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The Superfluosness of Big Brother: Charting the Evolution of Surveillance in Twentieth and Twenty First Century American and Global Anglophone Literature and Television

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THE SUPERFLUOUSNESS OF BIG BROTHER: CHARTING THE EVOLUTION OF
SURVEILLANCE IN TWENTIETH AND TWENTY FIRST CENTURY AMERICAN AND
GLOBAL ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE AND TELEVISION

by

RYAN EDWARD PINE

Under the Direction of Chris Kocela, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation charts the evolution of surveillance as presented in twentieth and twenty-first century American and Global Anglophone literature and television. It analyzes six exemplary works: *1984*, *The Circle*, *Black Mirror*, *Purity*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and *The Lowland*. It seeks to move beyond the scope of Benthamite and Foucauldian approaches to surveillance studies in order to examine the post-panoptic structures of the synopticon and the banopticon. To this end, this dissertation argues the six illustrative works mentioned above help underscore the shift from the few watching the many to the many watching the few. It seeks to explain the paradox whereby the televisual capabilities have never been more powerful yet the

need for them has been rendered superfluous by an attitudinal, paradigmatic shift in western society. Finally, this dissertation endeavors to explain how literature productively complicates the issue of watching and how, paradoxically, we have never been better connected while simultaneously never been more alone. It posits another paradox as a solution: that we can know someone better by reading their words than by connecting with them through “social media.”

INDEX WORDS: Surveillance, Panopticon, Synopticon, Banopticon, Social media

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Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

This is for Erika, obviously.

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1 INTRODUCTION

You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

George Orwell, *1984*

Surveillance, according to David Lyon, “refers to routine ways in which focused attention is paid to personal details by organizations that want to influence, manage, or control certain persons or population groups” (5). This dissertation seeks to use literature and television to distinguish from what Lyon has called the sharp end of the panoptical spectrum, the prison, from what he calls the soft end, consumption and entertainment.¹ This dissertation endeavors to join the burgeoning field of surveillance studies. Interdisciplinary and multipurposed, surveillance studies attracts scholarship from sociologists, psychologists, economists, political scientists, technologists, border and security experts, and literary scholars. Lyon, a key figure in surveillance studies, in *Theorizing Surveillance*, helpfully differentiates between Benthamite panopticism and Foucauldian panopticism. The key distinction lies in the production of human beings. The social media user performs much like the prison inmate in the panopticon: both produce human beings for the observer. In Bentham’s view, the panopticon should produce a morally reformed individual. In Foucault’s post-structuralist reworking of the panopticon, the result is a docile body. Though this dissertation goes beyond the panopticon into post-panoptic theory and application, it is this second production—the docile body—with which it is chiefly concerned. However, it is impossible to fully escape Foucault and his panopticon. We’re always haunted, as Boyne says, by, “the panoptic presence as ghost lurking within the post-panoptic

¹ Andrejevic neatly sums up the conflation of entertainment with surveillance: “the labor of watching is integrated with the labor of being watched” (as quoted in Lyon 7).

world” (Boyne as quoted in Lyon 4). One of the many remnants Foucault has left behind for us to deal with in this post-panoptic, post-Big Brother world is the Christian notion of omniscience. Lyon argues that Foucault, in true postmodern fashion, both uses and parodies Christianity in order to make the case for his panopticon. These texts, and the treatments of social media contained within them, might reflect what Lyon has called “panopticommodity”—a seemingly least-panoptic form of surveillance which, under the auspice of self-expression, “domesticate” and achieve the aforementioned “paradoxical docility” (Lyon 4). Whitaker calls this the “participatory panopticon”—one in which people market themselves.

There’s a famous scene in George Orwell’s *1984* in which Winston and Julia are carrying out an affair in Mr. Charrington’s boarding house room. One afternoon while in bed a picture slips from the wall, crashes to the floor, and reveals a telescreen. The telescreen, according to Banita, is “a piece of broadcast equipment that permanently streams propaganda content at an ambient level—the audience paying only scant attention as they perform their daily tasks—while monitoring the viewers” (253). Julia flatly remarks, “now they can see us” and the voice behind the wall responds, “now we can see you” (Orwell 222). Julia betrays the panoptic feeling of being watched. A truly chilling scene for Orwell’s readers at the time, Julia and Winston’s most intimate moments have been laid bare for the Thought Police to see. The anxiety in *1984* can be located within the feeling of being watched. This dissertation makes the case for taking Lyon’s panopticommodity further: the soft end of the panoptic spectrum, or social media as the conflation of surveillance and entertainment, has become what Mathieson has called the “synopticon.”—the idea of the few watching the many has shifted toward a situation in which the many now watch the few, such that the locus of anxiety now resides within not being watched. In other words, the gaze of the Other, once signifying objectification, now signals validation. In this

post-panoptic state, the synopticon encourages—indeed rewards—the watched for forfeiting their privacy. Chapter three moves beyond the panopticon and synopticon to explore something Didier Bigo has called “the banopticon.” A portmanteau of Giorgio Agamben’s “ban” and Foucault’s “opticon,” the “banopticon” synthesizes televisual surveillance with dataveillance to create databases of personal information for the purposes of categorization, exclusion, and punishment.

Privacy functions as the precondition for intimacy; without it our interactions are simply fodder for organizations to manage us. But what is privacy? Maciej Ceglowski, a tech entrepreneur and frequent Silicon Valley critic, testified before Congress on May 7, 2019 that privacy is:

the idea that there exists a sphere of life that should remain outside public scrutiny, in which we can be sure that our words, actions, thoughts and feelings are not being indelibly recorded. This includes not only intimate spaces like the home, but also the many semiprivate places where people gather and engage with one another in the common activities of daily life — the workplace, church, club or union hall.

What has changed in the seventy years since the publication of *1984*? It is hard to imagine contemporary readers reacting to the boardinghouse bedroom scene in the same way. Would frequent users of Instagram, the photo-sharing platform purchased by Facebook in 2011, feel the same anxiety? Is shame still possible in this era of “leaked” celebrity porn videos, social media “influencers,” and YouTube celebrities? This dissertation argues that the change lies within the source of the anxiety. Today, in a postmodern world dominated by social media, the anxiety lies not with being watched but *not* being watched. This dissertation endeavors to explain that shift by charting the evolution of surveillance as depicted in six illustrative works: George

Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Dave Eggers's 2013 novel *The Circle*, Jonathan Franzen's 2015 novel *Purity*, Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror*, Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's 2013 novel, *The Lowland*.

Surveillance capitalism, however, does not begin with Facebook and Google. Richard Powers's 1998 novel, *Gain*, charts a related history of technocorporate domination, the story of Clare International, a corporate conglomerate not dissimilar to Procter and Gamble. In doing so, Powers also locates the genesis of the corporation in the history of United States and how that legal entity came to enjoy the same set of rights as a human being. By interweaving the demise of Laura Bodey, a 42-year-old woman dying of cancer from exposure to Clare's household cleaning products, with the corporation's ascendancy to the business entity *de rigueur*, the implication is laid bare: corporate rights have long and far surpassed individual human rights; the liability the leaders of an American corporation take on is naught compared to the vulnerability of individual human beings to its actions. In other words, the corporation is only a person when its rights have been impugned; when it comes under legal scrutiny, the persons at its helm are shielded from liability. Big Tech has similarly sought to humanize its products while dehumanizing their users. IBM, in a not-so-covert effort to distance itself from associations with ethical quandaries surrounding "artificial intelligence," chose to describe its AI product, Watson, as "computational intelligence." Watson was named after IBM's first CEO, Thomas J. Watson. A top salesman with NCR, the National Cash Register company, Watson took the reins at CTR which would later become International Business Machines. Big Data, a contemporary catch-all phrase to describe the insidious inner-workings of companies like Facebook and Google, isn't so contemporary after all. In *IBM and the Holocaust*, investigative journalist Edwin Black reports: "Data generated by means of counting and alphabetization equipment supplied by IBM through

its German and other national subsidiaries was instrumental in the efforts of the German government to concentrate and ultimately destroy ethnic Jewish populations across Europe” (198). It is not without a sense of irony that the company that spawned the careers of both Watsons—the CEO and his computationally intelligent descendant—strengthened its stranglehold on the world computer market by supplying the tools for the first banopticon—the cataloging of two million Jews inside Germany by the Third Reich. IBM directly assisted Nazi Germany in manipulating one of the first big data sets to be analyzed for the purposes of surveillance, exclusion, and eventually, extermination. IBM consolidated its power and secured its status as the world’s preeminent supplier of computational machines, in part at least, by outfitting Germany’s Third Reich with the technology to propagate the original manifestation of the banopticon, the Holocaust. The surveillance state being perfected in Communist China and tested upon its Muslim Uighur population owes a debt of gratitude to its politically opposite pole, Fascist Germany.

Thermo Fisher, a Massachusetts biotech company, is continuing the callous, capitalistic program of placing profits over people as it, through its Applied Biosystems brand, enables the Chinese government and its Institute of Forensic Science to surveil millions of Muslim Uighurs. In what could be scenes ripped straight from the pages of *The Handmaid’s Tale* or *Never Let Me Go*, the governments of cities like Xinjiang, in northwestern China have, under the auspice of free health screenings, rolled out a “Physicals for All” plan.² The difference is that these “physicals” do not resemble normal health screenings: the heart, liver, kidneys, or lungs are not checked; the only “vitals” recorded are the patient’s voice, face, and fingerprints. The data is then entered into a massive database used by the government to surveil the minority Muslim

² Margaret Atwood and Kazuo Ishiguro’s respective dystopian novels

population and intern upwards of a million people in what the Pentagon has labeled “concentration camps” (Reuters). What the Pentagon, at least at this moment in time, is not prepared to say, is that the technology that is fueling this genocide is undeniably American. In 2014, China’s Ministry of Public Security, through its Institute of Forensic Science research arm, published a paper describing a way for scientists to distinguish one ethnic group from another, namely Uighurs from Indians. And where did the data for the other ethnic groups come from? They came from the research lab of Dr. Kenneth Kidd, a professor of genetics at Yale University. And yet, despite selling their technology, offering their expertise, and employing thousands in the service of a government perpetuating genocide of its Muslim minority population, Thermo Fisher and geneticists like Dr. Kidd perform well in the strictly capitalistic sense. A cursory glance at their financials reveals revenues last year in excess of 20 billion dollars. They employ over 70,000 people. Thermo Fisher stock trades on the NYSE, as of this writing in May 2019, at \$268 per share, up from just under \$40 a share 10 years ago. The Chinese market for gene-sequencing represents 10% of Thermo Fisher’s revenues—over 2 billion U.S. dollars. In other words, you do not have to be a Harvard Business School professor like Shosanna Zuboff to understand that many people are becoming wealthy in what she has described as the surveillance capitalist economy.

Now that Zuboff has, in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, given us the vocabulary to understand the “horseless carriage” of the technology undergirding that contemporary dominant market force, we can retroactively apply it to both the post-9/11 state of exception described by Bigo as seen in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and even further back— the identification, classification, and eventual eradication of millions of Jews in Europe using IBM’s Hollerith machine. Black writes, “When Germany wanted to identify the Jews by name, IBM showed

them how. When Germany wanted to use that information to launch programs of social expulsion and expropriation, IBM provided the technologic wherewithal” (73). Othering has always been a lucrative practice for supranational technocapitalists like Thomas J. Watson. Although infatuated with Mussolini’s cult of personality, Watson was no fascist himself. His only political loyalty—indeed perhaps his only loyalty full stop—was to the singular party of financial capital. The architects and administrators of today’s surveillance tools are similarly unconcerned with who their targets are. In the twelve years of the Third Reich the customer was Hitler and the targets Jews. In the last two decades or so the customers are China, the U.S., much of Western Europe, and their targets Muslims. The “problem”—racial impurities infecting white hegemony—has once again been framed in terms of religious difference—Christian versus Muslim—but “solved” via technocapitalists who pray at the altar of the same capital-“G” God: money.

The targeting, via surveillance, of racial minorities, is of course nothing new. Visual and taxonomical identification precedes genocidal elimination. Christopher Hitchens referenced the Rwandan genocide, the slaughter of nearly one million Tutsis by the largely Hutu military, in order to underscore Freud’s concept of the narcissism of small differences. The Belgian colonizers of Rwanda tried to determine the difference between the Tutsis and Hutus in order to better classify the peoples they had conquered. The phrase, “the narcissism of the small differences,” coined by Freud in 1917, received extended treatment in his study, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in 1929. Hitchens, in a 2010 *Slate* article wrote, “It is one of the great contradictions of civilization and one of the great sources of its discontents, and Sigmund Freud even found a term for it: ‘the narcissism of the small difference.’ Freud argued, ‘It is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of

hostility between them’” (*Slate* 2010). Taxonomical surveillance relies upon this pernicious form of narcissism to root out and then elevate these minute differences via technology in order to preclude the free movement of persons possessing them. In other words, the banopticon, like the panopticon before it, is a framework and set of tools used to discipline and punish, but also exclude. A contemporary geopolitical example exists. Whether or not it is more accurate to classify The People’s Republic of China as state capitalism is immaterial to this study; it still bears mentioning that the specter of communism Orwell feared is not only alive but thriving in China.

This dissertation is validated in part by David Lyon’s recent study, *The Culture of Surveillance*. Lyon, perhaps the world’s foremost expert on surveillance studies, not only looks to literature for examples of surveillance culture becoming the dominant force in our society, he uses Dave Eggers’s *The Circle* as his prime case study. He isn’t alone. Peter T. Marks, in his excellent work, *Imagining Surveillance*, also looks to examples in literature as creative responses to the historical development of surveillance. With this in mind, this dissertation seeks to continue Lyon and Marks’s work, intervening at times, to carve out a prominent place for literary analysis inside the broader concerns of surveillance studies. The word “surveillance” is pregnant with meaning. It’s always-already imbued with nefarious connotation. The six illustrative works remind us that “surveillance,” like “technology,” is not a natural phenomenon, but rather the product of human culture. In other words, it’s a culture we control. As D.A. Miller, in *The Novel and the Police* argues, that literary form itself was the first attempt to get inside the head of another person, the first attempt to surveil the contents of a mind. The chief distinction between the novel (and all literary forms) and Big Tech lies within their respective treatments of the human person. Literature, through its codifying of myths, its symbols, and its connections

attempts to reduce the gap in understanding between people; Big Tech, on the other hand, simply seeks to reduce people to information.

In the climactic scene from the Wachowski sisters' seminal film, *The Matrix*, Neo, the software engineer-turned savior of humanity, begins to see the eponymous digital structure underpinning all human reality for what it is: binary code. In rendering Big Brother superfluous with its hyperfocus on Big Data, Big Tech has inverted this scene: human beings are the ones and zeroes. The six works productively complicate this reductive vision of humanity through utopia, dystopia, parody, pastiche, irony, and naturalism. They offer reflections and warnings, points of resistance and capitulation, glimmers of hope and apocalyptic ominousness. They also offer imaginaries—for seeing how surveillance functions in our world now and how we may want it to in the future.

While the specter of Foucault always looms large over surveillance studies, its genesis owes a greater debt to George Orwell and his final work, the now seventy-year-old novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (hereafter referred to by its American title, *1984*). As much as we might like to escape Orwell, Banita concedes, “Despite the frequent adulteration of his themes—especially through the adoption of Big Brother as a quasi-mythological entertainment figure—Orwell does anticipate several aspects of the current war against terrorism, including permanent surveillance, unlimited and unwarranted detention for potential crimes, and torture” (Banita 252). Surveillance studies often points to Orwell's prescience in *1984* insomuch as he anticipates the above phenomena. The purpose of chapter one is, in a way, the opposite: *1984* is paired with Eggers's *The Circle* not simply to point out Orwell's prescience and the debt the latter owes the former, but to highlight how much has changed in our attitude towards privacy. If describing the actual genesis of surveillance as depicted in 20th-century literature were the target of this

dissertation, Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1924 novel, *We*, would have been the starting point. Indeed, *We* features many of the panoptic, dystopian plot elements—numbers for names, a militaristic, regimented society—associated with the Orwellian. Orwell undoubtedly owes a debt to Zamyatin, who in turn, it is argued, owes a great deal to H.G. Wells and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Therefore, this dissertation interests itself more with the evolution of the *reaction* to surveillance rather than its chronological, genealogical development.

