



The Loss of Self: A Posthumanist Reading of Dave Eggers's *The Circle*

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ABSTRACT

Posthumanism is an approach that seeks to analyse the influence of science and technology on human beings. Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013) serves as a cautionary narrative, warning against the potentially harmful effects of advanced technologies on humanity. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the impact of digital technology on identity, selfhood, and social relationships. This research employs posthumanism as its primary theoretical framework. The analysis of *The Circle* suggests that humanity has already transitioned into the posthuman condition and does not need to wait for the future to realise it. The central character, Maebelline Renner Holland, may be regarded as a posthuman subject, as she embodies a cyborgian fusion of digital identity and lived reality. The findings illuminate the detrimental impact of emerging technologies on individuals and society as a whole, while also underscoring the importance of recognising their far-reaching implications.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Technology; Cyborg; Digital Identity; Dave Eggers; *The Circle*.

INTRODUCTION

As computers and other technologies have become increasingly integrated into daily life—particularly in the twenty-first century—writers have begun to explore the darker aspects of technological advancement through literary works. Innovations such as the evolution of personal computers, the internet, and digital communication networks play a significant role in shaping the backdrop of digital dystopian literature. While these technologies offer new opportunities for connectivity and information exchange, they also raise critical questions about identity and the loss of personal autonomy. The internet, cyberspace, and human interaction with the digital world and social media have contributed to the formation of fragmented and constantly shifting identities. Advancements in science and technology compel us to reconsider fundamental questions about what it means to be human. These concerns are explored in *The Circle*, which illustrates how human life may be distorted in an era of relentless technological progress. The novel focuses on the potential dangers of techno-scientific advancements on the individual level and reveals how omnipresent online identity can negatively impact the construction of personal identity. The narrative depicts Maebelline Renner Holland, who secures a position at the world's most influential technology corporation, the Circle, with the assistance of her friend Annie. The company is led by the so-called "Three Wise Men" (Eggers, 2013, p. 19): Tom Stenton, Eamon Bailey, and Ty Gospodinov, a brilliant technological innovator. The Circle consolidates all aspects of online activity into a unified digital identity known as "TruYou" (Eggers, 2013, p. 21).

The Circle envisions a future world in which the ubiquity of virtual realities precipitates the fragmentation of the self and the emergence of communities that transcend the constraints of physical space. This paper examines how Eggers's *The Circle* critiques the social and cultural consequences of complete digital integration on individual identity. The study explores how digital immersion, as depicted in the novel, reconfigures subjectivity and reconceptualises the human body as a data-driven entity. Drawing on theoretical frameworks developed by

scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles and Donna J. Haraway, this analysis situates *The Circle* within broader discourses on posthumanism and the cyborg, examining how the text engages with these concepts to interrogate the evolving relationship between humans and technology.

METHODOLOGY

Posthumanism presents a conceptual framework for critically re-examining what it means to be human and investigating the emerging possibilities within the evolving interactions between humans and machines. Posthuman figures are defined as a "union of the human with the intelligent machine" (Hayles, 1999, p.2), and are distinguished from traditional humans either by degree or by type. Hayles (2012) argues that "our interactions with digital media are embodied, and they have bodily effects at the physical level" (p. 3). She further asserts that physical engagement with digital technologies constitutes a form of embodiment that "takes the form of extended cognition, in which human agency and thought are enmeshed within larger networks that extend beyond the desktop computer into the environment" (Hayles, 2012, p. 3). Embodiment is thus central to the formation of posthuman identity, as it encompasses the integration of human bodies and minds with technological systems. She explores the implications of translating bodies into information, describing "how information lost its body, how the cyborg was constructed in the postwar years as technological artifact and cultural icon, and how the human became the posthuman" (Hayles, 1999, p. 291). She also notes that "cybernetics was born . . . as a way to maximize human potential in a world that is in essence chaotic and unpredictable" (Hayles, 1999, p. 291). According to Hayles, the digital age has compromised the boundaries of the human body, driven by a desire to transcend physical limitations and transform the body into data. Hayles's posthumanist perspective highlights the erosion of subjectivity that accompanies the dissolution of bodily boundaries.

Hayles argues that the posthuman condition arises not from physical transformations of the body but from changes in the ways individuals perceive entities. Similarly, Haraway posits that, in the modern era, humans are deeply integrated within technological systems, which increasingly blur the distinctions between humans and machines. According to Haraway (1991), "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (p. 150). This cyborg identity facilitates the transcendence of traditional societal roles and relationships. The figure of Man is rendered obsolete, leading to the conclusion that it is not possible to revert "ideologically or materially" (Haraway, 1991, p.162). Haraway (1991) further contends that "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (p. 154). The cyborg undermines established categorical separations between reality and virtuality, the mental and the physical, and the biological organism and mechanical systems. Consequently, "bodies are maps of power and identity" (Haraway, 1991, p. 180). The concept of the cyborg involves simultaneously "both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories" (Haraway, 1991, p. 181).

