hell with Aunt Nettie! Let's play ball!

To hell with Aunt Nettie! Let's play ball!" (p. 57)

When Eleanor dies and the league rechristens itself, "Aunt Nellie's All-Star Resistance League," it stops being merely a sports team and becomes an unparalleled emblem of human unity. This form of collective defiance changes the meaning of resistance from a personal act to a collective endeavor in restoring human essence. The league's existence shows that despite the rule of AI and surveillance, there is still a human bond. The protests which follow Eleanor's death, an outrage on Aunt Nettie's control, drives this point home. While AutoAmerica relies on AI to faction and dominate its populace, these acts of massive defiance illustrate that humanity thrives in shared rebellion and emotional solidarity.

This study illustrates the paradox of the human essence being lost and saved in a modern world filled with technology through *The Resisters*. The novel reviews the dehumanizing effects of AI but ultimately reaffirms that the spirit of humanity survives, even if loud or quiet. Eleanor's legal rebellion, Gwen's unwavering sincerity, Grant's deep-seated persistence, and even Ondi's inner turmoil all encompass the multifaceted forms of resistance. From inner conviction and communal ties, to quiet insubordination, each figure shows or copes in such a manner that illustrates the book's fundamental premise that although technology can invade one's being as deeply as the body and mind, the heart of what it means to be human is to resist, to relate, and to take control.

## Conclusion

This research paper illustrates how *The Resisters* redefines individual and collective identity as perpetually reconfigured through engagement with technology. When Aunt Nettie tries to integrate the core of artificial intelligence into every sphere of life to dominate human actions, the novel speaks of the human spirit that can never be subdued by the system. Characters such as Gwen, Grant, and Eleanor serve as symbols of emotional and technological resistance. They regain

their agency in defiance and through relationships that have not been programmed into the AI's understanding.

Beyond the parameters where the story takes place, this study raises further questions regarding the contemporary human experience. It reflects the current issue associated with the AI interference in the concept of self-identity and social interactions, either through the surveillance capitalism or genetic manipulation. By portraying AutoAmerica's Netted and Surplus classes, Jen explains to the rest of the world that socio-economic inequalities are aggravated by the differential access to technical facilities. By depicting how relationships become both regulated and strained by AI, the study compels the audience to confront technology's impact on how we live and who we become.

To sum up, this research shows that *The Resisters* does not just portray a dystopian future, a world overtaken by technology, but portrays the attempts to reclaim what it means to be human. While AutoAmerica's AI attempts to oversee and dictate the minutiae of existence, the research argues that the core of human identity resides in the immeasurable and unpredictable realm of relationships, emotions, and a collective form of defiance. Jen's characters highlight that in a world ruled by algorithms, resistance can be crafted by, and be as transformational as, authentic connections. Even under the rule of AI, the core of humanity is demonstrated through our capacity to feel, to love, and rebel. And it is a force that technology cannot eliminate.

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