This dissertation also seeks to re-economize surveillance. In other words, it attempts to situate surveillance studies into a broader conversation about economy. “Economy” is used in two different ways in this dissertation: firstly, I use it to describe the efficiency of the synopticon, the self-surveillant engine of social media. Garcin in Jean-Paul Sartre's 1943 play *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*) assesses his predicament in one of the most famous passages in all of world literature:

All those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only two of you? I thought there were more; many more. So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the “burning marl.” Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE! (Sartre 1.195-198)

The genius of this version of hell, Inez comes to realize, is its simplicity and economy:

Well, well! Ah, I understand now. I know why they've put us three together. You'll see how simple it is. Childishly simple. It's obvious what they're after – an economy of manpower – or devil-power, if you prefer. The same idea as in the cafeteria, where customers serve themselves. Each of us will act as torturer of the two others. (Sartre 1.199-202)

The philosophy undergirding *Huis Clos* was published by Sartre the year prior in a treatise called *Being and Nothingness*. In it, Sartre argues that the gaze of the Other objectifies the subject. In other words, the gaze turns the person into object. For Sartre, the original feeling brought on by

the realization of the existence of others is shame. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre analogizes this tension, between shame and excitement, in the example of a keyhole. Being spied through a keyhole induces a thrill in the watched—the thrill of the peeper. But it is also in this moment that the subject realizes he is little more than a bodily manifestation in the gaze of the Other—an object. It’s a moment of shame—the shame of oneself in the gaze of the Other. In his gaze, the Other holds the power to alienate—to lock the subject in a particular mode of being—to deprive him of his freedom. It’s this gaze from Inez and Estelle that Garcin identifies as hell in *No Exit*. It’s the same gaze affixed to Winston and Julia in that chilling scene from *1984*. The Thought Police freeze the couple into objects of desire, intimacy, and shame. The jig is up. They know they’ve been watched all along. What they thought was private was actually public. They cannot escape the panoptic power of Big Brother and his henchmen the Thought Police and their omnipresent instrument, the telescreen—the few Inner Party members watching the many Outer Party members.

In Dave Eggers’s *The Circle*, the panopticon morphs into the synopticon—the few watching the many become the many watching the few. In this novel the anxiety lies not with being watched but *not* being watched. This central tension is revealed in the character Mae. There is no longer any shame embedded in the erosion of privacy for the subject. In the synopticon, to be one of the few watched by the many converts shame into power. Mae, followed by millions on the Circle’s TruYou platform, becomes a powerful influencer. Or as Lyon puts it, “There is a reward for displaying your body and its activities. It is gratifying to be watched; close surveillance is destigmatized” (7). It is desire for this type of power that inspires others to submit to a culture of self-surveillance. This act of submission renders Big Brother superfluous. Just as Inez came to realize a hell without devils, the technocrats responsible for the culture of self-

surveillance created by social media understand the simplistic genius of the watched surveilling themselves. The economy of devil-power becomes the economy of surveillant-power. There is no need for red hot pokers and no need for Big Brother.

In the second sense of the term which I will use in this dissertation, economy defines how human existence has been coopted and our behavior mined for fuel to power what Shoshanna Zuboff has called “surveillance capitalism,” a “new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales” (1). In doing so, I will chart the second important shift following panopticon to synopticon: Big Brother to “Big Data.” Just as the mythical Big Brother has been marginalized by the self-surveillant, his televisual surveillance device, the telescreen, becomes obsolete as surveillance capitalism relies more upon dataveillance—the mining of personal information—to generate profits. In other words, the computer is quickly replacing the camera as the surveillance device *de jour*. What we do online, it seems, is more important to technocorporations and the traditional corporations that prop them up via advertising than what we do offline.

Chapter one of this dissertation returns to the idea of omniscience when it unpacks the eponymous, Google-like company of Dave Eggers’s novel, *The Circle*. It sheds light on the paradox that Lyon has highlighted: that the more stringent and rigorous the panoptic regime (think Orwell’s INGSOC), the more it generates active resistance. By contrast, the more soft and subtle the panoptic strategies (think Eggers’s *The Circle* and Brooker’s “Nosedive”) the more it produces the desired docile bodies.

Chapter two, with its focus on Franzen’s *Purity* and Brooker’s television series, *Black Mirror*, functions as an inquiry into the psychosocial forces undergirding the shifts from panopticon to synopticon, Big Brother to Big Data. *Purity* charts the rise and fall of Andreas

Wolf, a Julian Assange facsimile who becomes so enmeshed in the totalitarianism of the Internet that he ceases to function as autonomous from it. Similarly, the protagonist of the *Black Mirror* episode, “Nosedive,” Lacie Pound, allows her own person to be completely determined by her online reputation. It is her preoccupation with status and validation that causes her self-worth, along with her reputational score, to nosedive. The chapter, therefore, concludes that the above shifts occur as a result of the surveillance capitalists tapping into the human predilection for performativity. That fleeting moment of excitement Sartre described in his keyhole example—the moment the watched realizes there is a peeper looking through it—expands to cover everything in the synopticon. The peephole is widened so that potentially everyone can turn their gaze upon the subject to watch the performance. This performance, a theoretical focal point of chapter two which I explore through the work of Lacan, persists for the life of the subject who becomes so in that formative moment of spying himself in a mirror. Once he has, he becomes differentiated from the Other and also from himself. The Lacanian “Mirror Stage” is linked to Zuboff’s framework in providing the psychosocial impetus for what Lyon has described as an [economy capable of] “...persuading individuals that they count when all it wants is to count them” (8). Chapter two, through an analysis of *Purity*, discusses a dialectical fusion of the Old Regime (communism) and the New Regime (Big Tech and surveillance capitalism.)

The banopticon relies, at least in part, upon colonial discourses of racialization. To this end, the Other is discussed in chapter three, but rather than employing strictly psychical terms, my analysis focuses on xenophobia, Islamophobia, and fear-mongering—what Levinas called symptoms of the inability to see ourselves in the face of the Other. Two exemplary works, Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Lahiri’s *The Lowland*, serve as representations in global anglophone literature for how resistance to the banopticon can be effectuated. The

banopticon operates as another product of surveillance capitalism. Its history runs parallel to, and interweaves with, the history of capitalism. Scholars such as Ania Loomba have argued that the rise of capitalism is inextricable from racialism. In other words, this chapter is an attempt, among other things, to reorientalize Marx. “Orientalism” is used here in its original usage as intended by Said—to refer to the South Asian subcontinent of India and the Middle East, not as it was subsequently expanded to include the Far East. Another key feature of chapter three comes in the form of a framework Marxist scholar Peter McLaren calls “critical revolutionary pedagogy.” A specific set of pedagogical tools for educators, the framework encourages students to see beyond the limits of, and imagine alternatives to, global capitalism. This is a perfect description of one of the protagonists analyzed in chapter three: Changez of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. A one-time acolyte of the fundamentalist religion of the United States, capitalism, Changez returns to Pakistan to become a professor and activist decrying American meddling in international affairs. His apostasy, we are led to believe, is punishable by the U.S. in the same manner as it is prescribed in the Quran—by death. Lahiri’s novel, *The Lowland*, shares banoptic characteristics with Hamid’s novella. The characters of *The Lowland* at various times capitulate and resist global capitalism—alternatingly suffering and perpetrating surveillance. Incorrectly labeled a “postcolonial work” by many, *The Lowland* is a diasporic text, and like *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, chiefly concerned with its characters’ Americanness. Its author, Jhumpa Lahiri, is an American of Bengali descent who, just like one of her characters, Bela, grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island. Keeping this in mind, it is important to note that postcolonial theory only constitutes a framework for this dissertation inasmuch as it provides a lens through which to view the racialized component of the banopticon. As such, concerns like those of Homi Bhabha-

regarding cultural hybridity are set aside to focus on how surveillance capitalism relies just as much upon the banopticon as the synopticon to generate profits.

Despite its ambitions, this dissertation carries serious limitations. Its scope narrows to reflect its authors' profiles; although cosmopolitan in plot, the six works manifest as products of the imaginations of five Western writers (Orwell, Eggers, Franzen, Brooker, Lahiri) and one Eastern-born but Western-educated writer (Hamid). In other words, the six works selected for this study represent how surveillance is perceived through Western eyes. It cannot claim to represent the perspective of persons oppressed or liberated by a culture of surveillance in Eurasia or East Asia—places where Orwellian regimes have contracted with Western technology companies to surveil, suppress, and control the populations. Any scholarly work within surveillance studies would be incomplete without taking the temperature of the respective political, social, and economic climates. However, this dissertation does so only inasmuch as necessary to show how literature—specifically fiction—can work to denaturalize the surveillance capitalism undergirding the two post-panoptic structures analyzed: the synopticon and banopticon.

2 CHAPTER ONE: *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR AND THE CIRCLE*— THE NEW BIG BROTHER IS US.

“You might consider how escape from a cage must surely require, foremost, awareness of the fact of the cage.” – David Foster Wallace

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter endeavors to draw comparisons between traditional forms of surveillance as found in George Orwell’s 1949 novel, *1984*, and “self-surveillance,” the post-panoptical world of social media networks, found in Dave Eggers’s *The Circle*. The omnipresent and omniscient “telescreen” from *1984*, the two-way television used to transmit party messages and spy on party members, has been rendered redundant and superfluous by myriad social media tools, applications, and platforms as seen in *The Circle*. In other words, social media and Internet users have become the new Big Brother. Beginning with a brief synopsis of both texts, and a short section defining relevant terms and key concepts, the chapter moves to a short history of privacy and surveillance in the West. David Rosen and Aaron Santesso’s *The Watchmen in Pieces* will function as the literary-historical and philosophical framework from which to build a lexical scope through which to analyze both Orwell and Eggers’s projects. Its tagline, “Surveillance, Literature, and Liberal Personhood,” underscores its invaluableness to this dissertation in determining what exactly is meant by “privacy” and why a liberal society might value it. Key to my project will be a negotiation of the space between Foucauldian treatments of Benthamite panopticism and Bentham’s actual ideas on a modern surveillance state. Using Bauman’s concept of “liquid surveillance,” and Suarez-Villa’s concept of “technocapitalism,” the chapter argues we’re living in a post-panoptic world. This new psychosocial dynamic can be called the

“synopticon”—a shift from the few watching the many to the many watching the few. In doing so, the chapter will attempt to explain how the technologists have shifted the source of anxiety of being watched in *1984* to the anxiety of *not* being watched in *The Circle*. Furthermore, both *1984* and *The Circle* co-opt religious language in order to indoctrinate would-be acolytes into the orthodoxies of the Party and technology, respectively. This is ironic considering the socio-historical shift from God to society as the all-seeing eye. Although both characters acquiesce to party and company doctrine and capitulate by the end, the main characters of the novels, Winston Smith and Julia of *1984* and Mae Holland of *The Circle*, at various points, inhabit spaces of resistance. The spaces of dissent in the novels run parallel to each other as natural, analogic ecosystems to the political and digital artifice of the Party and the Circle. Reflecting the philosophies of the American transcendentalists, Winston and Mae use nature to retreat from, and grapple with, party and company dogmatic dominance. Finally, textual evidence is adduced to support the above claims and conclude that the enemy of the Party and the Circle is the solitary, contemplative human being, alone with his or her thoughts—the act of being offline itself an act of resistance. The reification of human interactions, multiplied by exponential factors through techno-corporatism and its high technologies, is the reason for the paradigmatic shift from a private to public society that is brought about through first a blurring and then complete dissolution of the line separating the two spheres. Galic has outlined a final phase of contemporary surveillance studies: “Surveillance theory branches out in different directions, from new types of Panopticons and digital surveillance to more user-centric perspectives of participation and resistance” (Galic et al. 11). This works to explain why being alone is no longer permissible in our hyper-capitalistic, techno-corporate society; why every single utterance, every passing thought must be shareable, disseminable, clickable, downloadable, and watchable; in

other words, why the new Big Brother is us. The chapter will conclude that Big Brother is superfluous in light of the above and that Big Data has all about replaced it as the primary means of discovering what another person is actually thinking—the final boundary to be traversed.

This chapter fits squarely into the discipline of surveillance studies. “Surveillance” is the “watch or guard kept over a person, etc., esp. over a suspected person, a prisoner, or the like; often, spying, supervision; less commonly, supervision for the purpose of direction or control, superintendence” (*OED*). As stated above, this chapter endeavors to chart surveillance in literary fiction from *1984* to *The Circle*. I will attempt to reconcile the word with its historical application. The term “surveillance” is nearly as adulterated as “Orwellian.” This chapter seeks to construct a frank discussion about the ramifications of a modern surveillance state. According to Masa Galic, “the term surveillance can be deconstructed in its etymological parts ‘sur’ (from above), and ‘veillance’ (to watch)” (10). This positionality implies a top-down strategy like Bentham’s panopticon. “Panopticon” is a circular prison with cells arranged around a central well, from which inmates can be observed at all times” (*OED*). This chapter will work to expand surveillance to include other ways and means of watching. Surveillance in its narrowest definition is being swiftly replaced by dataveillance. “Dataveillance” is “the collection or monitoring of (esp. digital) data relating to personal details or activities, regarded as a form of surveillance” (*OED*). Computers have all but replaced cameras as the primary tool for gaining knowledge of people. Eggers’s *The Circle* collapses the technologies of the telescreen in *1984* into modern-day computing power. This new form of panopticism might be accurately referred to as a “personal panopticon” or “self-panopticon.” Foucault defines panopticism as “a type of power that is applied to individuals in the form of continuous individual supervision, in the form of control, punishment, and compensation, and in the form of correction, that is, the modelling

and transforming of individuals in terms of certain norms' where 'panoptic' refers to 'seeing everything, everyone, all the time' (52). I will resist wholesale adoption of Foucault's concept of the panopticon and instead join Lyon in declaring, "Today's world is post-panoptic" (Lyon 4).

Surveillance is a defining feature of corporatism and techno-capitalism. "Corporatism" is defined as "the power of business corporations over society" (Suarez-Villa 1). This definition "signifies collusion between corporate and government interests" (1). "Techno-capitalism" is a portmanteau of "technology" and "capitalism." It is defined as a "new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity" (3). While Orwell warned of the autocracy of Big Brother in *1984*, Eggers's dystopian nightmare centers around a technocracy. "Technocracy" is a proposed system of governance where decision-makers are selected on the basis of their expertise in their areas of responsibility, particularly scientific knowledge. One of the more recent challenges Silicon Valley has presented surveillance studies is the conflation of digital and physical tracking into one package. Galic articulates the changing landscape of the discipline: "Surveillance theory branches out to conceptualise surveillance through concepts such as dataveillance, access control, social sorting, peer-to-peer surveillance and resistance. With the datafication of society, surveillance combines the physical with the digital, government with corporate surveillance and top-down with self-surveillance" (Galic). Business intelligence is "a term to describe concepts and methods to improve business decision making by using fact-based support systems." Under this umbrella might be "data intelligence." Data intelligence is "the analysis of various forms of data in such a way that it can be used by companies to expand their services or investments" (*Technopedia*). "Surveillance capitalism" is a term first coined by business theorist Shoshana Zuboff in a 2014 essay entitled, "Digital declaration." It is characterized by a "radically disembedded and

extractive variant of information capitalism based on the commodification of reality” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine*). “Liquid modernity” and “liquid surveillance” are two terms coined by Zygmunt Bauman to describe the fluidity, borderlessness, and shifting perspective of a modern world and any attempts to watch its inhabitants. “Liquid surveillance is...a way of situating surveillance developments in the fluid and unsettling modernity of today” (Lyon 2). This chapter seeks to deploy these concepts in an attempt to analyze the shift from Big Brother to Big Data, a sea change embodied by Eggers’s novel.

Surveillance studies operates at the intersection of many broad avenues: sociology, literary and cinematic textual criticism, psychology, criminology, ethics, moral philosophy, legal scholarship, and utopian studies, to name a few. It would be naive to attempt to discuss all or even most of these disciplines. Instead of outlining the scope of surveillance studies as the excellent Routledge *Handbook of Surveillance Studies* does, this chapter aims to answer the question, “Through fiction can we see the ways in which surveillance concepts are becoming part of the world?” (Neyland and Goold xxiv). “Novels,” Lyon argues, “are an important source of metaphor and simile, then, and help to alert us to significant dimensions of surveillance as well as helping the reader imaginatively to get inside characters who are either the surveillers or, more frequently, the surveilled” (145). The novel is, after all, the first attempt to truly crawl inside the mind of another human being or, more specifically, as Masterson challenges, “how might writing oblige us to bring alternative modes of being in, as well as seeing, the world differently” (725). *1984* and *The Circle* are two worthy examples for helping address these issues. This chapter will confirm Marks’s claim that “imaginative texts have been critical from the outset of surveillance studies, providing models, concepts and dramatic situations (13). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this chapter will introduce a new surveillance

concept that is definitely a huge part of our ever-changing world, “self-surveillance,” something of which Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell could never have dreamt.

Dave Eggers’s 2013 novel *The Circle*, a clear homage to *1984*, tells the story of Mae Holland, a 20-something year-old woman who leaves her dead-end job at the local utility company to join the Circle, the world’s “most valuable and influential company” (1). The Circle, Eggers’s fictional Google-Facebook-Apple-Twitter hybrid, provides the setting for Mae to fully embrace the mythology of “technocapitalism”—the pervasive, utopian lie that modern technology will solve all of humanity’s problems. The Circle is led by a co-executive triumvirate: Eamon Bailey, Tom Stenton, and Tyler Gospodinov. Bailey is the avuncular face of the company, the man with big ideas *a la* Apple’s Steve Jobs. Stenton is the ruthless capitalist in the Jeff Bezos mold. Ty is the genius behind the scenes who believes the Circle’s power must be reined in. After some initial reluctance and a healthy dose of skepticism, Mae completely buys in to the Circle’s philosophy, becoming a spokesperson for its relentless pursuit of our hearts, minds, and wallets. Eggers’s reimagining of *1984* morphs from utopian dream to dystopian nightmare over its four hundred-odd pages. In adopting the orthodoxy of the Circle, Mae alienates her friends, family, and social life offline. Her role in “closing the circle” coincides with the deterioration of the mental health of her best friend, Annie. By the end, Mae has chosen company over country, orthodoxy over humanity. Eggers cannily transforms Orwell’s overt dystopia into a utopian problem for the reader to solve.