The cyborg serves as both a significant and unsettling representation of technological advancement, undermining the conventional distinctions between humans and machines. In a similar vein, the delineation between the real and the cybernetic has emerged as a significant focus of scholarly inquiry. The cyborg figure plays a pivotal role in reconfiguring concepts of identity and community within the increasingly interconnected interface between human beings and technology. This phenomenon reflects a broader societal and cultural shift from an organic model toward a polymorphous system of information exchange. Fundamentally, a cyborg represents a synthesis of organic and mechanical elements. Haraway employs the cyborg metaphor to critically examine and deconstruct socially constructed and gendered identities. She characterises the cyborg as a hybrid entity, describing it as both "machine and organism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149) and as "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). Within this framework, even individuals utilising mobile devices may be considered cyborgs—humans integrated with technological systems. Haraway's use of the cyborg image highlights the extent to which human subjectivity is increasingly embedded in and influenced by technological environments.

The posthuman subject is defined as "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (Hayles, 1999, p. 3). Its construction is closely "involved with boundary questions, particularly when the redrawing of boundaries changes the locus of selfhood" (Hayles, 1999, p. 279). As such, the posthuman framework offers conceptual "resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines" (Hayles, 1999, p. 287). When the human self is no longer regarded as a stable or discrete entity, the concept of the other is likewise destabilised, leading to increased ambiguity in traditional classifications and the boundaries that define them. As articulated by Hayles, the posthuman transcends conventional understandings of selfhood. Therefore, "it is not a question of

leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in . . . ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis" (Hayles, 1999, p. 291). Nevertheless, the enhancement of human potential within the posthuman paradigm does not necessitate the direct neural integration of computer hardware for all individuals. As Hayles (1999) asserts, "The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components" (p. 4).

Accordingly, the posthuman condition facilitates a reconfiguration of human subjectivity and agency by challenging and transcending conventional boundaries. Hayles (1999) emphasises that part of becoming posthuman is "to acknowledge that we have always been posthuman" (p. 279). It is through "the seriated history of cybernetics" (Hayles, 1999, p. 291) that she supports this claim. Simultaneously, Hayles argues that the posthuman displaces the notion of a natural self, which is a central tenet of the humanist tradition. Instead, the posthuman emerges from the idea that human intelligence is co-produced with advanced and intelligent machines. As Hayles (1999) explains, "there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (p. 3). Accordingly, the boundaries that once separated humans from machines no longer hold firm.

Contemporary computing technologies have enabled the expression of cyborg identity within digital environments. Within popular culture, the cyborg motif commonly addresses issues of identity and subjectivity, emphasising concepts of fluidity and the breakdown of fixed boundaries. The growing normalisation of online interaction has further integrated technological elements into the understanding of selfhood. Accordingly, digital identity can be understood as a form of cyborg identity, marked by an ongoing process of change that signifies the gradual breakdown of distinctions between male and female, as well as between the physical body and its digital representation. Moreover, the emergence of virtual worlds further complicates the distinction between reality and fiction by enabling the formation of social relationships within artificial spaces.

CYBORG IDENTITY IN EGGERS'S *THE CIRCLE*

The first words of the novel — "MY GOD, MAE thought. It's heaven" (Eggers, 2013, p. 1) — immediately introduce the reader to Mae's subjective experience. These words illustrate how her consciousness is simultaneously distinct from other subjectivities and reliant upon them for existential significance. Initially, Mae is portrayed as a Cartesian subject, characterised by self-awareness and rational observation. The narrative's use of past tense, combined with the initial framing of Mae as a Cartesian subject, subtly foreshadows the eventual fragmentation of her identity into a digitised construct, thereby challenging her coherence as a subject within Western humanist philosophy. Additionally, the past tense contributes to the novel's dystopian tone, suggesting that the impact of social media on human consciousness is irreversible and fully realised. The depiction of the technology corporation in quasi-theological terms, as an object of worship, indicates the role of social media as a dominant force in Mae's life. Mae progressively disengages from tangible reality and becomes estranged from the external world. The opening words also provide insight into Mae's internal state by revealing her thoughts, emotions, and actions, thereby demonstrating social media's expansive capacity to transform human consciousness. The company's totalising operating platform, named TruYou, implies that the digital self is regarded as the sole authentic identity.

Mae's parents and her ex-boyfriend, Mercer, represent her primary ties to the world beyond the Circle's physical and virtual domains. They criticise the growing influence of technology on Mae, serving as voices of resistance to its encroachment on authentic human experience. Mae's parents initially express approval of her employment at a highly prestigious company. However, as Mae's involvement with the Circle deepens, her behaviour undergoes changes that elicit their concern and disapproval. Under pressure from her supervisors — who insist that active online engagement is an essential aspect of her role — Mae becomes constantly involved in social media, frequently posting content and checking her phone. Mae begins to feel incomplete without it. Even during a family dinner, she is unable to switch off her device, feeling compelled to stay updated on the latest online activity. As a result, she is often distracted and pays little attention to her surroundings. Furthermore, the frequent beeping of her phone irritates her mother, as illustrated in the following lines:

"Her mother continued. "I was going to thank you, Mae, for all you've done to improve your father's health, and my own sanity. And I wanted to toast Mercer, too, as part of our family, and to thank him for his beautiful work." She paused, as if expecting a buzz to sound any moment" (Eggers, 2013, p. 256).

This quote highlights the anxiety Mae's mother experiences while attempting to engage with her daughter, who appears to be primarily preoccupied with her mobile phone. Mae is absorbed in reading messages rather than paying attention to her parents, offering hundreds of similar responses each day. This intense attachment signals

a transformation in her identity. Mae has constructed an online persona. Social media serves as both a platform and a mechanism for the development of identity. Mercer attempts to make Mae understand that her behaviour has changed since she started working at the Circle. He criticises her for being consumed by the virtual world and neglecting the real world and those who care about her. Mercer draws Mae's attention to the fact that she is so distracted by her virtual self that she is "not *doing* anything interesting anymore" (Eggers, 2013, p. 261). He tells her:

"You're not seeing anything, saying anything. The weird paradox is that you think you're at the center of things, and that makes your opinions more valuable, but you yourself are becoming less vibrant. I bet you haven't done anything offscreen in months. Have you?" (Eggers, 2013, p. 261)

Mercer conveys his regret that their communication no longer occurs face-to-face, stating, "Every time I see or hear from you, it's through this filter. You send me links, you quote someone talking about me, you say you saw a picture of me on someone's wall. . . . It's always this third-party assault" (Eggers, 2013, p. 131). As he observes, Mae and the people at the Circle will simply "live, willingly, joyfully, under constant surveillance, watching each other always, commenting on each other, voting and liking and disliking each other, smiling and frowning, and otherwise doing nothing much else" (Eggers, 2013, p. 367). Mercer's views echo Hayles's perspective that, with the widespread adoption of virtual reality technologies in contemporary society, individuals are increasingly inclined to neglect the physical aspects of their lives in favour of focusing on their virtual selves. The condition of virtuality, according to Hayles (1999), arises as a direct consequence of privileging information as "more mobile, more important, more essential than material forms" (p. 19).

Hayles (1999) underscores the necessity of critically examining "the erasures that went into creating the condition of virtuality" (p. 20) and ultimately advocates for an embodied conception of the posthuman—one that embraces the possibilities offered by information technologies without succumbing to "fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality" (Hayles, 1999, p. 5). In this framework, Eggers's narrative foregrounds embodiment over virtuality, with particular emphasis on certain characters such as Mae's parents and, more specifically, Mercer, who emphasise the significance of reconnecting with and valuing tangible, lived experience. Mae's perspective shifts markedly following her employment at the Circle. The characters in *The Circle* become increasingly reliant on the corporation's technologies to such an extent that existence without them appears almost untenable. The most evident example of this is Mae's unawareness of her escalating dependence on technological augmentation—culminating in her sense of incompleteness without her prosthetic wrist monitors—as demonstrated in the following quotation:

"It had taken a few weeks to get used to sleeping with her wrist monitors—she'd scratched her face one night, and cracked her right screen another—but Circle engineers had improved the design, replacing the rigid screens with more flexible, unbreakable ones, and now she felt incomplete without them" (Eggers, 2013, p. 333).

Humans have been cyborgs since the time they used tools such as sticks. Today, devices such as mobile phones, contact lenses, biotechnological products, and other technologies blur the line between organic and artificial life. Gray (2001) argues that it is politics that establishes the standards recognised in posthumanism, and the most significant consequence of techno-scientific politics is the cyborgization of the human subject (p. 11). Hinchliffe (2019) suggests that the main characters in *The Circle*, especially Mae, "are literally transformed into cyborgs" (p. 56). By becoming a cyborg for the company she works for, Mae ultimately weakens her relationships with her parents and friends. At one point, her trainer, Jared, tells her that they never want the customers "to think they're dealing with a faceless entity" (Eggers, 2013, p. 49), and thus she should "always be sure to inject humanity into the process" (Eggers, 2013, p. 49). From the moment she joins the Circle, Mae's body becomes penetrated by various technologies. Unaware of her transformation and by relinquishing her subjectivity to embrace that of the company, Mae embraces the idea that "No robots work here" (Eggers, 2013, p. 49).