The great debate on whether didactic novels are of artistic worth seems to center around the question of whether characters possess literary value. Is flatness of character in itself an indictment? Political writing seems to share the brunt of this focused opprobrium with science fiction. H.G. Wells sums up his criticism of political writing as lacking the “blood and warmth

and reality of life” (7). Do Mae Holland and Winston Smith fit this description? Marks complicates Lyon’s reading of Winston in *1984* as a “subject,” pointing out that literary studies would more often refer to him as a character. This, as Lyon points out, is often the charge leveled at dystopian writing: the “character” functions as a two-dimensional subject with which to beat the reader over the head.

In his essay, “Why I Write” (1946), Orwell aspired to transform “political writing into an art.” According to Rodden and Rossi, arguably the two greatest living Orwell scholars, he succeeded in this aim with the composition and publication of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. In doing so, Orwell also succeeded in his goal of becoming a famous novelist. It is conspicuous then that nearly seventy years later, the bulk of criticism Eggers received for *The Circle* centers around its naked politicizing. Where did Orwell succeed, and Eggers fail? This criticism fails to recognize that the two aims—revelation of complexity in the human condition and advocacy for an agenda—are not mutually exclusive. A great writer, an Orwell, can and has accomplished both at the same time. Eggers, with the publication of *The Circle*, achieves the same. He accomplishes this in part by complying with Orwell’s prescription, “Good prose should be like a window pane; it should hide nothing” (Orwell as quoted in Rodden 2). And yet, even a window pane offers a faint reflection. Upon reading *The Circle*, we recognize ourselves as implicated, if not fully complicit, in welcoming the end of privacy.

1984 is a simple permutation of 1948, the year in which Eric Arthur Blair wrote the novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He originally intended to have the book set in 1980 or 1982 before settling on 1984. Rodden and Rossi hypothesize that Orwell chose the setting of the book in the near future because it was a date many of the book’s readers would live to see. In other words,

the danger is imminent. Similarly, Eggers set *The Circle* in a world recognizable to contemporary readers.

The Circle is the name of Dave Eggers's novel and the titular company of its pages. A circle can represent many things: totality, wholeness, perfection, the self, and even God. In this case, the circle represents a paradigm, an invisible geometric shape that encompasses everything we are and everything we do. The over-arching goal of the company is to "close the circle." This process refers to the complete annihilation of privacy and the total absorption of daily life by the Circle, which is bringing to fruition one of the company's slogans and aims: "All that happens must be known." A circle has been used benignly to represent infinity and trust like a wedding ring signifying marriage. It is with this sense of irony that Eggers has chosen to reimagine the circle as a symbol signifying the unbreakable totalitarianism of techno-corporatism. In other words, we are all encircled; we cannot escape.

Masterson invites us to consider another reading of the title: "Rosenberg[...]coined the concept of the 'warm circle' [...]to grasp the same kind of naive immersion in human togetherness—once perhaps a common human condition, but nowadays available, increasingly, only in dreams" (734). I would argue that "dreams" have been replaced by the digital platforms of social media tools. Being inside the Circle means being inside an electronic fever dream that lasts forever—it is a nightmare. It is no coincidence then, that Franklin Foer has located the genesis of techno-corporatism in the hippie culture of California in the 1960s. Stewart Brand, creator of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, announced a manifesto that still resonates in Silicon Valley: "Technology...had created the ills of the world. Only technology could solve them" (Foer 19). But the technology had to be unified into one system, a wholeness represented by Eggers as a circle.

Both *1984* and *The Circle* function as *romans a clef*, allegories overlaid on historical figures, companies, and organizations. Whereas Orwell, in *1984*, issued a stern warning to Western Europe and the rest of the world about the dangers of an authoritarian, autocratic, dictatorial, totalitarian nightmare like Stalin's regime, Eggers warns us of a new threat—that of adopting another orthodoxy in the techno-capitalistic domination of Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Twitter, and companies that seek to emulate them (or at least be purchased by them). This new danger, Eggers would have us believe, is even more pervasive than Stalinistic communism. However, the striking similarities between the orthodoxy of Silicon Valley and the former communist bloc must be noted. The myth undergirding both life in Orwell's Oceania (Stalin's Soviet Union ported over to England) and life in America under the thumb of technocorporatism is simple: we're much better off with them than without them. Early on in *1984*, the unnamed, omniscient, third-person narrator (focalized through Winston) reveals the sham of the Ministry of Plenty ("MiniPlenty" in Newspeak) and Winston's fudging of figures to project an abundance of material resources: "All one knew was that every quarter astronomical numbers of boots were produced on paper, while perhaps half the population of Oceania went barefoot" (Orwell 41). This ability to control the flow of information is matched and perhaps surpassed by the Circle. Political critics of the company's monopolistic stranglehold on electronic existence were met with sudden scandal—WikiLeaks-style data dumps revealing the dissenters to be pedophiles, adulterers, and sexual deviants. Or, as Mercer puts it to Mae, "You think it's just a coincidence that every time some congresswoman or blogger talks about monopoly, they suddenly become ensnared in some terrible sex-porn-witchcraft controversy?" (259). Historical truth and objective reality, in both *1984* and *The Circle*, are completely perspectival, and more chillingly, completely manufactured. The erosion of objective truth, not

the proliferation of communism, was Orwell's greatest fear. The Ministry of Truth, or "MiniTru" in Newspeak, where the protagonist of *1984*, Winston Smith, works to destroy and invent the past, is nothing more than an analog, offline Circle; his "speakwrite" is a Dictaphone reminiscent of today's electronic personal assistants like Siri and Alexa. Both the Party and the Circle can, quite literally, wipe someone's existence out. This kind of power, left unchecked, can alter the course of human history. This is why Orwell considered communism, and not Nazism, the more insidious species of totalitarianism: "Hitler burned books; Stalin rewrote them," the author lamented ("*Animal Farm* at 70"). This ability to create, alter, and destroy a person (we know Trotsky was simply airbrushed out of official Soviet photographs) is only enhanced by the time we reach the era of high technologies in which *The Circle* takes place. "If you control the past, you control the future" goes one of the many slogans of the Party in *1984*. Similarly, by the end of *The Circle* we are forced to admit this truth. We must also admit that knowing everything about our past, while possibly productive, is not without pain. Annie, the mentor to Eggers's protagonist Mae, comes to learn that her ancestors owned slaves in Ireland and America; that her parents maintained an open marriage; and that they witnessed a homeless person drown and did nothing. Eggers's message is clear: be careful what you wish for.

The Circle reveals an evolution in technology but also in the dystopian novelist's treatment of female characters. It is here that Rodden and Rossi's charges against Orwell for writing a flat, apolitical character in Julia seem to be overturned. One of the most famous passages in *1984* begins, "Almost as swiftly as he had imagined it, she had torn her clothes off, and when she flung them aside it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated" (125). It is here that Julia, not with speech, but with the rhetoric of her body, the rhetoric of her sexuality, makes an overt political statement. Julia

weaponizes her sexuality despite being unaware of its potency in the resistance against the Party. Orwell tells us as much: “Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act” (126). It is her unique, albeit inadvertent, way of fighting back. She weakens the orthodox hold of the Party by dampening its members’ fervor. However, her impatience with the tedium of political pomposity should not be confused with complete apathy. Furthermore, Orwell failing to fully realize the female mind should not be confused with misogyny. In light of this, we might conclude that Julia functions as the literary godmother to *The Circle’s* Mae Holland.

While Julia’s rebellious sex acts can be viewed as resisting the party, Mae’s sexual encounters provide anarchic foil to the neat ordering of the Circle. Whereas every single detail has been thoughtfully considered at the Circle’s headquarters, Mae’s trysts are never carefully planned and are often messy, embarrassing, wild, and untamed. Stylistically and thematically, this is where Eggers diverges from Orwell’s didacticism. Rather than call attention to cross-purposes like Orwell does through Julia and the Party’s attitudes toward sex, Eggers allows Mae to temporarily escape the Circle through *la petite mort*.

Both *1984* and *The Circle* deal in voyeuristic and pornographic forms of surveillance. Structurally, both plots contain a scene in which the sexual partners are ostensibly free from surveillance and both contain a scene in which the pair are subject to observation. In *1984*, Winston and Julia go to great lengths to avoid discovery by escaping the panoptic urbanism of Airstrip One for a bucolic setting in the Oceanic countryside. This contrasts greatly with the scene in Mr. Charrington’s boarding house, one of the most chilling scenes in the novel, in which the telescreen is discovered and their affair revealed. In *The Circle*, Mae and Kalden escape the SeeChange cameras by having sex in the women’s bathroom. This discretion diverges sharply

from her other partner, Francis's, attitude towards sex. The socially and sexually awkward computer programmer videos his encounter with Mae much to the latter's horror. Francis cannot, even if he wanted to (which he surely does not) delete the video. Deleting data is an unforgivable sin at the Circle. The incident will remain in the videographic archives of the Circle's cloud and servers. The distinction should be clear: the Party of *1984* owns its members and their bodily functions; the Circle owns its employees' (and it is safe to assume non-employees') data. This difference signifies the aforementioned shift from Big Brother to Big Data. In other words, like the respective slogans remind us, "Slavery is Freedom" and "Privacy is Theft." Changing Mae's mind on this issue of privacy—from a defender to a privacy skeptic—is illustrative of the paradigmatic shift of our entire society from the "why" to the "how." The Circle's leaders change her mind by making her into a star, the focus of the synopticon—first internally, on stage at Circle HQ, and then externally, as the test subject for their Go Clear project, beaming her image, via SeeChange camera, onto the screens of millions of TruYou users.

It is important to reiterate the relationship between sex and recreation. Sex is creation and to *re-create* is to create again. It is a resetting. Julia weaponizes sex. She seeks to take down the whole party with her sexual promiscuity. She sleeps with as many Outer Party members as possible. Sex, the narration focalized through Julia suggests, strips the party member of the requisite political fervor, rendering him or her spent. For Mae, sex is a means to an end beyond creating political discord; it is a means of re-creating, resetting the delicate calibration of our psychic machinery. She engages in messy, and at times, animalistic sex to reset the system much like an alcoholic might go on a bender to temporarily short-circuit the wiring. In this, we're reminded of a line from *1984*: "Not merely the love of one person, but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces" (126). Mae,

like Julia and Winston before her, also turns to nature. Solace in nature and recreation are forms of escapism for Mae. But as we come to learn, even her kayaking expeditions in the bay cannot escape the watchman's eye. The Circle has installed "SeeChange" cameras at the shore of the bay; they capture Mae stealing a kayak and taking it for a spin. The whole incident is turned into a teachable brain-washable moment on stage for Eamon Bailey, the Circle's avuncular but dogmatic high priest of technology. In a Foucauldian turn, Bailey gently chastises Mae by asking her if she would have behaved differently had she known a camera was surveilling her every move. The effect, Bailey insinuates, is one similar to that of the signs around American cities, warning citizens and prospective criminals that, "This Area is Under 24-hour Video Surveillance." Like Bentham's panopticon, it needn't be: it only matters that the populous perceive it to be so. Their behavior follows suit.

It is interesting to note that while Orwell's novel "reveals an inability to penetrate the female mind" (Rodden 7), Eggers's novel is concerned with the revelation of two female minds: Mae Holland and Annie. Rossi and Rodden argue that Orwell's Julia is a "caricature created by a male mind that doesn't understand women" (7). Similarly, Horan laments "the image of Julia trotting through the Golden Country is not that of a liberated woman, but of a woman liberated for men" (327). Julia is a character who is apolitical, only serving her own self-interest, and completely disinterested in any revolution beyond the bedroom. She cares little for taking down the Party. To call her a flat character would be a bridge too far, but it does seem as if she lacks any discernible level of intellectual curiosity. While textual evidence exists to support Rodden and Rossi's claims, we must counter that it is Julia who makes a handful of astute observations about the nature of the Party. She startles Winston with her claim that perhaps it is the Party themselves who are dropping bombs on the Proles to keep them in a constant state of fear, and to

whip them into a state of patriotic fervor. Eggers cleverly reverses the ordering of gender roles in *The Circle*: it's Mae and Annie, young women, who find themselves at the center of the novel's political and ideological action, and peripheral male characters like Francis Garaventa, who come across as vapid and sex-obsessed and are pushed to its margins.

Horan, in "Revolutions from the Waist Downwards," coins the term "projected political fiction," stories that "project a political system or philosophy with which they disagree into a futuristic story" (315). Sexual desire, for Horan, like the kind exhibited by Julia, "can never fully be appropriated" and acts as a "potential force for political and spiritual regeneration from within the totalitarian state" (314). In a surveillance state, no human activity escapes the watchman's eye, not even the most basic functions. As Horan points out, in *1984*, "Sex, like everything else, is monitored through the telescreen, a descendent of the television that doubles as a video camera" (324). One seemingly antidotal, if not downright deliberately anarchic counterpoint, to the authoritarianism of the techno-corporatism of the Party and the Circle is sex. In *1984*, sexual fervor must be suppressed because it dilutes the power of political fervor. As Julia explains, "When you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time" (133). Sex as rebellion and even revolution defines Horan's genre of "projected political fiction." For Horan, "each projected political fiction is plotted around an unlawful erotic relationship[...]between two characters: an orthodox character[...]and a subversive, lascivious radical" (316). The orthodox character in this dynamic is eventually won over by the rebel's "heretical political philosophy." I argue, at least in the case of *1984*, that this is a serious misreading of the text. Horan's definition is too neatly applied. While Winston jokingly refers to Julia as a "rebel from the waist downwards," the narrator, focalized through

Winston, goes on to say, “in the ramifications of Party doctrine she had not the faintest interest” (156). Julia literally falls asleep any time Winston starts talking politics. Her heresy, if we can call it that, is far less deliberate and orchestrated than Horan would have us believe. She is orthodox only inasmuch as she is ignorant about what orthodoxy means: “Talking to her, he realized how easy it was to present an appearance of what orthodoxy meant. In a way, the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it” (156). Having said that, according to the principles of *INGSOC*, that is about as orthodox as it gets. While the definition of projected political fiction fits aptly with *1984*, its emphasis on futurism fails to align with *The Circle*, a novel set in the present. Horan labels *1984* a “cautionary form of projected political fiction” (315). He likens the form to a movie projector, casting an image of what lies ahead. *The Circle* functions more like a mirror reflecting the ineluctability of the neoliberal, technocapitalistic society.

Both novels are allegories. *1984* is Orwell’s warning about a near-future autocratic, dictatorial, totalitarian regime like Stalin’s Soviet Union taking control in near present-day England. He packages this portent in a science-fiction-like, dystopian nightmare set in the not-so-distant future. However, Orwell himself called the novel a “satire.” He styled it after his idol, Jonathan Swift, perhaps the most famous satirist in the whole of English literature. Although the *1984* shares some elements with *Gulliver’s Travels*, Rodden and Rossi allege it most closely resembles “A Modest Proposal” in which the narrator recommends eating children to solve Ireland’s famine (82). The *OED* defines “satire” as “[a] poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary.” Orwell successfully employed exaggeration and ridicule in *1984* to expose the immorality of

communism, something he saw his compatriots seduced by after the war. However, his criticisms were not limited to communism.

The most overlooked aspect of Orwell's *roman a clef* in *1984* is its warning about hyper-capitalism. Crick, in his definitive biography *George Orwell: A Life* has shown the effects, on *1984*, of Orwell's experiences in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War. Rodden and Rossi have similarly argued, in their Cambridge *Introduction to Orwell*, that Orwell's journey through Catalonia shaped his views on fascism and communism and helped create the Newspeak and "MiniTru" of *1984*. Yet critics barely make mention of a highly influential text in Orwell's constellation of sources for the novel: James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1941). This functions as the missing link between Orwell's and Eggers's projects. In the book, Burnham looked to examples from the 20th century, namely Nazism, Stalinism, and FDR's "New Deal" as evidence that historical capitalism would not remain static; it would be replaced by socialism or something new or completely collapse under its own weight. Orwell took Burnham to task in his 1946 essay in *Polemic* titled "Second Thoughts on James Burnham." The essay contains a repudiation of neoliberalism: "Always *laissez-faire* capitalism gives way to planning and state interference, the mere owner loses power as against the technician and the bureaucrat" (Orwell). Neoliberalism is "a modified form of liberalism tending to favor free-market capitalism. It refers primarily to the 20th century resurgence of the 19th century ideas associated with *laissez-faire* economic liberalism" (*OED* and *The Routledge Handbook of Poverty in the United States*). *The Circle* continues this repudiation, homing in on Silicon Valley's libertarianism.

While Orwell warns of fascism, communism, and state capitalism, Eggers warns of the unchecked, unthrottled power of technology companies operating with *carte blanche* in present-day America. He also packages this warning in a utopian-dystopian nightmare set in the near-

future. If we're paying attention, we would notice that Eggers is not warning us of what could happen if we allow these companies to grow out of control, but rather showing us that they already have. Nearly none of the technologies represented in *The Circle* were unavailable at the time of the book's publication in 2013. It is not so much what could happen, but what is happening, that becomes the threat if we just take the time to look around outside the novel. Eggers's project is to reveal the motives behind some of the world's most valuable technology companies, or their *raison d'être*: the complete obliteration of privacy. However, privacy, as a societal value, is a very recent ideal. In the United States, legal precedent for personal privacy is barely a century old.

In 1890, Louis Brandeis, future Supreme Court justice, wrote a paper titled "The Right to Privacy":

Instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that 'what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the housetops.'...The press overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and of decency. Gossip is no longer the resource of the idle and of the vicious, but has become a trade, which is pursued with industry as well as effrontery'. (Brandeis qtd. in Rosen and Santesso 108, ellipsis in original)

California was the first state in the U.S. to legally prohibit wiretapping (in 1862) and convicted a stockbroker, D.C. Williams, for violating the statute by listening in to corporate telegraph lines to steal information and sell it to investors (Smithsonian). In another landmark case, *Katz v. United States* (1967), the court considers: "Would a reasonable person objectively looking at the communication setting, the situation and location of a communicator and communicatee--would

he reasonably believe that that communication was intended to be confidential?” (Schneider as quoted in Farivar 7). These three historical markers, when analyzed together, form the legal backbone of societal attitudes toward surveillance in the United States. They therefore must be credited, at least partly, with the creation of surveillance studies as an academic pursuit.

Galic organizes surveillance studies into three distinct historical phases. The first phase is the original architectural project of Bentham’s Panopticon and Foucault’s subsequent analysis of it as a social metaphor. Galic argues that this phase provides the theoretical framework underpinning all of surveillance studies and still resonates today. The second phase, as presented by Galic, is dominated by the post-panoptic theories of Deleuze and Guattari, Haggerty and Ericson, and Zuboff and the emergence of an electronic, networked society. Deleuze’s greatest contribution to surveillance studies is to break from Foucault and declare the *dividual* or “divided individual” the most important subject of control. In his theory, the individual is split into consumer and purchasing behavior (Galic 20). Picking up the baton from Deleuze and Guattari, Haggerty and Ericson repurpose their “assemblages” as “surveillant assemblages.” This represents a shift in focus from territorialized to deterritorialized (21). Zuboff, as we will discuss in greater detail in chapter three, has coined the term “surveillance capitalism,” a system whereby “profits derive from the unilateral surveillance and modification of human behavior” (Zuboff qtd. in Galic 24).

Finally, the third historical phase is concerned with contemporary notions of surveillance and “surveillance theory” concerned with “more user-centric perspectives of participation and resistance” (Galic 11). Although this chapter must pay homage to the giants in Bentham and Foucault it will primarily concern itself with this third phase of surveillance studies as outlined

by Galic. But before we fully delve into this third phase, let us connect Orwell's conceptualization of "nationalism" with traditional surveillance.

The U.S.A. PATRIOT ACT or the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" of 2001 was passed by Congress and then signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2001. The act allowed for a broad assignation of powers for the federal government to surveil its own people in the interests of national security. Although chapter three will deal with this act more closely, it is worth noting here that the passing of this act is straight from the Orwellian, totalitarian playbook: if you keep citizens in a perpetual state of fear they will agree to forfeit most if not all of their civil liberties under the auspice of safety. Julia, in one scene in *1984*, illuminates this defining feature of totalitarianism for Winston: "Once when he happened in some connection to mention the war against Eurasia, she startled him by saying casually that in her opinion the war was not happening. The rocket bombs which fell daily on London were probably fired by the Government of Oceania itself, 'just to keep people frightened'" (153).

This fear of constantly being watched mimics fiction and film from *Minority Report* to *Enemy of the State*. Choice, or lack thereof, is another defining feature of the totalitarian state. Complete subservience in every aspect of life must be maintained at all costs. The power that technology companies like Google and Facebook currently enjoy means the transformation from a technocapitalistic state to a purely totalitarian regime. In *1984*, power is maintained through thought control, cult of personality, and propaganda. The party also employs psychic and physical torture and bombs. In *The Circle*, control is exercised through far more subtle and insidious channels. Its own brand of totalitarianism is effectuated not through overt violence, but

advanced technological social tools for targeting, cataloging, surveilling, and corralling. Where can we look to find examples of resistance to emulate?

2.2 Spaces for resistance:

The enduring image of the Amish is perhaps the horse and buggy transporting a man with a long beard and a big hat to and from the farm. We know little of the Amish apart from their predisposition for rejecting new technologies out of hand in an attempt to insulate and inoculate themselves from the temptations of electronic life. However, this reductive image of Amish-as-Luddite is not accurate. While most Americans wholesally adopt Silicon Valley's every attempt to build a better mousetrap—think AppleWatch, Roomba, Fitbit, Nest, etc. – "The Amish don't buy that," says Donald Kraybill, professor at Elizabethtown College and co-author of *The Amish*. "They're more cautious — more suspicious — wondering is this going to be helpful or is it going to be detrimental? Is it going to bolster our life together, as a community, or is it going to somehow tear it down" (*NPR.org*)? *The Circle* includes an Amish-like character, Mercer. The ex-boyfriend of the protagonist, Mae, Mercer eschews digital marketing for the bygone method of word-of-mouth to hawk his wares—chandeliers fashioned from animal antlers. Like the Amish, Mercer, but to the dismay of Mae, does not reject these tools on their face; he simply weighs the cost-benefit ratio of their adoption. Just like the tried-and-true methods of his carpentry and artistry, Mercer does not assume newer is necessarily better. This tech-will-solve-all mantra is the neoliberal, technocapitalistic lie Eggers and *The Circle* seek to explode. And it dovetails nicely with another myth: the Luddites.

The Luddites were textile workers fighting against the mechanization of the workplace. Merchant, in summation of the work of Parisian sociologist, Raymond Boudon, *Analysis of*

Ideology, concluded, “The Luddites weren't technophobes, then. They were labor strategists” (*Vice*). Just as the Amish should not be dismissed as pre-historic Neanderthals, the Luddites should not be written off as simply anti-technology. Their fight, a fight which led to the formation of labor unions, is a fight being presently resumed. The automation of everything from the service industry to transportation is an affront to the worker. Unchecked capitalism like the kind discussed in “Second Thoughts on James Burnham” was, for Orwell, an evil on par with the likes of communism and fascism. Insatiable capitalistic drive married to advanced surveillance technologies have led to the obliteration of privacy and the endangerment of the American worker. Mercer, in this sense, is also a Luddite— not just in its current usage as metonym for “technophobe”—but as a skeptic seeking to opt out of the Circle’s “services.” He does just that for Mae’s parents. In exchange for free healthcare from the Circle’s army of physicians, her MS-stricken father and his caregiver, her mother, stream video of themselves to Mae’s online audience of followers. Mae’s mother hands her a letter from Mercer. In it he reports, “I helped them cover some the cameras. I even bought the fabric. I was happy to do it[...] They want to be alone. And not watched. Surveillance shouldn’t be the tradeoff for any goddamn service we get” (Eggers 367).

Technology, despite being grounded in the hard sciences, relies upon the socio-literary phenomenon of mythology. Once our devices cease to be looked upon as merely tools to achieve specific goals, instruments that we control, and become magical, inherently good objects in themselves, they transcend utility. I’m not sure if this hasn’t always been the case, but in the era of the iPhone, it feels particularly poignant. On its face, it sounds fairly benign: technology companies produce beautiful objects that people want to use. Marx, in *Das Kapital*, spoke of commodity fetishism as a phenomenon in which “the products of the human brain appear as

autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own” (165). Lyon refers to the products coming out of Silicon Valley as “sexy screens”—the brushed steel, matte black, space grey, liquid crystal objects that jockey for our attention every single day. Their benignity transforms into malignancy when they completely subvert organic human contact. Technological objects are also a source of anxiety in *1984*.

Just as Jeremy Bentham’s prison, the panopticon, began with the idea of a physical structure, so too does George Orwell’s dystopia. When we first meet Winston Smith, a member of the Outer Party, he is living under the tyranny of Big Brother, the ubiquitous avatar for English Socialism or *INGSOC* in Newspeak. That tyrannical rule, we learn, is enforced through, among other methods, the “telescreen.” A two-way, simultaneous receptor and transmitter, the telescreen projects Party messages, news from the various fronts in the perpetual war, and instructions for members while surveilling every last bit of minutiae of their daily existences. In a decidedly Benthamite turn, the narrator of *1984*, focalized through Winston, laments this quotidian hell: “You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized” (3). Galic reminds us, “Bentham’s vision, already in the prison-Panopticon, was not to create a ‘society of control’ where people would be watched all the time; rather, the idea was that discipline would be internalised and the need for the inspector, the watching itself, would be eventually exhausted” (12). Big Brother functions much in the same way: his dark eyes and mustachioed face loom over everything.

As Santesso and Rosen have pointed out in *The Watchmen in Pieces*, much of the work in surveillance studies appears to be concerned with applying “vaguely Foucauldian” analyses of various technologies (7). While much is owed to Foucault’s interpretation of Bentham’s model

for the panopticon prison in the *Panopticon Papers*, we must also exercise the freedom to divorce ourselves from his totalizing approach. Just as T.S. Kuhn came to realize that we cannot view Aristotle's grasp of physics and natural science through a twentieth-century lens, so too must Foucault be contextualized. The technologies of the twenty-first century and the psychosocial transformations they've brought about render Foucault an incomplete model with which to analyze the literature struggling to grapple with a rapidly evolving world since the turn of the millennium. We must situate both Bentham and Foucault in their time. The former was writing about an actual prison whereas the latter was opining on socio-cultural codes. Even the Circle's "SeeChange" cameras—tiny wearable devices capable of real-time video streaming—will feel quaint as surveillance studies evolves from primarily speaking of videographic surveillance to computer surveillance or "dataveillance."

This chapter is primarily concerned with the shift in our society's attitude toward privacy. It is not without irony that the advent of the digital age and its increasingly powerful tools for surveillance has perfectly coincided with a paradigmatic shift in our attitude toward privacy. A bizarrely counterintuitive and inversive relationship exists between these tools and their users: as the tools become more and more capable, more and more powerful, their application becomes less and less necessary. In other words, along the way to a fully realized Orwellian world, something strange happened: Big Brother has never been more capable in his ability to spy on us, to record our every utterance; and yet we have never been more willing to freely divulge all of those utterances anyway. Bauman, in his and Lyon's essential work, *Liquid Surveillance*, refers to this phenomenon as "DIY panopticon" – "a panopticon significantly modified: surveillance without surveillers" (69). This chapter concerns itself with the reasons why this has happened.

The corporations and the politicians they own have stumbled upon a veritable gold mine: social media. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's revolutionary discovery had little to do with writing brilliant computer code. It's called a "platform" for a reason: the site itself provides users with nothing more than a forum in which to launch their own agendas. The technology has been there, for the most part, since the nascent days of the Internet and its rudimentary chatrooms and message boards. While Foucault's interpretation of the panopticon might not be useful as a one-size-fits-all model for this chapter or other 21st-century surveillance studies, perhaps Thomas Mathiesen's neologism, *synopticon*, comes closer. Although, as Lyon correctly argues, this term is born out of the 24-hour news and mass media culture following 9/11, we can just as easily apply Mathiesen's model to social media. Mae Holland, the protagonist of *The Circle*, by the end of Book I, "goes transparent" – she submits, willingly, to the Circle's self-surveillance program whereby participants share, videographically, all but the most scatological, basic human exercises to watchers worldwide: "The pressure on those who hadn't gone transparent went from polite to oppressive. The question, from pundits and constituents, was obvious and loud: If you aren't transparent, what are you hiding?" (Eggers 239). Millions of viewers around the world watch Mae's every move and hear her every utterance in real-time. Lyon is right to point out that synoptic spaces could include areas for resistance, dissent, questioning or criticizing surveillance. It's just that, in *The Circle*, those voices are subverted by the pure pornographic pleasure of reality (streaming) TV. Transparency is one way the technologists try to sell us their utopian vision; safety is the other.

One Circler, Francis Garaventa, is working on a project to track children under the auspices of safety and protection. Surveillance as safety is even more insidious than surveillance for the sake of convenience. We need only remember the broad assignation of powers granted to

the executive and judiciary branches of government by the Patriot Act. Although we will save a more in-depth discussion of tracking and mapping for our discussion of the “banopticon” in Chapter Three, it’s worth pointing out here that losing people and things is impermissible in the technocapitalistic society. Lyon in his recent book, *The Culture of Surveillance*, points us to the term “logjects”—“objects that record and log their own use and frequently also transmit those data elsewhere” (154). He goes on to gloss the myriad choices for finding people, pets, and things. He gives the example of the Bluetooth “Tile” that can be affixed to nearly any object for retrieval. Staying connected, finding your friends, means just more opportunity to surveil and be surveilled. Along with the prohibition against being alone, the impermissibility of solitude, is the mandate from technocracy that we always know where we, our stuff, and everyone else, can be located. Francis’s “ChildTrack” is the natural progression of Lyon’s “logject”—our most precious objects, our children, must be tracked. Being off the grid is a crisis at *The Circle*. In *1984*, being alone is tantamount to treason:

It was assumed that when he was not working, eating, or sleeping he would be taking part in some kind of communal recreations; to do anything that suggested a taste for solitude even to go for a walk by yourself, was always slightly dangerous. There was a word for it in Newspeak: *ownlife*, it was called, meaning individualism and eccentricity. (82)

Later, Winston Smith would remark that it “struck him as a curious fact that he had never heard a member of the Party singing alone and spontaneously. It would even have seemed slightly unorthodox, a dangerous eccentricity, like talking to oneself” (142). Singing for oneself, and not for the collective, political will, like the Prole woman does outside Mr. Charrington’s room, is seen as, at best masturbatory, and at worst, heretical.

Ownlife manifests itself slightly differently in *The Circle*. At Circle HQ, online participation is not simply monitored; it is mandated. Mae’s supervisor admonishes her for a less-than-robust TruYou footprint: “Okay. But just know, from now on, that being social, and being a presence on your profile and all related accounts—this is part of why you’re here. We consider online presence to be integral to your work here. It’s all connected” (95). It’s “all connected” and always connected. There is never a time for privacy in *The Circle*—a reality only exacerbated by Mae’s decision to “go transparent” and beam her every move to every smart device in the world. Privacy is theft.

Rosen and Santesso, in *The Watchman in Pieces*, argue that “Wordsworth saw privacy as having certain crucial functions: in addition to protection, it allowed for reflection (the process by which the individual self might be developed and expanded), and it encouraged the nurturing of memory” (Rosen and Santesso 117). Mercer, Eggers’s avatar in *The Circle*, also speaks of the restorative properties of reflection: “You people are creating a world of ever-present daylight, and I think it will burn us alive. There will be no time to reflect, to sleep, to cool” (431). But Rosen and Santesso also use Wordsworth as the starting point down a path to an illiberal future: “...the beginnings of a worrisome logical circle: liberalism depends on privacy; privacy can limit empathy; lack of empathy dissolves civil cohesion...makes a liberal state functionally impossible” (118). While Rosen and Santesso might be helpful in charting surveillance in literature, they are guilty of falling prey to the logical fallacy of the slippery slope argument. Mercer is not arguing, at least at this stage of the novel, for total immersion in privacy; he is arguing for *some* privacy—the very condition Rosen and Santesso argue is necessary to make liberal personhood possible—and the separation of the individual, private citizen from the collective will. It is what, Orwell would argue, separates us from fascism: “sanity” Winston

concludes “is not statistical.” Tracking people, of course, is nothing new; it’s something of a literary trope. It’s omnipresent in classic dystopian fiction like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Philip K. Dick) and *Brave New World* (Huxley) but stretches back even farther. Marks reminds us that, in More’s *Utopia*, “Utopians are required to obtain authorised passes in order to travel beyond their usual environs and must travel in groups. An individual who travels without permission is made a slave” (9). This resonates strongly with More’s literary descendant, *1984*, and the slogan “FREEDOM IS SLAVERY.” To go it alone is to be a slave; you can only find freedom in the group, in the collective. In twenty-first-century techno-capitalism, this means never allowing your connection to be broken.

To always be connected means never being alone. Being alone is anathema to technocapitalism. Time to reflect is the enemy of international market capitalism. Under the auspices of humanism, techno-corporatism traffics in the myth that heightened personal interconnectedness will lead to greater levels of human empathy. Being alone is not permissible because being alone allows time to cool, time to rest, and time to think. Becoming a thinking human being, a truly contemplative individual, is the last thing techno-corporate overlords want. Time alone means time to interrogate our own thinking and behavior. It means being Amish, if only for a little while. This is a behavior in itself. Just as the cigarette companies design their products to be highly addictive, the technology companies create devices which act upon the brain’s neuroreceptors. Just like nicotine, our “sexy screens” give us a hit, a high, every time they ding, vibrate, or ring. The serotonin and dopamine released reduces us to little more than lab rats itching for the next dose. We need time to unplug and disconnect lest we become lobotomized by digital narcotics. Recently, technology companies like Facebook, Apple, and Google have introduced tools for users to monitor time spent on digital applications. This vain

attempt at image rehabilitation rings about as true as billboards for beer and spirit companies reminding us to “drink responsibly.”