The Circle functions as a cultural artefact that encapsulates a pivotal juncture in twenty-first-century Western history—namely, the ascendancy of surveillance capitalism and the consequent transformation of social life through digital technologies. The novel dramatises a cultural shift away from the valorisation of personal privacy toward the embrace of hyper-visibility. This transition reflects a historical moment characterised by increasing erosion of the boundaries between public and private spheres, propelled by social media, pervasive data surveillance, and ubiquitous connectivity. Eggers's narrative delivers a trenchant cultural critique of contemporary society, capturing the ethos of Silicon Valley and its pervasive influence on global cultural practices. *The Circle* illustrates how technology reshapes societal norms, collective values, and cultural heritage, reflecting and amplifying contemporary developments. Eggers highlights a historical shift in Western societies where privacy increasingly becomes viewed as questionable or even subversive. Through the Circle's slogans—"SECRETS ARE LIES" (Eggers, 2013, p. 298), "SHARING IS CARING" (Eggers, 2013, p. 302), and "PRIVACY IS

THEFT" (Eggers, 2013, p. 303)— the text conveys an ideological transformation that positions transparency as a moral imperative. This reflects a cultural moment in which governments and corporations increasingly justified surveillance in the name of security, efficiency, and accountability—trends accelerated in the post-9/11 era. This ideological shift is dramatised through Mae's experience of "going transparent" (Eggers, 2013, p. 304), where her every action is live-streamed. Her transformation from a private individual into a public persona reflects the cultural pressures of performative identity under surveillance capitalism. The embrace of surveillance signifies the internalisation of social norms that prioritise visibility over authenticity—a hallmark of contemporary digital culture. The narrative explores Mae's transition to transparency:

"Mae's tasks were to show her watchers the beasts, to explain when necessary, and to be, through the lens worn around her neck, a window into this new world, and the world, generally, of the Circle. Every morning Mae put on a necklace, much like Stewart's, but lighter, smaller, and with the lens worn over her heart. There, it presented the steadiest view, and the widest. It saw everything that Mae saw, and often more. The quality of the raw video was such that viewers could zoom, pan, freeze and enhance. The audio was carefully engineered to focus on her immediate conversations, to record but make secondary any ambient sound or background voices. In essence, it meant that any room she was in was scannable by anyone watching; they could focus in on any corner, and, with some effort, isolate and listen to any other conversation" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 307-308).

Mae's decision to broadcast her life through a wearable camera exemplifies a broader cultural phenomenon: the normalisation of self-surveillance and public performance as defining modes of contemporary subjectivity. This reflects the realities of influencer culture and the societal pressure to engage in self-disclosure on social media platforms, where visibility functions as a form of cultural trend. Such dynamics contribute to the emergence of a posthuman identity, characterised in part by the integration of wearable computing technologies, which signify the convergence of human and machine attributes. At the Circle campus, Dr. Villalobos's clinic operates under the motto, "TO HEAL WE MUST KNOW. TO KNOW WE MUST SHARE" (Eggers, 2013, p. 150), highlighting the central role of transparency in medical care. During her examination, Mae is presented with "a silver bracelet, about three inches wide" (Eggers, 2013, p. 153), which is described as a device intended to monitor any measurable aspect, essentially everything (Eggers, 2013, p. 154).

From the first day at the Circle, Mae's body becomes increasingly adorned with and penetrated by a range of technologies. Upon agreeing to participate in the company's "Complete Health Data program" (Eggers, 2013, p. 357), Dr. Villalobos "handed Mae the dense green liquid she'd been preparing" (Eggers, 2013, p. 154), which Mae subsequently "drank it down" (Eggers, 2013, p. 154). The doctor informs her that she has "just ingested the sensor that will connect" (Eggers, 2013, p. 154) with her "wrist monitor" (Eggers, 2013, p. 154). This ingestion, occurring without Mae's explicit consent, marks a further step in her transformation into data, intensifying her estrangement from her corporeal self. The sensor monitors an extensive range of metrics, including "heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, heat flux, caloric intake, sleep duration, sleep quality, digestive efficiency, on and on" (Eggers, 2013, p. 154). This system enables the Circle to accumulate comprehensive data on Mae's physical condition. Dr. Villalobos reassures Mae that such monitoring constitutes standard protocol for all Circle employees.