Orwell, most prescient of soothsayers, predicted smartphone technology as far back as the 1930s. He conceived of a device capable of projecting messages and spying. His “telescreen” provides the vehicle for one of the most haunting scenes in modern dystopian fiction, the moment when the jig is finally up: Winston and Julia are caught quite literally with their pants down. The telescreen has been watching them the entire time they have been carrying out their tryst in Mr. Charrington’s room. “Now they can see us,” Julia said resignedly. “Now we can see you,” replied the voice. Orwell predicted the ubiquity of the two-way screen. However, he failed to predict the cultural shift required to turn us from unwitting surveillance subjects to eager co-conspirators. The fear Julia and Winston feel when they discover they’ve been watched is replaced by Mae’s fear of *not* being watched.

By the time we reach the present and very near future of *The Circle*, a scene like the one described above from *1984* holds little cultural relevance. For millennials and subsequent generations, surveillance, as traditionally conceived, is no longer necessary. We willingly, eagerly, and it must be said, cheerfully, surveil ourselves. The Circle’s “SeeChange” project – the nation- and then worldwide phenomenon whereby politicians and private citizens “go transparent” by opting to let the entire Web-connected world see their every move and hear their every utterance—seems like a dystopian nightmare ripped from Orwell’s or Zamyatin’s pages. On further examination, however, Eggers, like Orwell before him, is actually talking about our time. We are already there. The pressure to create an online persona—to digitally document every bit of minutia of our quotidian existence—is already taking place in the form of social

media tools and platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn, to mention but a few.

Mercer is the one character in *The Circle* that fiercely resists this pressure. Despite Mae's insistence, Mercer resists digitizing his small business. He is determined to distribute his antler chandeliers without the aid of Mae's myriad digital marketing tools. He opts out of the online marketplace in favor of more organic, interpersonal customer relationships. In liberating Mae's parents from the electronic eye fixed on their every movement and then attempting, albeit in vain, to evade his own televisual tracking, Mercer becomes a hermit-hero. His withdrawal from the surveillance culture represents a last act of resistance. Masterson argues that "Mercer's decision to withdraw and withhold becomes retrograde, even criminal, in the context of the virtual community's broader right to informational access" (737). This resonates with O'Brien remarking to Winston about the futility of the individual and the necessity to be subsumed by the collective will of the Party. Eggers is also concerned with determinism.

Eggers is saying "yes, we *can* conceive of a world in which technology giants like Google could eventually manipulate our politicians like puppets on a string" but the really insidious creature is not even them; it is us. Are the denizens of tech simply tapping into and exacerbating tendencies that are already there—human vanity, jealousy, and pettiness? If so, therein lies the genius. But can the central characters in these novels also offer a window into forms of resistance?

Both Winston and Mae (and later Annie) fight back against the Party and *The Circle* on paper. Winston writes in his journal and later becomes nostalgic for creamy paper and ink. Mae, on her kayaking expeditions in San Francisco Bay, uses a paper map. Later, when Annie is struggling with her feelings toward the Circle, she communicates to Mae through paper notes.

The underlying tension is laid bare by Mae's supervisor at the Circle HQ: "my problem with paper is that all communication dies with it. It holds no possibility of continuity. It ends with *you*. Like you're the only one who matters. But think if you'd been *documenting*" (186). Rodden and Rossi connect the analogic to the nostalgic: Winston "is fascinated by physical reminders of the past: an old-fashioned pen, a notebook with rich creamy paper, and a glass paperweight—things that in themselves have no value or utility but for that very reason are dear to him" (83). "Utility" is the operative word here. Rodden and Rossi actually mean "instrumentality." But let us ruminate on "utility" for a moment. It's not without a sense of irony that the seminal figure in surveillance studies, Jeremy Bentham, is also the father of utilitarianism. The "greatest good for the greatest number" is precisely how Circle dogma shapes the conversation surrounding virality. In one scene, Mae is brought on stage to answer for stealing a kayak. The Circle's SeeChange cameras installed on the beach picked up the whole incident. The bone to pick was not with the physical theft of the kayak (she "borrowed" it after hours) but rather the theft of the experiential record from those who are not able to kayak. The demonstration paves the way for the adoption of one of what Lyon calls "the pithy Orwellesque slogans": "Sharing is Caring" (154). Using a non-connected device, like a paper journal or map, is an affront to the values of Silicon Valley's open society. Lyon is correct to connect the sloganism of *The Circle* to remarks by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg: "If people share more, the world will become more open and connected. And a world that's more open and connected is a better world" (155). The new autocrats don't wield tanks and guns; they have iPhones.

The totalitarianism of the technocratic society is fueled in part by the capability for disseminating new media. More traditional forms of media, such as paper, are denigrated because they cannot be disseminated as easily; i.e. Mae's paper map of the bay cannot go viral.

The Circle encourages us to imagine a society in which paper money will be eliminated by federal statute. The banks will feed the government the line to feed us: laundering can be all but eradicated by completely adopting electronic currency. It is much more difficult to track consumers who make purchases with cash than credit and debit cards, electronic wallets, etc. It will happen. And it will happen under the pretenses of safety and consumer empowerment. Why rely upon banks to handle your financial transactions when you can simply download an application to your smartphone? After all, this is how Elon Musk made his billions: his PayPal platform was the first to truly disrupt the financial industry. Much like Uber and Lyft would later render taxi cabs obsolete, PayPal (and its subsidiary Venmo) turned the banking world on its head. Technocapitalism, it would seem, knows no bounds. The circle is closing. Zizek, in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, uses adoption of digital currency as an example of fetishism:

money fetishism will culminate with the passage to its electronic form, when the last traces of materiality have disappeared – it is only at this stage that it will assume the form of an indestructible spectral presence: I owe you 1,000 dollars, and no matter how many material notes I burn, I will owe you 1,000 dollars – the debt is inscribed somewhere in virtual digital space. (36)

The techno-corporate octopus, with its myriad tentacles touching every aspect of quotidian life, is dependent upon the virality of new media. The goal is always to get your product or service in front of as many eyeballs as possible. This process undergirds the so-called “attention economy.” The most precious commodity in the Information Age isn’t oil; it’s our attention. However, we would be remiss not to point out that virality alone is nothing new. Gutenberg’s moveable type for the printing press was similarly attacked by the Luddites for degrading the sanctity of the written word. However, the written word is quickly becoming replaced in this hyper-graphical

society by images, video, and audio. This leads us directly into a discussion of the treatment of language in Eggers's *The Circle* and Orwell's *1984*.

In *1984*, the character Syme, a colleague of Winston, is in charge of creating a new dictionary for INGSOC. This latest edition of "Newspeak" – the Party's destruction of the King's English – "cuts language to the bone." The project of this sub-department of MiniTru is less about developing a new language and more about destroying the old lexicon. To completely stamp out individuality, and to completely universalize human experience, the Party must eradicate the nuance of language, the ambiguity of subtext and connotation. What is the point of a word like "bad," Syme asks, when it's not even the opposite of good? "Ungood" works better. There is no room for subtlety or nuance in Newspeak. Rodden and Rossi argue that while his prophecies and predictions are incidental, Orwell's two chief concerns are "the loss of historical objectivity and the corruption of language" (84). Bauman, in analyzing the "creative destruction" of the twentieth century in his book, *Liquid Surveillance* – attempts by Communism and Nazism to "eradicate...every disorderly, opaque, random, control-resisting element...of the human condition" (82) sound eerily reminiscent of Syme and his linguistic project. The problem is likely to get worse. The growth of "deep fake" image synthesis, which combines computer graphics and artificial intelligence to manufacture images whose artificiality can only be identified by expert analysis, has the potential to create a paranoid labyrinth in which, according to the viewer's bias, fake images will pass as real, while real ones are dismissed as fake" (Lynskey).

In forcing us to move from a textually based to a constantly surveilled, graphically based society, the Circle is also rendering language moot. Mae, early on in her time at Circle HQ, is outfitted with a silver bracelet which monitors her health. There is little need for Mae to

communicate verbally with Dr. Villalobos, the Circle's physician, when her bracelet – not unlike the Fitbit and AppleWatch of today – sends vital signs and health data directly to the clinic. Lyon refers to this constant desire for self-monitoring as “the quantified self.” What use will there be in the future for interpreters, commentators, and translators when we are receiving 5k streaming video of events directly beamed to our phablets? Just as Bauman predicted a second phase to Burnham's “managerial revolution”—an elimination of middle-managers – it is not a massive leap to imagine a creative destruction of pundits, journalists, and cultural critics; their work has been outsourced to the users of “personal panopticons.”³ Just as it is abhorrent to be lost or off the grid, *mis*-understanding is no longer permissible. In the continuing campaign to universalize, sanitize, and homogenize human experience, technocrats such as Stenton and Bailey of the Circle want to eliminate conversation, interpretation, and metaphorical language. In their utopian future, language itself will be superfluous—mooted by our newly acquired ability to directly engage, in real time, with the totality of the observable world. Today's Newspeak is the emoji which both “cuts language down to the bone” and eliminates nuance and misunderstanding.

Orwell's prescience is difficult to overstate. Much has already been made here and elsewhere of his eerily accurate prediction of smart televisions, smartphones, smart homes, smart-everything, or what critics have referred to as “the Internet of things.” But as chilling as his descriptions of the destruction of language are, it is hard to imagine Orwell predicting the supplanting of the written word so effectively. The millennial generation and the one behind it—generation Y—are more interconnected than any other people in recorded history. New digital communication tools are being developed too quickly to rehearse here. This absurdly interconnected, incessantly switched-on world of ours means actual recreation is becoming

³ This is David Lyon's term for the smartphone.

increasingly rare. In the new era of surveillance capitalism, disconnection is a near futile task. Our wearables, shareables, and trackables ensure it. The fetishizing of these products plays right into the hands of engineers and their multinational, corporate employers. At one point in *The Circle*, Mae Holland's boss chastises her for not being on "campus" during the weekend. The implicit instruction is that, while not "required," it is *required* for her to participate.

Just as we have seen the line between public and private collapse, so too has the distance between work and play been collapsed. Our AirPods, iPhones, AppleWatches, WhatsApp, texts, instant messaging services, FaceTime, etc. all point to one inevitability: we are now *always* on the clock. Marx, in *Das Kapital*, discussed *Mehrwert* or surplus value: the excess of value produced by the labor of workers over the wages they are paid. Wages are stagnating in the U.S. despite the fact that workers are working more hours than ever before. Leaving work behind is quite literally a physical impossibility now as we are never unreachable. The analogic communications being replaced by the more portable digital messages mean we are always-already tethered to the responsibility. Again, it is packaged to us as progress, as making our lives better. Bauman likens the iPhone-strapped worker-bee to a "personal panopticon": "employees...carry their personal panopticons on their own bodies (leaving your mobile or iPhone at home when you go for a stroll...is a case of serious misdemeanor)" (Bauman 59). Mae is one such worker. This type of surveillance is packaged as convenience. Mercer unpacks the stealthy motives of "Homie"—the Circle's Amazon-esque automatic replenishment service:

You know how they framed it for me? It's the usual utopian vision. This time they were saying it'll reduce waste. If stores know what their customers want, then they don't overproduce, don't overship, don't have to throw stuff away when it's not bought. I mean, like everything else you guys are pushing, it sounds perfect, sounds progressive,

but it carries with it more control, more central tracking of everything we do. (Eggers 259)

The lie the technocracy tells us is that life has never been better; life has never been easier, under it. We owe them. And for our more convenient-than-ever lives, we will repay them with our servitude. The technocapitalistic society is dominated by the production of tools marked by a powerful combination of fetishism and surveillance. This begins to explain our readiness to adopt personal-panoptic policies.

Apart from convenience, the mandate for increased levels of surveillance and ultimately self-surveillance is tied to the rhetoric of safety. The prevailing wisdom to “tell someone [of a certain generation] where you’re going” has morphed into “tell *everyone* where you’re going.” While the tools readily available for techno-corporate and governmental entities to surveil everyone have never been more powerful, the need for them is waning. We willingly opt into services like Apple’s “Find My Friends,” a mobile application that, using digital mapping and satellite positioning, allows users to see their friends’ precise geographical locations. This is to say nothing of applications such as “Foursquare” whereby users “check in” to various locations such as retail stores, restaurants, and the like. This foreshadows Chapter Two’s discussion of *Black Mirror*’s episode on child-tracking. It is also reminiscent of the aforementioned Circler Francis, the company employee developing a system to track children: “Mae, think about a world where there could never again be a significant crime against a child. None possible. The second a kid’s not where he’s supposed to be, a massive alert goes off, and the kid can be tracked immediately. *Everyone* can track her” (Eggers 89). This brings to mind the old cliché: “It takes a village to raise a child.” Now the village can surveil that child, and eventually, that child can surveil him- or herself. How can we escape this encircling?

As mentioned above, another way both the protagonists of *1984* and *The Circle* fight back is through the pastoral. Horan argues that “writers of projected political fiction typically rely on Judeo-Christian religious symbols and pastoral settings” (317). Both Winston and Mae retreat to the bucolic as a form of active resistance against the totalitarian structures of the Party and the Circle. Horan sees this in terms of sexuality, but the pastoral in *The Circle* is stripped of the erotic and functions purely as transcendental space for resistance. Some of the most vivid imagery in *The Circle* takes place outside the campus: “She paddled beyond the tidy yachts, beyond the mystery ships and into the open bay. Once there, she rested, feeling the water beneath her, smooth and undulating like gelatin fathoms deep (139).” Rest, despite the billions spent on things like “sleep pods” on campus, can only be found outside the Circle.

Eamon Bailey functions as the counterpoint to transcendentalist philosophy. Bailey, the avuncular but ruthless co-executive of the Circle, writes off Mercer as someone “alone in some cabin” who will “get depressed and work himself into a state of madness and paranoia” (463). In an attempt to sooth Mae, Bailey explains away Mercer’s life and suicide as a “deeply depressed and isolated young man” who could not “survive in a world like this, a world moving toward communion and unity” (464). Masterson argues that “Mercer’s cabin emerges as a peculiarly contemporary version of Thoreau’s on Walden Pond” (737). While Thoreau escapes the urbanity of Concord, Massachusetts, to find solace in the woods, Mercer travels northward to the Pacific Northwest to escape the Circle and its smartphone-wielding acolytes. The characters’ paths sharply diverge there: Thoreau returns from his two years, two months, and two days in his cabin (compressed to one year in *Walden*) with immeasurable wisdom concerning the human condition; Mercer emerges from his cabin to find himself the target of a twisted scavenger hunt perpetuated by Circle HQ. In one of several overt metaphors, Mercer literally drives off a cliff—

the only way to escape his pursuers and the electronic eye of the surveillance society. The utopia described in the novel's opening pages has now devolved into a full-blown dystopia as images of Mercer's truck plunging into the river below are beamed out to Mae's millions of followers.

Utopia is often mistranslated as a "perfect place." However, utopia actually translates to "no place" or "nowhere," emphasizing its fictionality. The Internet is also a utopia inasmuch as it is fictional and occupies no physical space. Sargent defines the root term as applying to "[a] nonexistent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (Marks 6). The Information Age is a kind of nowhere inasmuch as the Internet lacks tangibility. Sure, there are giant server farms that house the bytes and bits flying back and forth but the information itself is somewhere in the ether — a kind of nowhere. John Gray argues that utopian thinking fuses Christian apocalyptic thought with fantasies of human perfection. "The core feature of all utopias," he contends, "is a dream of ultimate harmony" that "discloses its basic unreality" (17)." *The Circle* perpetuates this myth.

The Circle, like *We*, *Brave New World*, Lowry's *The Giver*, and Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* before it, puts forward a utopian vision—an alternative reality in which life has been perfected. Mae, in her appraisal of the world outside the gates of the Circle, laments the "unnecessary filth, and unnecessary strife and unnecessary errors and inefficiencies" (371) of the neighboring cities. She contrasts this starkly with the physical perfection being pursued on the campus of the Circle. And yet, even within the walls of the Circle, as the novel progresses, Mae spends less time interacting with the physicality of the campus and its inhabitants and far more time online in the TruYou portal, working nearly round-the-clock to enhance her profile or "PartiRank" in Circle-speak. It's not without irony, therefore, that as the technical means to perfect nearly every physical flaw increase (one Circler is proud of his misshapen smile as a

counterweight to the creepy faultlessness on campus), that the time people spend occupying concrete and somatic spaces decreases.

In the interdisciplinary work of surveillance studies, the scholarship contrasts the utopia of *The Circle* with the dystopia of *1984*: “Literary dystopias function for Gray [*Black Mass*] as instructive and necessary antidotes to utopian poison” (Marks 7). However, dystopias are just as fictive and foreign to normal reality. Textual evidence exists to support this. Indeed, Hunt and others have argued that the famous opening sentence of *1984*, “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen” underscores the unreliability of the narrator and the fictionality of his subsequent tale. In other words, although digital clocks around the world can be set to 13:00 hours in military time to signify 1:00 p.m., nowhere do analog clocks (the kind that strike) accomplish this. For Hunt and others, this alludes to a Christian proverb about “the thirteenth stroke of a crazy clock, which not only is itself discredited but casts a shade of doubt over all previous assertions” (536). It’s immaterial to O’Brien whether or not Big Brother or Emmanuel Goldstein or the Brotherhood really exists; it’s the effect that each has in solidifying the power of the Party that matters.