Although Mae inadvertently ingests the sensor, she exhibits no resistance upon being informed of this fact by the doctor. Within this conceptual framework, the body is constructed as a mechanistic entity composed of flesh, its internal processes rendered visible, subjected to continuous surveillance and regulated accordingly. While such a perspective is intrinsically dehumanising, it remains grounded in a fundamentally Cartesian logic: Mae's corporeality is reduced to a vessel optimised for efficiency and cognitive function. This entrenched mind-body dualism is further reinforced when Ty, disguised as Kalden, introduces Mae to "an enormous red metallic box, the size of a bus" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 218-219). He identifies the apparatus by stating, "This is Stewart" (Eggers, 2013, p. 219), referring to the computer system that archives data streams generated by the live feeds of the first transparent subject. Kalden's assertion implies an unproblematic equivalence between Stewart as an embodied being and Stewart as pure informational code, thereby signifying the culmination of the second phase in Mae's transformation into a transparent subject—namely "the erasure of embodiment" (Hayles, 1999, p. xi). Equipped with advanced bracelets and an implanted nanotechnological sensor, Mae attains near-complete integration with a comprehensive network of devices, screens, and cameras. Within the institutional context of the Circle, Mae and her colleagues embody a cyborg paradigm, inhabiting a hyper-optical, sanitised cyberspace that transcends the corporeal world's encroachment upon the chemical senses. Human beings are rendered intelligible through algorithms derived from expansive data repositories.

Through the internalisation of the Circle's mottos and its quasi-religious technological language, Mae gradually adopts the modes of mediation enforced by the company's communication systems. The Circle's digital architecture alienates individuals from their inherent humanity, a condition exemplified when Mae, with evident

astonishment, discovers that Kalden is, in fact, Ty—one of the Circle's founders. Although Ty's image circulates widely within the Circle's internal media, Mae fails to recognise him due to his absence from the company's social platform. For Mae, social media has become the definitive mechanism through which existence is validated. As a result, she becomes fully immersed in the simulacrum generated by digital representation. Mae proclaims that the company's ambitions will give rise to "a world of perpetual light" (Eggers, 2013, p. 491). Rather than mobilising her voice in resistance to this digitised regime, she instead articulates its goals through the symbolic, heliocentric language of the Enlightenment ideology — thus exemplifying the extent to which social media radically reconfigures contemporary understandings of identity and subjectivity.

THE EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON HUMAN BEINGS IN EGGERS'S *THE CIRCLE*

Mae primarily embraces the Circle's culture of connectivity and transparency. Nevertheless, as she becomes more deeply entangled in the company's web, her decisions are no longer her own, and her sense of self is gradually eroded as she becomes a functional component of the company. *The Circle* illustrates how the neoliberal self in the digital era becomes computable. Mae grows increasingly obsessed with her online identity, devoting significant time to maintaining virtual connections. As a result, she becomes progressively more socially isolated, prioritising her presence on the Circle's social network over real-world interactions. This dynamic is clearly illustrated when Mae begins to focus on improving her "Participation Rank" (Eggers, 2013, p. 100) by the end of one of her workdays. She sets out to systematically climb the PartiRank ladder to attain the "T2K" (Eggers, 2013, p. 192), which designates the top two thousand most active users on the platform:

"Embarked on a flurry of activity, sending four zings and thirty-two comments and eighty-eight smiles. In an hour, her PartiRank rose to 7,288. Breaking 7,000 was more difficult, but by eight o'clock, after joining and posting in eleven discussion groups, sending another twelve zings . . . and signing up for sixty-seven more feeds, she'd done it. She was at 6,872, and turned to her Inner-Circle social feed. She was a few hundred posts behind, and she made her way through, replying to seventy or so messages, RSVPing to eleven events on campus, signing nine petitions, and providing comments and constructive criticism on four products currently in beta. By 10:16 her rank was 5,342, and again, the plateau—this time at 5,000—was hard to overcome. She wrote a series of zings about a new Circle service, allowing account holders to know whenever their name was mentioned in any messages sent from anyone else, and one of the zings, her seventh on the subject, caught fire and was rezinged 2,904 times, and this brought her PartiRank up to 3,887" (Eggers, 2013, p. 190).

This passage exemplifies the extent to which the imperative to perform effectively within digital environments constrains Mae's personal life. She devotes her evenings to engagement on the social network well into the late hours, resulting in a limited state characterised by a tenuous form of companionship. Although Mae is not entirely alone—maintaining virtual connections to many other users—she remains physically alone in her room. Superficial gestures characterise Mae's online interactions; she spends significant time zinging, smiling, bumping, and liking virtually all content appearing on her feed to enhance her "Popularity Rank" (Eggers, 2013, p. 100). Immersed in a mediated virtual reality dominated by screens, all of her communicative acts occur through digital interfaces. Moreover, Mae is preoccupied with augmenting her social status within the Circle, carefully curating her social media presence to this end. She persistently strives to attain the T2K rank:

"By ten o'clock, just when she was tiring, and when she'd gotten as high as 2,188, she had the revelation that she was young, and she was strong, and if she worked through the night, one night without sleep, she could crack the T2K while everyone else was unconscious. She fortified herself with an energy drink and gummy worms, and when the caffeine and sugar kicked in, she felt invincible. The third screen's InnerCircle wasn't enough. She turned on her OuterCircle feed, and was handling that without difficulty. She pushed forward, signing up for a few hundred more Zing feeds, starting with a comment on each. She was soon at 2,012, and now she was really getting resistance. She posted 33 comments on a product-test site and rose to 2,009" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 192-193).

Mae's online activities, however, fail to confer upon her the intrinsic value derived from genuine, cooperative human interaction. As her engagement with digital platforms intensifies, Mae frequently experiences what is described as a "black rip" (Eggers, 2013, p. 195) and a "loud tear" (Eggers, 2013, p. 195) within herself. This internal rupture, alongside an escalating sense of emotional emptiness, symbolises not only the profound void in Mae's affective life but also the inexorable trajectory of the future she is embracing. The "wave of despair" (Eggers, 2013, p. 195) that she endures may be understood as a direct consequence of her compulsive online performance within the online realm. Although Mae receives intermittent validation and recognition through her persistent presence on the Circle's platforms, such support remains superficial and simulated. It becomes apparent that she fully assumed the role of a showcase Circler. Mae's cognitive orientation undergoes a decisive shift toward the uncritical embrace of a technologically saturated future, culminating in a progressively abstracted conception of

self, especially concerning the material and embodied dimensions of existence. The deeper Mae immerses herself in the expansive domain of social media, the more screens she accumulates, exemplifying the progressive fragmentation of her identity. On her initial day at the Circle, Mae meets an employee named Brandon, who provides her with a new tablet and smartphone, transferring all of her previous data and media. Brandon then proceeds to explain to Mae:

"Now everything you had on your other phone and on your hard drive is accessible here on the tablet and your new phone, but it's also backed up in the cloud and on our servers. Your music, your photos, your messages, your data. It can never be lost. . . . It'll be here next year and next century" (Eggers, 2013, p. 43).

Mae's entire personal archive—comprising images, texts, and digital traces that constitute her identity—is preserved in the seemingly infinite liminality of the Circle's expansive data infrastructure, perpetually accessible for future extraction and use. In merging her personal and professional spheres, Mae facilitates the assimilation of her subjectivity into the technological systems that envelop her. Predictably, her sense of self becomes increasingly subsumed by the digital apparatus of the Circle. Over time, Mae's dependence on social media intensifies to the extent that she is unable to participate in any activity without simultaneously documenting or disseminating it. Her fixation on her Popularity Rank becomes so pervasive. Mae begins her first day of work equipped with two computer screens—one displaying her Customer Experience cases and the other reserved for intra-corporate communications. In addition, she is issued a mobile phone, which inundates her with a constant flow of zings, private emails, and internal correspondence. This configuration exemplifies the early stages of her integration into a system of perpetual connectivity and performance.

Originally intended to serve as functional interfaces facilitating interaction between individuals and technological systems, the screens increasingly come to dominate Mae's perceptual and cognitive experience. Gina informs Mae of the initial distribution of tasks across her screens: "Your second screen will continue to be the way you'll stay in touch with your team. That will be exclusively for CE business. Your third screen is for your social participation, in the company Circle and your wider Circle" (Eggers, 2013, pp. 95-96). Although initially presented as tools intended to enhance efficiency and productivity, these technological devices progressively evolve into mechanisms of control and surveillance. Mae's occupational responsibilities undergo a marked escalation, initially involving the operation of two screens. Her role progressively expands to include a third screen, followed by a fourth allocated for the instruction of new employees, and subsequently a fifth and sixth, thereby exemplifying the sustained intensification of her professional duties.

At this stage, she is "communicating with clients all over the planet, commanding six screens, training a new group of newbies, and altogether feeling more needed, more valued, and more intellectually stimulated than she ever thought possible" (Eggers, 2013, p. 242). The swift proliferation of duties serves to reveal the systematic diminishment of personal autonomy, obscured beneath the legitimising language of technological innovation. As Mae's responsibilities escalate, she eventually manages nine screens concurrently along with wearable devices on both wrists. Her relentless pursuit of digital omnipresence and unwavering commitment to *the Circle's* institutional imperatives result in the complete dissolution of personal solitude. Mae's identity becomes wholly absorbed into the corporation's pervasive technological and ideological infrastructure, exemplifying the profound erosion of individual autonomy in favour of total corporate assimilation.