The Internet itself is a dystopian nightmare for Mercer. However, the Internet began as a type of utopian structure. Tim Berners-Lee, the architect of the World Wide Web, conceived of the Internet as a democratizing space not unlike the “connected world” Mark Zuckerberg would later espouse. Berners-Lee is among the most vocal dissenters about the current state of affairs—the cooption of his invention by technocorporations for purely monetary gain and societal control. Perhaps Berners-Lee was always naïve to view a tool made for human consumption in utopian terms. As Marks argues, “Utopianism is appealing but dangerously misguided, not comprehending the world with the necessary rationalism. As a consequence, utopianism cannot

fundamentally change the world” (7). Eli Pariser might include Berners-Lee in the category of California futurists and techno-optimists [who] in those pages spoke with a clear-eyed certainty: an inevitable, irresistible revolution was just around the corner, one that would flatten society, unseat the elites, and usher in a kind of freewheeling global utopia” (3). That has not happened. The Internet has failed to become a utopian, egalitarian, or democratizing space. The promise of the Internet has gone largely unfulfilled: it has become another platform of reification. The users of the Internet are like the homeless people in an urban park: they have been corralled there to be pacified and spied upon.

Both the tyrannical forces in *1984* and *The Circle*, Big Brother and The Three Wise Men, coopt religious language to create a dogmatic culture centered around their respective orthodoxies, INGSOC and surveillance technology. As Masterson contends, “for all the... rhetoric of a global village brought closer together, the expansionist zeal so intoxicating to Mae is framed in increasingly reductive terms. The real logic of securitization is revealed as...fundamentalisms” (734). *1984* is the more overt of the two in its unabashed appropriation of theological and sectarian terminologies. Its unnamed narrator speaks often of “heresies” against the Party—those actions, words, and even thoughts that appear as antithetical to the doctrine of INGSOC. The stated goal of the Party is to bring about total “orthodoxy,” or what Orwell describes as “not thinking.” O’Brien asks Winston, “How could you have a slogan like ‘freedom is slavery’ when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (53). In this sense, Julia is the most orthodox Party member. As Winston explains, “Talking to her, he realized how easy it was to present an appearance of orthodoxy while having no grasp of what orthodoxy meant. In a way,

the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it” (156). Her one deviation from orthodoxy, as mentioned earlier, is her sexuality.

The novel’s appendix, “*The Principles of Newspeak*” defines “*sexcrime*” as all sexual misdeeds[...]fornication, adultery, homosexuality[...]normal intercourse practiced for its own sake[..].all equally culpable, and[...]punishable by death” (306). This precisely parallels the doctrine of orthodox religions. Islamic “sexual jurisprudence” stipulates that the sex act be exclusively performed between men and women in marital relation. Similarly, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *fornication*, the sexual union of two unmarried persons, is “gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children” (“Fornication”). However, it’s not just ignorance and sex that are framed in religious terms. We again hear echoes of Judeo-Christian rhetoric or holy war in O’Brien’s appraisal of Party opponents: “The heretic, the enemy of society, will always be there, so that he can be defeated and humiliated over again” (268). This frames the apostate, the heretic, as someone outside of the collective. Again, the Party launches an attack on individualism.

We must now connect the dots between the concept of orthodoxy to the distillation and destruction of language by the Party and the Circle. We’re reminded of Syme’s orthodoxy: “It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words” (Orwell 51). He underscores the relationship between unconsciousness and language: “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller” (52). Here, a chief distinction must be made between religious orthodoxy and the political orthodoxy of the Party and the Circle: religious orthodoxy is based almost entirely on textualism, whereas political orthodoxy seeks to obliterate text. Francis, a Circler with great

technical ability, but clearly lacking a facility with language, explains, “We just argued about all this, about the words you used and what they meant. We didn’t understand their meaning the same way, and we went around and around about it. But if you had just used a number I would have understood it right away” (Eggers 381). Orwell’s fears of a loss of objective truth and the sanctity of the English language are wrapped up in the surveillance society’s displacement of the word with first the picture and then the number (sur- and data-veillance.) Even Mercer adopts religious rhetoric to outline the deepening divide: “I expect this is some second great schism, where two humanities will live, apart but parallel. There will be those who live under the surveillance dome you’re helping to create, and those who live, or try to live, apart from it. I’m scared to death for us all” (433). Orthodoxy means not being scared. Orthodoxy means not thinking at all. Uncritically accepting Silicon Valley’s offerings is another form of orthodoxy. One such offering is the social media platform Facebook, not wholly dissimilar to the Circle’s “TruYou.”

David Lyon sums up the business model of Facebook succinctly: “Social media depend for their existence on monitoring users and selling the data to others” (Lyon 7). Resistance to these platforms is, for Lyon, problematic because “surveillance power *within* social media is endemic and consequential” (7). Gina, Mae’s supervisor at the Circle, explains the *raison d’être* of the company, or how social media profiles are valued through the “Conversion Rate: the Circle would not exist, and would not grow, and would not be able to get closer to completing the Circle, if there were not actual purchases being made, actual commerce spurred” (248). This serves as another example of Eggers allowing his characters to plainly spell it out for the reader. The human being online is reduced to a mere consumer, a receptacle for the products and services the corporate overlords of the Internet are trying to hawk. The endgame is simple: the

paltry paychecks the production owners allow the workers to “earn” are pillaged by the same people via targeted advertising over social media networks. This is the engine that fuels the machine of the Circle. It is the means to the end: power to influence, power to manipulate, power to make the user believe. The goal is to hook the user and his or her attention. The character Gina captures the genesis of surveillance capitalism:

for years lesser companies had been tracking, and trying to influence, the connection between online mentions, reviews, comments, ratings, and actual purchases. Circle developers have figured out a way to measure the impact of these factors, of your participation, really, and articulate it with the Conversion Rate. (Eggers 250)

Or, as Marks puts it, “Twenty-first century consumer capitalism could not function without the collection, storage, processing, and transmission of personal information” (5). Consumers, in other words, are not serviced so much as they are targeted. It’s this militaristic rhetoric of “targeting” that I will examine next.

Bauman and Lyon, in *Liquid Surveillance*, argue that although not every surveillance tool is created with the express purpose of a physical killing, they are all born out of the military industrial complex. The adoption of militaristic language by marketing managers is of course nothing new. “Targeted” advertising has long been a feature of American and global retail marketing. But we must take notice when the Circle rejoices at the fact that “the actual buying habits of actual people were now eminently mappable and measurable, and the marketing...done with surgical precision” (21-22). Masterson is correct to argue that this “rhetoric of surgical precision” has been “transposed from a discourse of ‘heavy security’ (military strikes, drone warfare, and collateral damage...)” (733). Consumers are now targets of ads, videos, pop-up windows, spam, and click-bait, to name but a few modern maladies. This digital assault on our

attention—above I referred to this new feature of capitalism as the “attention economy”— bears much resemblance to the military targeting of enemies for elimination and the exclusion of undesirables from the home nation’s society. As Masterson asserts, “here targets on a screen are consumers rather than enemy combatants, with the chilling suggestion that they are neutralized in similarly devastating ways” (733). The new wrinkle is that the targets are now affixing themselves with bullseyes.

The Circle, as a utopian text, differs from the dystopia of *1984*. Whereas the latter focuses on torture, the former depicts the technocapitalistic emphasis on pleasure. The Party functions as an overtly repressive totalitarian government, hell-bent on quashing impulse, whereas the Circle satiates human desire. This “social totalitarianism,” as Horan sees both Zamyatin’s *We* and Huxley’s *Brave New World* as “just as insidiously effective” (318) as the repression exercised in *1984*. In other words, at least on this point, *The Circle* shares more with Orwell’s literary predecessors than with *1984*. The social media, and the Internet user in general, wants what they want, and they want it now—instantaneous gratification. They’ll get it, too, just after a short video from one of our sponsors. Mercer, Eggers’s hero, discusses the tools developed to sate us:

It’s like snack food. You know how they engineer this food? They scientifically determine precisely how much salt and fat they need to include to keep you eating. You’re not hungry, you don’t need the food, it does nothing for you, but you keep eating these empty calories. This is what you’re pushing. Same thing. Endless empty calories, but the digital-social equivalent. And you calibrate it so it’s equally addictive. (Eggers 134)

Lyon highlights the link between desire and attention: “A paradox here is that while consumption entails the pleasurable seduction of consumers, such seduction is also the result of systematic surveillance on a massive scale” (Lyon 16). In other words, our Netflix-binging and Instagram-scrolling result in the production of massive data sets capable of fueling powerful algorithms. However, the tools are not just engineered to be addictive, they’re designed to give us the illusion of accomplishment. Microsoft’s Windows platform enabled the era of digital multitasking: the delusion that a single frontal lobe can process multiple complex tasks simultaneously. The technocorporations have convinced us that their tools make us safer *and* more productive.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in *No Exit*, his seminal existentialist play, conceptualizes hell as "other people." Torture is no longer meted out by the devil or his henchmen but, through an "economy of devil-power," the subject herself. She provides the tools by which to punish. There’s no longer any need for red-hot poker in hell just as there’s no longer any need for surveillance cameras in the streets. We are the torturers; we are the surveillants; we are Big Brother. As Lyon reminds us, “We swipe our cards, repeat our postcodes and show our ID routinely, automatically, *willingly*” [my emphasis] (Lyon 13). Surveillance, in Eggers's *The Circle*, functions in similar fashion: it is not that traditional tools have been rendered obsolete; it is that the subject's own attitude towards privacy has reduced those methods to superfluity. The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0—consumer to producer—has ushered in a new era of self-surveillance or what Lyon calls self-panopticon. Mass production of consumer electronics and digital media software has opened the doors for a new generation of self-taught writers, artists, photographers, and journalists, and given them a platform to showcase their creations. In other words, there is no longer a need for Big Brother because we are him. Corporations have saved immeasurable time, money, and assets

on surveillance by convincing the populace to surveil itself. This is achieved through a combination of commodity fetishism, technology addiction, and techno-corporatism.

Bentham has become, unhelpfully, a metonym for surveillance theory and panoptical structures beyond the prison. However, his main contribution to philosophy is utilitarianism. Not to be confused, as it often is, with instrumentalism, utilitarianism essentially means “the greatest good for the greatest number.” In the spring of 1776, in his first substantial (though anonymous) publication, *A Fragment on Government*, Bentham invoked what he described as a “fundamental axiom, it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong” (93). If we agree that the Sartrean vision of hell is applicable to surveillance studies, we might also agree that Bentham’s maxim, perversely and ironically, can be transformed into the greatest number of views, clicks, downloads, and likes for the greatest number of people—the *raison d’être* for Facebook and other platforms. Galic bemoans the misapplication of Bentham by Foucault when they claim that the Panopticon “should be seen as a template, which can be adapted to the specific circumstances of...society, in which methods of control are more complicated...by increasing exceptions to continuous individual supervision” (13). The panopticon has been adapted by techno-capitalistic forces to a previously unimaginable degree.

The synopticon might prove a better model for understanding contemporary surveillance practices than the panopticon. Bauman, in his gloss on Mathieson’s synopticon, likens the new structure of managerial thought to outsourcing. The “watchtowers” he says, have been “privatized” while “wall-building” has been “deregulated” (73). Mae, after a heavy dose of the Circle Kool-Aid, inquires, “So why not *require* every voting-age citizen to have a Circle account” (388)? Can we envision a world in which Facebook might replace the U.S. voting system? The dots are not hard to connect. On the back of evidence that Russia and other foreign

adversaries hacked into our voting systems to influence the 2016 presidential election, we could see a scenario whereby a company like Alphabet, soon to be the world's third trillion-dollar company after Apple and Amazon, could take control of the electoral system by arguing it alone possesses the requisite tools and expertise to keep would-be hackers at bay. This would be a first but far from only step in dissolving the barrier separating state functions from corporate interests. The effects are far-reaching and would arguably make the American military-industrial complex look quaint by comparison. Once again, it will be packaged as convenience: the streamlining of disparate processes and collapsing of civic functions into one system. The logic will go, "you already possess a Facebook or Google+ account (TruYou in *The Circle*), why not use it to register your car, register to vote, obtain a permit for your home or business, apply for a marriage license, etc.?" The voices of dissent will be easily drowned out by arguments centered around dismal voting numbers recorded for local, state, and federal elections. Kalden warns us of the dangers of closing the circle:

Once it's mandatory to have an account, and once all government services are channeled through the Circle, you'll have helped create the world's first tyrannical monopoly. Does it seem like a good idea to you that a private company would control all the flow of all information? That participation, at their beck and call, is mandatory? (401)

Ty, no longer operating under the guise of Kalden, makes one last-ditch attempt to reason with Mae, the only person he believes is capable of preventing the Circle from closing. In doing so, he perfectly explicates the dynamic undergirding the entire process:

Stenton professionalized our idealism, monetized our utopia. He's the one who saw the connection between our work and politics, and between politics and control. Public-private leads to private-private, and soon you have the Circle running most or even all

government services, with incredible private-sector efficiency and an insatiable appetite.

Everyone becomes a citizen of the Circle. (484)

It's impossible not to draw parallels with our world. In fact, only the opposite problem persists: each and every day we are inundated with articles warning of the coming totalitarian wave of technocorporatism. The companies themselves, although now engaged in a sham public service campaign to reduce screen time, are simultaneously doubling down on efforts to control politics and continue to obliterate the line dividing public from private interest. By 2018, Alphabet was spending more money on lobbyists than any other corporation in America (Confessore). Perhaps in a deliberately benign example, the Circle takes over the local government's administration of mass transportation. This seems to be a subtle referendum on the aforementioned disruption caused by Uber and Lyft—the ride-hailing companies that have turned the taxi industry on its head. This turn of events is innocuous on its face but problematic considering the concentration of power in the hands of one or two private companies in what is, or at least used to be, a highly regulated enterprise.

The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0—consumer to producer—has ushered in a new era of self-surveillance. The change from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is not just consumer to producer, but consumer to product. As mentioned earlier, consumers are now “targets.” But “target” doesn't tell the whole story. Even people of the developing world can get their hands-on digital media devices. Once the circle is closed and everyone has one of these devices, the surveilling need not flow from top down as in Bentham's panopticon. If reality television and YouTube celebrity have taught us anything, it's that the few are not as interested in watching the many as the many are interested in watching the few. Mercer, early on in *The Circle*, before Bailey has set the hook, chides Mae for her role in the widespread adoption of social media platforms and

underscores its psychosocial ramifications. The zings and likes, buzzes and dings, frowns and smiles, tweets and retweets, have replaced human conversation and have set their sights on journalism and language qua language.

On its face, the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has been perhaps the most democratizing shift in technocapitalistic society. Tools once reserved for professional photographers, writers, journalists, artists, and musicians are now widely available on the cheap. However, as noted above, the shift from consumer to producer has also been fraught with challenges. Professional training, historically, at least in this country, has been married to various professional codes of ethics—industry standards to adhere to while engaging in these practices. Before the advent of Web 2.0, the line of demarcation between professional journalism, to mention but one industry affected, and cheap tabloid was usually pretty clear. In the supermarket line, when faced with a decision between *The National Enquirer* and *Time* magazine, the choice was clear enough: the former would contain salacious, unfounded rumor and wild conjecture, whereas the latter would, so prevailing wisdom went, be filled with professionally-vetted articles that met a minimum standard of journalistic integrity. The ubiquity of smartphones and the social media applications tied to them now mean everyone is a photographer; everyone is a writer; everyone is a surveillant. This might be regarded with a shrug. It shouldn't be. Mercer, the begrudging leader of the "great second schism" explains:

I mean, all this stuff you're involved in, it's all gossip. It's people talking about each other behind their backs. That's the vast majority of this social media, all these reviews, all these comments. Your tools have elevated gossip, hearsay and conjecture to the level of valid, mainstream communication. (Eggers 132)

As we saw earlier, privacy is a relatively new concept. The concept of liberal personhood as something distinct from, and outside of, society, is only a couple hundred years old. The “right” to privacy is an even more recent development. In *1984*, Winston underscores its necessity: “Privacy, he said, was a very valuable thing. Everyone wanted a place where they could be alone occasionally” (Orwell 137). This chapter endeavors to chart the psychosocial shift that has taken place somewhere between 1949 and 2013, the respective publication years of *1984* and *The Circle*: why has privacy gone from being a commodity deeply valued by the liberal person to a quaint relic of a bygone era of an opaque, unconnected world?