The novel not only supports of Andrejevic's assertion that "new information and communication technologies that have had a powerfully transformative effect on . . . contemporary social relations" (2007, p. 8) in general, but it also highlights the harsh impacts of techno-scientific development on individuals who, even when physically alone, are often connected to the world through technological tools that indorse endless communication and data interchange, resulting in superficial human interaction. The company has uploaded the entirety of Mae's perception experience into the cloud, insofar as it exists beyond the boundaries of her physical body. Our online personas, as depicted through social media profiles, are mere simulacra—shadows of our true selves. *The Circle* reveals how contemporary technological progress is reshaping what it means to be human. Mercer, who urges Mae to face reality, tells her:

"You willingly become utterly socially autistic. You no longer pick up on basic human communication clues. You're at a table with three humans, all of whom are looking at you and trying to talk to you, and you're staring at a screen, searching for strangers in Dubai" (Eggers, 2013, p. 260).

Mae's sense of self becomes progressively entangled with the immaterial, cybernetic version of herself, and as her status within the PartiRank grows, so does her inflated sense of self. The mediation of social media alters her perception of reality; she no longer experiences empirical reality as she once did, nor processes information in the same way. She no longer indulges in wishes that please her; instead, she becomes so secluded within the spectacle that she finds it redemptive. Ultimately, Mae's Circle profile emerges as the primary means of validating her material existence, with her digital persona increasingly reified as the core of her self-identity. Although Eggers

does not explicitly engage with the concept of code, the narrative consistently alludes to its presence through references to algorithms, the computational processes, and social media infrastructure underpinned by code, which collectively shape a reconfigured subjectivity characteristic of the posthuman condition. Mae's subjectivity hinges on information flows and her active engagement with them. This dystopian portrait of the self as quantified data is also reflected in the business concept of TruYou, as presented in *The Circle*: "one account, one identity, one password, one payment system, per person" (Eggers, 2013, p. 21). This vision of constructing a unified identity is offered as a redemptive response to the Internet's pluralistic and dispersive tendencies, aiming to restore a reliable sense of identity. Therefore,

"The era of false identities, identity theft, multiple user names, complicated passwords and payment systems was over. Anytime you wanted to see anything, use anything, comment on anything or buy anything, it was one button, one account, everything tied together and trackable and simple, all of it operable via mobile or laptop, tablet or retinal" (Eggers, 2013, p. 21).

Mae's effort to consolidate her identity within a unified online profile necessitates the incorporation of her personal records and medical data into the corporation's cloud-based system. This process of digital assimilation transcends routine administrative procedure; it embodies a fundamental ideological stance upheld by the Circle—namely, that the erosion of personal privacy is not only unavoidable but also ideologically commendable. Dan's characterisation of the Circle as "a *humanplace*" (Eggers, 2013, p. 47) captures the core principle of the organisation: that identity is not inherent or self-determined but instead formed through constant connectivity, complete transparency, and total integration into the corporate framework. This ideology closely aligns with Matwyshyn's (2010) concept of the "corporate cyborg" (p. 574), a blended entity where the boundary between personal identity and institutional surveillance is not simply blurred but systematically eradicated. This shift is reinforced by the rise of mechanistic reading habits, which replace genuine intellectual engagement with oversimplified cognitive approaches that treat information as disconnected and context-free data points. Mae exemplifies this cognitive change through her obsessive engagement with the Circle's information feeds. By determining to "get through all the Inner and Outer feeds that night" (Eggers, 2013, p. 101), she shows a mode of interaction that prioritises speed, conformity, and visibility over careful analysis or comprehensive understanding. Her systematic examination of messages and "looking for anything she would have reasonably been expected to answer personally" (Eggers, 2013, p. 101) showcases a veneer of productivity that masks a lack of intellectual depth.

Communication has evolved from primarily face-to-face interaction into a multifaceted engagement that often results in superficial online relationships. The transformation of communication and identity assumes a profoundly unsettling character. Nonetheless, Mae's quest for online validation symbolises self-fragmentation, influenced by the company and its technology. She feels compelled to remain constantly online. Communication between the public and the Circlers primarily occurs online. Although Circle's employees are physically present in the office, they connect via a dedicated digital platform, accessed through an additional screen. However, prioritising digital communication fosters physical distance. Mae's new mode of communication affects her interactions with others. She soon becomes immersed in the Circle's culture and embraces this mode of communication. Yet, the constant flow of information and the overwhelming number of screens, platforms, and messages leave no time to "process, understand, and interpret" (Schober, 2016, p. 369). Despite Mae's sustained and extensive engagement with social media, her mode of communication has become increasingly depersonalised and mechanistic. *The Circle* serves as a paradigmatic representation of critical posthumanism, which seeks "to move beyond the traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous, self-willed individual agent in order to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology" (Nayar, 2014, p.4).

In *The Circle*, Eggers critiques the implications of digital archiving by illustrating how the systematic reduction of human experience to quantifiable data renders memory both malleable and susceptible to manipulation. The program "PastPerfect" (Eggers, 2013, p. 349) exemplifies this critique by promoting the digitisation of personal and familial histories, grounded in the ideological assumption that all dimensions of human experience should be recorded and preserved. The conversion of lived realities into algorithmically curated data underscores the novel's profound concern with the erosion of cultural heritage and the distortion of historical memory within a society dominated by data-driven systems. Annie's engagement with PastPerfect serves as a potent illustration of these perils. The program discloses that her ancestors were "slave owners" (Eggers, 2013, p. 428) and unveils a morally troubling accident in which her parents witnessed a man drowning yet "don't run to get help, or call the police or anything. They don't jump in to save the guy" (Eggers, 2013, p. 439). These revelations provoke intense public outrage and incite a relentless wave of online condemnation, ultimately precipitating Annie's psychological disintegration, which culminates in a total emotional collapse and subsequent coma. PastPerfect underscores the profound ethical ramifications of digital transparency. Although the precise

cause of Annie's coma remains uncertain, it "was still a subject of some debate, Dr. Villalobos had said, but most likely, it was caused by stress, or shock, or simple exhaustion" (Eggers, 2013, p. 489). Annie's fate underscores the inherent dangers of technological systems that operate without ethical oversight, even inflicting harm upon those who once supported or helped build them. Ultimately, *The Circle* portrays PastPerfect as a dystopian instrument that erodes the boundary between public and private life. By digitising the past, the program disregards both the right to privacy and the right to be forgotten, thereby raising pressing concerns that resonate with contemporary debates on data retention, digital legacy, and archival ethics. Eggers underscores the cultural risks inherent in such practices.

During her visit to Annie in a comatose state, Mae exhibits frustration at her inability to access Annie's internal thoughts. This moment prompts Mae to conclude that the next phase in the Circle's technological development should involve the ability to read minds. Her perspective is articulated in the following passage:

"Another burst of color appeared on the screen monitoring the workings of Annie's mind. Mae reached out to touch her forehead, marveling at the distance this flesh put between them. What was going on in that head of hers? It was exasperating, really, Mae thought, not knowing. It was an affront, a deprivation, to herself and to the world. She would bring this up with Stenton and Bailey, with the Gang of 40, at the earliest opportunity. They needed to talk about Annie, the thoughts she was thinking. Why shouldn't they know them? The world deserved nothing less and would not wait" (Eggers, 2013, p. 491).

The company's goal—now Mae's goal—is to eliminate privacy and create a world where transparency supersedes individual consent. Mae's response to Annie's condition illustrates the adverse effects of technology on identity, including ethical detachment, diminished empathy, and the erosion of meaningful human relationships. *The Circle* can also be interpreted through the framework of cultural imperialism, as its global expansion imposes a dominant technological paradigm that threatens to displace local traditions, languages, and practices, amounting to a form of digital colonialism. Furthermore, Eggers's portrayal of Mae's transformation from a private individual to a performative digital subject underscores the reconfiguration of self-expression and community in the age of surveillance. By the end of the novel,

"Mae has lost contact with her family, female friends, and male lovers, but has millions of virtual followers and feels connected to a digital community. Mae appears to have internalised the Circle's posthuman imperative of downloading the body and human identity into the safely antiseptic architecture of the digital panopticon" (Jarvis, 2019, p. 290).

CONCLUSION

The Circle provides a salient illustration of Hayles's (1999) critique of the posthuman condition, particularly her concern that the prioritisation of information over embodiment leads to a disembodied and abstract construction of subjectivity. As Hayles argues, the posthuman framework emphasises "informational pattern over material instantiation" (p. 2), thereby contributing to a conception of the human increasingly detached from corporeal experience. Mae's transformation exemplifies this shift; she becomes a humachine, a hybrid identity shaped more by data flows than by embodied experience. Her integration into technological systems renders her fully transparent and machine-readable. This progression reflects Hayles's (1999) notion of posthuman subjects as being seamlessly articulated "with intelligent machines" (p. 287), dissolving boundaries between the organic and technological. Thus, the novel presents a dystopian critique of posthumanism, aligning with interpretations that view the posthuman condition as characterised by diminished agency and autonomy. Mae's technological augmentation does not enhance her individuality but rather integrates her into a data-driven system of total visibility and constant performance. Mae's identity undergoes a significant transformation, shifting from an autonomous individual to a data-driven entity shaped by corporate ideology and technological systems. Mae, initially critical of the Circle's intrusive practices, progressively adopts the principles of total transparency and continuous digital connectivity, ultimately relinquishing her privacy and emotional depth in favour of algorithmic quantification and digital validation. Her identity becomes increasingly defined by metrics, performance rankings, and screen-based interactions rather than embodied experience. The novel positions Mae as an embodiment of the posthuman condition, wherein identity is constructed through technological integration and systemic control. Therefore, *The Circle* offers a critique of the posthuman paradigm, emphasising its potential to undermine personal autonomy and embodied subjectivity in favour of algorithmic governance and corporate dominance.

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