Just as Winston finds privacy all but impossible under the electric gaze of Big Brother and the telescreen (your body language can even give away your heretical thoughts via *facecrime*), Mercer bewails the demise of basic human conversation:

All right. Mae, we have to change how we interact. 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. Even when I’m talking to you face-to-face you’re telling me what some stranger thinks of me. It becomes like we’re never alone. Every time I see you, there’s a hundred other people in the room. You’re always looking at me through a hundred other people’s eyes. (Eggers 131)

In this passage, Mercer foreshadows Mae’s decision to go clear. By then it’s not “like” they’re never alone; they are never alone. Mae amasses millions of followers to surveil her every waking move. Farivar argues, “Many people say, ‘Yeah, whatever, I have nothing to hide.’ But there’s probably something that you do (or have done), that you wouldn’t want known by anyone outside of a tight circle. Whatever it is that you’re doing, what business is it of the government’s

to know?” (xvi). Bauman and Lyon liken teenagers with smartphones to “apprentices...trained in the art of living in a confessional society...notorious for effacing the boundary that once separated the private from the public, for making public exposure of the private a public virtue and obligation” (30). This is precisely the logic behind the transparency scheme by the Circle. The politicians who have gone transparent are lauded for their virtuousness while those who have resisted fall prey to sex scandals dredged up from the Internet.

The “I have nothing to hide” argument is also taken to task by Marks in *Imagining Surveillance*. In More’s *Utopia*, Marks reminds us, “Its narrator, Raphael Hythloday, makes clear that on the eponymous island of Utopia there are ‘no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings. Because [the inhabitants] live in the full view of all’” (9). And we know from Mae and the Circle that, “SECRETS ARE LIES.” But sometimes, secrets are necessary. Mae’s father suffers from M.S. In one scene, Mae returns home unexpectedly to find her mother attempting to orally pleasure her father. Under ordinary circumstances, this would be a secret shared among three family members, an embarrassing scene never to be discussed again. However, this sordid affair was captured by Mae’s SeeChange camera and broadcast to her million-plus viewers. Mercer explains to Mae the reasons for her parents opting out of the program: “They don’t want to be smiled upon, or frowned upon, or zinged. They want to be alone. And not watched. Surveillance shouldn’t be the tradeoff for any goddamn service we get” (367).

The smiles, frowns, and zings are all a part of what some scholars have called “digital exhaust”—what we leave behind for others to track. Franzen reminds us, “Powers defines ‘the private’ as ‘that part of life that goes unregistered,’ and he sees in the digital footprints we leave whenever we charge things the approach of ‘that moment when each person’s every living day will become a Bloomsday, recorded in complete detail and reproducible with a few deft

keystrokes” (Franzen 45). If Mae and her fellow Circlers get their way, this hell would become a reality. If we begin to believe that EVERYTHING MUST BE KNOWN, then there are no parts of life that go unregistered—even Mae’s mother attempting to fellate her M.S.-stricken father.

Mercer, despite his very appropriate protestations, might be cast out of normal society for resisting this new normal. Enriquez might place Mercer and Mae’s parents into the category of those “bound to be rejected, pushed aside, or suspected of a crime. Physical, social and psychical nudity is the order of the day” (Enriquez qtd. in Bauman and Lyon 30). It’s Mae’s parents’ physical nudity today but our psychical nudity laid bare for all to see tomorrow. If all is registered, nothing is private.

Fifty years ago, Lyndon Johnson, in response to signing Title III into law (Safe Streets Act June 1968), may have unlocked the key to the privacy’s disintegration in 2019: complacency. He warned us then that, [t]he right of privacy is a valued right. But in a technologically advanced society, it is a vulnerable right. That is why we must strive to protect it all the more against erosion” (Johnson qtd. in Farivar 23). Lyon and Bauman bemoan the same complacency that has led to this inattention to attention: “In a startling U-turn from the habits of our ancestors, however, we’ve lost the guts, the stamina, and above all the will to persist in the defence of such rights, those irreplaceable building blocks of individual attention” (Lyon and Bauman 28). This chapter is in part a search for the reasons behind this increased susceptibility. *The Circle* charts our forfeiture of the right to privacy.

The narrator of *The Circle* mines the water metaphor: “TruYou changed the internet, in toto, within a year. Though some sites were resistant at first, and free-internet advocates shouted about the right to be anonymous online, the TruYou wave was tidal” (21-22). As prescient as Eggers was in 2013, some of his complaints might seem quaint six years later. Perhaps this is

one of them. The right to be anonymous online, if it ever was a right, has not been exercised by the vast majority of Internet users. Quite the contrary, as Lyon points out, “anonymity is already being auto-eroded on Facebook and on other social media. The private is public, to be celebrated and consumed by countless ‘friends’ as well as casual ‘users’” (Lyon 14). To be anonymous is to “forego our minor celebrity, our ever-increasing fifteen minutes of fame, and the promise of enhanced visibility...the most avidly sought proof of social recognition, and therefore of valued - - ‘meaningful’ -- existence” (Bauman as quoted in Lyon 24). The anxiety of being watched has been replaced by the anxiety of *not* being watched. Mae’s digital second self, she contends, is proof she exists.

To speak of “surveillance”—seeing from above—seems antiquated in the face of today’s multidirectional tools. Brian Stelter, *CNN* pundit and journalist, offers perhaps the most succinct appraisal of the current landscape of the personal panopticon: “This erosion of anonymity is a product of pervasive social media services, cheap cell phone cameras, free photo and video Web hosts, and perhaps most important of all, a change in people’s views about what ought to be public and what ought to be private” (Stelter as quoted in Lyon 22). If the Circle has its way, what ought to be private is clear: nothing.

There’s a scene at the end of *The Matrix* when the main character, Neo, begins to see the binary structure underpinning all of human reality as code comprised of ones and zeroes. The Wachowski sisters, the creators of *The Matrix*, working in the mid-to-late-nineties, could never have predicted just how accurate their portrayal would be. The thesis of the film, in a decidedly Marxist turn, portrays human beings as batteries to fuel the capitalist machine. Many film critics have called *The Matrix* a Marxist allegory: it exposes the machinations of a capitalistic society. How ironic it must now seem that we’re forced to discuss artificial intelligence replacing human

beings in the workforce. Sanity might not be statistical, but labor production sure is. Orwell, Fromm argues, “is simply implying that...managerial industrialism, in which man builds machines which act like men and develops men who act like machines, is conducive to an era...in which men are transformed into things and become appendices to the process of production and consumption” (325). Bauman and Lyon write of a second managerial shift occurring, one marked by “adiaphorization.” Adiaphorization means relying more upon dataveillance than traditional surveillance to create a data body double for the user.

“Dataveillance” is the use of computers to spy on people—collecting and collating huge swaths of information in what is known in the business world as “Big Data.” This digital second self or “piecemeal double” as Lyon calls it, is far more valuable to social media platforms and the companies to whom they sell our data than is the actual person’s empirical data gleaned from more traditional surveillance methods; that is computers have replaced cameras as the ‘veillance method *d’jour*. This process of dehumanizing the subject through a strictly numerical analysis of the data allows dataveillants to disassociate themselves, “separating the person from the consequences of the action” (Lyon 7).

As a socialist and journalist, Orwell spent countless hours amongst the poor and downtrodden in otherwise cosmopolitan cities as depicted in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and the Northwest of England in *Road to Wigan Pier*. In this respect, *1984* is a continuation of the work Orwell performed with his *roman a clef*, the allegorical *Animal Farm*. In it the pigs declared, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” Socioeconomic stratification is also present in *1984*. Society in Oceania, one of the remaining three world superpowers, is divided into three groups: the Inner Party, the Outer Party, and the Proles. While the Inner Party goes to great lengths to surveil every single movement the outer party members

make, the proles are beyond, or perhaps more accurately, beneath, suspicion. In a continuation of themes present in *Animal Farm*, the Party of 1984 declares that “proles and animals are free”—the subtext clearly signifying that the two are indistinguishable. It’s hard not to think of urban America when reading of the pacification of the proles through sex, sports, the lotto, and cheap alcohol. It is here we see the collapsing of two technologies into one. Smartphones are one device with two aims: pacify users through addictive entertainment and surveil through social media tools. The embedded manual contained in 1984 on INGSOC provides some textual evidence. Chapter three of Emmanuel Goldstein’s treatise glosses the concept of “perpetual war”—an unwinnable and unlosable geopolitical deadlock in which the Party has the political capital it needs in the form of the Proles’ fear to justify an unending circle of creation and destruction of surplus goods. This is the economic engine that fuels the Party. Perpetual war will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three as it relates to the “war on terror.” The party slogan “SLAVERY IS FREEDOM” seems to be directly inspired by Zamyatin’s *We*. In it, the narrator, after reading a newspaper article relaying a story of an organization aimed at liberation from the State scoffs at the very notion, ““Liberation?” Amazing...the only means of ridding man of crime is ridding him of freedom” (28). And later, in an interaction with his foil, I-330, the narrator admits, “Yes, I was a slave, and this, too, was necessary, was good” (55). The proles are not deemed worthy of surveillance. The treatment of the proles in 1984 follows the treatment of the middle class in *Robinson Crusoe*, the first novel in English, according to Rosen and Santesso, to develop a sense of liberal personhood. Crusoe’s father belongs to the “middle station,” a group of men who “went silently and smoothly thro’ the World, and comfortably out of it” (Defoe as quoted in Rosen 82). Rosen argues the father sees the middle class as “invisible, docile, a mass without distinctions and thus not in need of constant monitoring” (83). This is reminiscent of the

narrator's appraisal of the proles who behave like "the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones" (Orwell 93). But the hope—yes, hope, the greatest difference between *The Circle* and *1984*—is that the proles will wake up to the power they wield as individuals who are part of a collective will.

By the time we reach *The Circle*, the inspector of Bentham's prison-Panopticon is replaced by the social media user. The illusion of constant surveillance is replaced by the reality of self-surveillance. The chilling, insidious genius of this new model is that users willingly opt into the system of self-sur- and dataveillance. The only resemblance self-surveillance bears to the prison-Panopticon is "the all-transparent space...where the inmates are seen without seeing the one who sees them (Galic 12). Whereas "the purpose of such central inspection was to obviate the need for watching, punishment and the Panopticon itself," this new system of self-surveillance relies upon creating the conditions whereby the desire exists to continuously watch and be watched. The closest model, therefore, to self-surveillance, is the "pauper-Panopticon": "whilst prisoners were convicted criminals sent to jail by judges and magistrates, the paupers entering the pauper-Panopticon ('the industry house') did so voluntarily" (Galic 13). It is telling that one of the key features of the pauper-Panopticon was the allowance of certain instances in which privacy would be afforded the pauper; blinds were drawn in circumstances such as marital sex or conference with elders (something not afforded to Mae's parents in the bedroom scene.) In the new era of self-surveillance, there are no blinds; the goal is always total transparency. "Going transparent" is purely a voluntary act.

The chrestomatic-Panopticon, a panopticon-shaped school conceptualized by Bentham, developed out of his ideas on utilitarianism: the better pupils taught the worse pupils, the pedagogical fulfillment of "the greatest good for the greatest number." However, the

chrestomatic-Panopticon ceases to maintain its surveillance once pupils have exited the structure. Social media networks such as Facebook have been working toward the creation of an entirely “offline” network, a shadow network of sorts to monitor behavior and communication of users and non-users alike even while they are not connected to the Internet.

The paradigmatic shift that has taken place in order to facilitate mass self-surveillance is less a technological advance and more a cultural change. Big Brother, ECHELON, NSA, do we even need these apparatuses if the polis willingly divulges everything via social media? The narrator of *The Circle* benignly summarizes the dataveillance taking place over time: “She had openly offered this information for years, and she felt that offering her preferences, and reading about others’, was one of the things she loved about her life online” (Eggers 125). Mercer underscores the voluntary nature of the new social contract:

No, Mae, it’s different. That would be easier to understand. Here, though, there are no oppressors. No one’s forcing you to do this. You willingly tie yourself to these leashes. And 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 260)

Simply surveilling, tracking, and recording human behavior is no longer the goal. The technologies required to accomplish this task have been around for millennia. The goal of the Circle is to learn the thoughts of human beings. This is the final frontier for technology companies. Closing the circle is not merely the total collapse of the barrier between public and private; closing the circle means actually knowing what someone is thinking, the annihilation of the “security” and “sovereignty of human physiognomy and psychology” (Masterson 731). For

years now, American consumers have had their every utterance recorded, their online activity or “data exhaust” tracked. Emmanuel Goldstein, in Chapter Three of *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, “War Is Peace” outlines the two aims of the Party as first conquering the whole of the Earth’s surface, and then destroying independent thought. Goldstein imagines two problems standing in the way of the Party: how to know what another human being is thinking and how to kill several hundred million people without warning. Eggers’s *The Circle* concludes by hinting that the first problem will be presently solved. Annie, formerly among the most trusted members of the Gang of 40, is in a stress-induced coma. Rather than feel genuine concern for her best friend’s health and well-being, Mae voices frustration. Her frustrations lie with her inability to know what Annie is thinking while comatose. Yet her vexation is mitigated by the prediction that this malady, the not knowing, is only temporary and reversible, a problem the Circle will eventually solve like everything else:

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. (491)

This self-assuredness and arrogance comport with the technologists’ view of their role in human evolution. The tension is for Masterson “productive” and sets “the Circle’s apotheosis as corporate enterprise and metaphysical idea...[as] completion” against the text itself as “gapingly incomplete” (730). Masterson conceptualizes this as the “domeland”—a balancing act between macro- and micro-security: “data gathering, permissions, and the notion that full transparency

rhetorically morphs into a guarantor of global peace” (730). He theorized the domeland manifesting itself as “individual bodies, failing or otherwise, imagined as territories to be mined, mapped, and measured for the secrets they hold or, more provocatively, withhold” (730). The concept aligns nicely with Mae’s proclamation that the future of the world was in the hands of the Circlers who “implicitly understood her and the planet and the way it had to be and soon would be” (370). For Masterson, it “reverberates with ominously neoliberal, rather than cosmopolitan, finality” (735). This mirrors *1984* inasmuch as O’Brien, a member of the Inner Party, interrogates Winston in Room 101. His methods for inducing compliance include physical torture with some electrical device. O’Brien can seemingly read Winston’s mind. He knows Winston’s greatest fear, in this moment, is that his back will be broken. Earlier, the narrator, focalized through Winston, seems to console himself with the fact that, “With all their cleverness they had never mastered the secret of finding out what another human being was thinking” (167). This parallels Julia’s earlier proclamation that despite all their efforts they “can’t get inside you.”

“TruYou,” the Circle’s centralized digital platform that governs everything from toilet tissue replenishment to voting, is, for Masterson, “imagined in familiarly apocalyptic terms” (733). It is fascinating, therefore, to consider the etymology of the word “apocalypse.” The Greek meaning of apocalypse is “an uncovering of knowledge.” This is precisely what the Circle endeavors to uncover through its unleashing of the “TruYou wave” which was “tidal and crushed all meaningful opposition”: knowledge of other people, their behavior, interests, disinterests, and thoughts. Marks reminds us that, “Aldous Huxley openly warns against the dangers of achieving perfection at the cost of freedom” (Marks 7). We’re reminded of the old Lexus ads declaring a “relentless pursuit of perfection.”

The endgame is not profit; the endgame is power. Power is not a means to an end; power is an end in itself, power for the sake of power. Control itself, power itself, is always the aim for the technocracy depicted in *The Circle* and its literary ancestor, the totalitarian Party in *1984*. If the image signifying power for the sake of power for Big Brother, the Party, and O'Brien is "a boot stamping on a human face forever," then the image signifying power for the sake of power for the Circle is a human hand clicking a mouse over and over and over again. George Orwell, in a 1943 essay, "Looking Back on the Spanish War," remarked, "Nazi theory...specifically denies that such a thing as 'the truth' exists...if the Leader says of such and such event, 'It never happened'—well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five—well, two and two are five. This prospect frightens me much more than bombs" (v). When you control the mechanisms whereby historical reality is captured, or in this case created, re-created, destroyed, or revised, you control "the truth." Herein lies the strongest link between the Stalinist "Party" of *1984*, specifically the Ministry of Truth or "MiniTru," and Eggers's *roman a clef* for Silicon Valley, *The Circle*.

The Circle's co-executive triumvirate of Bailey, Stenton, and Ty is metaphorized as three aquatic creatures. Bailey, toward the end of Book II, demonstrates the interactions of a seahorse, an octopus, and a shark taken from the Marianas Trench and placed in an aquarium at the Circle's headquarters. The premise was to replicate the peaceful cohabitation of the animals of the Marianas Trench in the tank at the Circle. Bailey explains the disposability of the tuna used as food for the shark: "They'll be food pretty soon, so their happiness is less important than the shark's" (473). This concept of disposability resonates strongly with the proles of *1984*, a whole class of people deemed unworthy of surveillance. The tuna function, metaphorically, as users of the Circle, edible and consumable by this new symbolic order, something to use up and throw

away. The rest of the tank's inhabitants emblemize the Three Wisemen: Ty, the brilliant but reclusive seahorse; Bailey, the avuncular octopus, tentacles everywhere; and Stenton, the menacing shark and self-described "Capitalist Prime." Ty, the rare, solitary beauty; and Bailey, intelligent, yet naïve will be devoured by the ruthless capitalistic ambition of Stenton. When Suarez-Villa speaks of a new form of corporatism that is "more clever, rapacious, and invasive...in its quest for power" (2) he is surely speaking of corporate actors like Stenton of the Circle. The "emancipatory trajectory" he recommends to "contain [technocapitalism's] pathological effects" must "involve greater accountability for corporatism" (2). In the Circle's co-executive triumvirate, Ty is the only "wiseman" desirous of acting as a check on technocapitalism's unbridled power. But corporate and governmental interests functioning within technocapitalism won't police themselves, and the seahorse is eventually turned to dust by the shark's stomach. The current public service announcements by technology giants like Facebook and Apple, recognition and *mea culpa* that their products are highly addictive and that they will sell users even newer, better products to help us control, manage, and even wean ourselves off of their earlier, more lucrative products are about as compelling as advertisements for casinos urging us to call 1-800-GAMBLER. If everyone gambled responsibly, casinos would cease to exist just as social media companies and smartphone makers would because both have a fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders, not their players or users. Capitalism must be insatiable for the model to work; the shark dies if it stops swimming and eating. Today's technocapitalists are now armed with powerful technologies designed to reveal private thoughts.

Historical notions of privacy in America were wrapped up with romantic, post-war ambitions such as home ownership. The home, the saying went, is a man's castle. The anxieties exhibited by the characters of George Orwell's *1984* center around that castle being breached by

state actors like the Thought Police. This chapter charted a seismic shift in attitudes toward privacy as seen in Dave Eggers's *The Circle*. It seems characters like Mae have not only accepted the siege on personal privacy, they have lowered the drawbridges and welcomed the onslaught. But this chapter also offered up characters peering from behind the castle's walls, holding down the fort—characters such as Julia and Mercer, who, through their embodiment of Transcendentalist values, represent pathways of resistance to the new technocracy. The solution need not be outright rejection of the totalizing master-narrative of the “wholeness” or “encircling” of Silicon Valley but rather a more nuanced and critical stance: we should ask ourselves if constantly being switched-on, plugged-in, and on-line is making our society better or worse. If there is any hope at all it lies with the Proles and the users.

**3 CHAPTER TWO: *BLACK MIRROR* AND THE MIRROR STAGE: A LACANIAN
AND DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF SURVEILLANCE IN THE NETFLIX TV
SERIES AND JONATHAN FRANZEN’S NOVEL, *PURITY***

Thou art that

Totus mundus agit histrionem

“There is no such thing as a person whose real self you like every particle of. This is why a world of liking is ultimately a lie. But there is such a thing as a person whose real self you love every particle of. And this is why love is such an existential threat to the techno-consumerist order: it exposes the lie.” – Jonathan Franzen from “Liking Is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts.”

(2011)

3.1 Introduction:

The introduction and chapter one charted three seismic, sociocultural shifts in surveillance: from Big Brother to Big Data (visual surveillance to computer surveillance), the panopticon to the synopticon (the few watching the many to the many watching the few), and the anxiety of being watched to the anxiety of *not* being watched. Chapter one discussed how, under the auspices of safety and convenience, the techno-capitalistic actors have come to dominate every aspect of our daily lives. This chapter endeavors to seek out the socio-psychic forces undergirding those shifts as represented in Charlie Brooker’s dystopian television series, *Black Mirror*, particularly its 2016 episode, “Nosedive,” and Jonathan Franzen’s 2015 novel, *Purity*. It hopes to show how Lacan’s concept of the Mirror Stage functions as a useful tool in

understanding the twenty-first century pressure to create an online profile and “digital second self.” Much as chapter one argued that the rise of “dataveillance” has all but supplanted traditional conceptions of surveillance and rendered Big Brother superfluous, this chapter contends that the digital second self is quickly taking primacy over its corporeal analog, the real physical presentation of our bodies. In other words, what we do and who we are online—those performances—now take priority over our behavior away from myriad liquid crystal displays. To this end, it revisits Goffman’s 1959 seminal sociological work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and views his dramaturgical analysis of construction of the self in the context of the totalitarianism of the Internet. In other words, the Internet has become an inescapable, all-seeing eye like Big Brother of *1984*, capital “G” God, or the Sun. We cannot opt out; we only stand in relation to it. In addition to Lacan and Goffman, the chapter returns to David Lyon’s 2018 indispensable book, *The Culture of Surveillance*, to try to come to terms with what he has called the Yelp-ification of our society—the increasingly pervasive desire to electronically rate, rank, and stratify our every offline encounter—and how Yelp-ification has become weaponized. Finally, I rely upon the research of Sherry Turkle, a technologist, psychologist, and MIT professor who has spent the better part of three decades studying the effects of technology on the human person. Turkle, once a champion of high technology, has come to understand digital mediation as injurious to face-to-face, human relationships.

This chapter also represents a continuation of themes and motifs from chapter one: the Circle’s campaign to persuade politicians and then citizens to “go transparent” will become, in *Purity*, The Sunlight Project— a WikiLeaks-style organization dedicated to electronically exposing political and corporate corruption.⁴ The Circle’s intra-office social media influence

⁴ “The Sunlight Project” is an homage to the original name of WikiLeaks as it was founded in Iceland, “The Sunshine Press.”

system, PartiRank, will become, in the “Nosedive” episode of *Black Mirror*, Reputelligent—a company for hire committed to helping raise customers’ personal rating—a number from zero to five that dictates exactly where and how a person will live. After a brief synopsis of both the novel and television episode I move on to analyses of the respective central characters, Andreas Wolf, the Edward Snowden-Julian Assange hybrid of *The Sunlight Project* and *Purity*, and Lacie Pound, the socially aspirational young woman of *Black Mirror*’s “Nosedive.” I argue that Brooker and Franzen’s works offer us a window into the impetus behind the mandate to participate in the online global village and how this affects our formation and perspective on the self. I contend that this split represents, in Lacanian terms, entrance into a second Big Other, a digital symbolic order. This electronic avatar, I conclude, is even more totalizing than the image the infant sees of himself in the mirror, because the others (“audience” in dramaturgical terms) are now virtually innumerable. This mandate to perform leaves the corporeal self even more fragmented and incomprehensible than ever before. In doing so I attempt to reconcile our longstanding inclination towards performativity as outlined in Goffman’s 1956 sociological treatise with this new directive to digitally perform and conform. Therefore, the chief research questions driving this chapter include whether these new digital tools and platforms simply exacerbate existing human tendencies such as jealousy and pettiness *or* whether they have created new conditions for fomenting societal discord? Are these tools the product of some nefarious deep state which seeks to control every aspect of our lives or is the answer simpler—capitalism run amok? Or, is it as simple as Franzen himself labeled it in one essay, “Capitalism in Overdrive?,” an outmoded economic form that was, in Piketty’s words, “never meant to be eaten raw” and in Zuboff’s words, “like sausage, meant to be cooked by a democratic society and its institutions because raw capitalism is antisocial” (43). *Purity* and “Nosedive” are but two

examples of contemporary art asking important questions and holding a mirror up to our society. Chapter one discussed the dangers in trading privacy for safety and convenience. Benjamin Franklin once opined, “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” What would Franklin say if he saw the fragility of a populous whose primary fears are missing out, not belonging, or being labeled “uncool?” These works by Franzen and Brooker encourage us to ask ourselves, is privacy, something Turkle loosely defines as “freedom from being observed,” still important in this hyper-connected age of performance? Weinstein distills Franzen’s novel: “*Purity*, written more than a decade following the events of 9/11 and the normalization of ensuing digital surveillance measures, suggests that what the Internet Age offers in exchange for the subject’s total adoption of a life without secrets — a life under constant threat of exposure — is ‘the safety of belonging’” (Weinstein as quoted in Sharpe xiv). In other words, social media users have callously traded any semblance of an interior life for the relative protection offered by fitting in; the high school cafeteria table has been expanded to the screens of over a billion daily users. This forfeiture of personal privacy has not come about accidentally; it is the product of a strategic campaign by the techno-capitalistic actors who have cunningly extracted precious data from consumers.⁵ This mining of digital gold at the expense of users’ privacy is the invisible superstructure driving the narrative action of both Franzen and Brooker’s works. Franzen’s *Purity* represents a synthesis, a dialectical fusion, of Orwell’s fears of communism in *1984* and Eggers’s anxieties concerning a totalitarian Internet company like the Circle.

⁵ In his first state of the state address, California governor Gavin Newsom proposed a “data dividend bill”: legislation that would compensate users for providing their data to big tech companies.

3.2 Synopses and analyses:

Franzen's novel *Purity* can be firmly situated within the genre of naturalist fiction. "The realist and naturalist novel," Mark Seltzer observes, "appears on the scene at the same time as the disciplinary society takes power" (527). Dickens, Tolstoy, and Wharton all serve as inspiration and intertexts for Franzen's project. Now viewed by some as a respite from, or antidote to, the onslaught of social media, serious literature, especially the novel, was the first attempt to surveil human beings, to crawl inside the mind of another person and read his or her thoughts, to know secrets. In his work, *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller offers a Foucauldian reading of the nineteenth-century novel and urges us not to take his title at its word but to read "police" as Foucault glossed the relations of disciplinary power; the goal is to move the question of policing out of the streets and "...into the closet—I mean, into the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends" (ix). But the Internet, as suggested earlier, is like God or the sun in that, even in atheism or darkness, you still stand in relation to it. If we allow "digital minimalism," itself now a product commodified and sold to us by a cottage industry of techno-corporatism, to rise to the level of digital asceticism we are allowing ourselves to be sucked right back into the orbit of the Internet. Miller, who portrays the nineteenth century, an age of discipline, as the period in which the novel gains its literary hegemony, invites us to consider that, "the novel frequently places its protagonists under a social surveillance" (18). Miller argues that it is with regret that novelists tell these stories of heroes crushed by social standardization. *Purity* is part of the genealogy of those nineteenth century novels which "make discipline a conspicuous practice" and its protagonist, Andreas Wolf, is a hero ultimately destroyed by the forces of social surveillance. However, while Franzen makes an obvious homage, in plot and character, to perhaps the greatest of nineteenth century realist novels,

Dickens's *Great Expectations*—Pip, his heroine searches desperately for her father—*Purity*'s real debt is owed to the early twentieth century and Edith Wharton's novel, *The Children*. Although *Purity*'s heroine possesses a decidedly Dickensian moniker, Selisker argues that Franzen has lifted the plot's "skeleton" from Edith Wharton's 1928 novel *The Children*. Like *Purity*, Wharton's story centers around a wealthy businessman vainly attempting to track down his run-away daughter and her daughter. Other critics, such as Weinstein in *The Comedy of Rage*, have pointed beyond Dickens and Wharton to debts owed to Faulkner inasmuch as the pair of writers share a "nervous, recursive narrative structure" with "delayed revelations" and Sophocles inasmuch as *Purity* follows his patterning of "an intricate mystery—virtually a mosaic of contrapuntal situations and voices...the one in which the most basic sanity-enabling assumptions emerge as soaked in scandal" (203).

Purity is, therefore, a social novel about social media. Sharpe argues that, "While...digital knowledge may have stripped the novel of its presupposed moral authority, the immediate social crisis with which *Purity*, in a self-justifying move, concerns itself is the failed promise of a democratizing Internet" (2). *Purity* tells the story of Purity "Pip" Tyler and Andreas Wolf, a twenty-something year-old Bay Area resident working for a nuclear disarmament non-profit and the forty-something year-old founder of The Sunlight Project, a whistle-blowing hacker group with the mission of exposing worldwide corruption. Their paths intersect when Pip, running from her \$130,000 student loan debt and unrequited love, Stephen, decides to accept Andreas's offer of an internship at TSP in the jungle of Bolivia. Skeptical at first—of Andreas, the project, her own worth—Pip is quickly seduced, as everyone else seems to be, by this self-described "predator." Central to Pip's motivations in heading to Bolivia is the quest to learn the true identity of her father, something her reclusive mother swears never to reveal. Among other

promises, Andreas, and Annagret, the beautiful German woman who initially recruits Pip, sell her on the idea that TSP possesses the capability to track her father down. Interwoven into the contemporary premise is Andreas's backstory—how it situates his family's history into the larger narrative of East German socialism. His father, in his role as undersecretary and chief economist of the Party, is only able to protect Andreas from his youthful deviance for so long—a tacit arrangement all but nullified when a Party informer, Annagret's stepfather-boyfriend, is murdered near the family dacha. In eliminating him, Andreas jeopardizes his cushy position as counselor to at-risk youth and cutting off his compensation—an endless supply of teenage girls for him to seduce in the office in the church basement. Once these backstories have been established, the narrator jumps to the present, returning to the Bolivian jungle where TSP has set up shop. Tom, a one-time friend and accomplice of Andreas, now revealed as Pip's biological, investigative journalist father, has accepted Wolf's invitation to visit him in Bolivia. After agreeing to join him on a hike, Tom finds himself at the top of a mountain not far from TSP headquarters. Andreas, failing in his attempt to goad Tom into killing him by recounting his seduction of Pip, throws himself off the edge of the several-hundred-foot cliff. Pip then betrays Tom and reads a manuscript Andreas sent her: a novella about his romance with Annabel. In it, the details of the marriage of Tom and Annabel, Pip's mother, are revealed. Pip comes to learn she is the granddaughter of a McCaskill Corporation (think Monsanto or Cargill, perhaps a portmanteau of both) billionaire, her mother heir to a fortune north of a billion dollars herself. The novel ends with Pip succeeding in paying off her student loans and helping a friend in need via her grandfather's trust; though failing in her attempt to reunite her parents in California.

Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror* debuted December 4, 2011, on BBC's Channel 4 to critical acclaim. After moving to the streaming-video service Netflix in 2016, the

show attracted a wider audience and garnered six Emmy Awards including outstanding television movie. The series follows an anthology-style format first popularized by shows like *The Twilight Zone*.⁶ To that end, *Black Mirror* episodes are stand-alone stories but follow similar thematic patterns featuring scopophilia, pornography, surveillance, and a general anxiety toward high technology. Brooker has spoken at length on the significance of the series' title and revealed the "black mirrors" are the screens we are now dominated by: the cold, shiny displays of our laptops, cellphones, TVs, and monitors that surveil and control us and reflect our worst tendencies toward addiction and manipulation. Like his artistic ancestor, Orwell, and his contemporary, Eggers, Brooker has set his world in a not-so-distant-future, one we can easily recognize as our own.

One episode with particular cultural resonance, and the focus of this chapter, is "Nosedive" from Season Three. In it a young woman named Lacie Pound, played by the American actress Bryce Dallas Howard, aspires to raise her social station by hiring a company called Reputelligent to enhance her social media rating. This number, from zero to five, governs nearly every aspect of life, from where you live to which wedding invitations you'll receive. The latter provides the central premise for the episode: Lacie attempts to leverage a childhood friendship in order to rendezvous with highly rated attendees, thereby raising her own rating. In classic American sitcom style, calamity ensues, with Lacie encountering obstacle after obstacle in her quest to acquire the requisite 4.5 score needed to matriculate to the affluent living community of her dreams, Pelican Cove. While tragicomic in tone—viewers are unsure whether to laugh, cry, or both—the episode is poignant in its brutal satire of contemporary social media culture and how that culture now bleeds into offline life in the physical real. The canny twist

⁶ Indeed, Brooker, in an interview with NPR's Terri Gross, cites *The Twilight Zone* as the main source of inspiration for *Black Mirror*.

Brooker, and fellow tele-playwrights for the episode, Rashida Jones and Michael Schur, execute is that, unlike the dissonance between the online and offline spheres in *The Circle*, “Nosedive” fuses the two seamlessly: physical human encounters are now instantaneously rated via a smartphone application which in turn have reactive, offline effects. In one scene, Lacie spills coffee on a passerby and immediately suffers the indignity of a brutal 1.7 rating, sending her score plummeting and her progress to the wedding with it.

One important detail to note about this episode is that the online judging, the incessant rating of individual performances on gleaming smartphone devices is neither silent nor anonymous; the rating’s author is instantly identified, and the accompanying chime heard. This leads viewers to conclude that even the act of rating a person’s performance is itself a performance. The deliberate pulling out of the phone, aiming it like a weapon, and dinging a person is a visible, audible behavior to be seen and heard by the recipient (and perhaps others in the “audience” in Goffmanian terms.) Of course, our own society can boast of an approximate example: the second we exit rideshare vehicles such as Uber and Lyft our smartphones are pinged with a notification asking us to rate our driver’s performance. He or she, too, is pinged with a notification asking him or her to rate our performance as rider, not coincidentally from zero to five stars. Prompted by a bank of terms inside word bubbles, we ask ourselves questions: Was his driving safe and legal? Was he courteous and punctual? Friendly? Too chatty? Not chatty enough? We highlight the little predictive-type bubbles we want to describe the encounter and select stars from zero to five in order to assign a value to the experience. This rating, we presume, will invariably affect his or her subsequent ability to secure fares. In turn, our own image and reputation as rider is projected via smartphone application. If we are viewed as less than punctual, courteous, and civil ourselves, we will suffer the potential ignominy of being

passed over for rides. What follows “Nosedive” is the classic slippery slope argument and begs the following questions: What would happen if we allowed that pervasive, Yelp-like rating and review system to permeate every facet of our daily existence? What if our individual human encounters were instantly digitized and recorded for posterity?⁷ What if, instead of credit worthiness, income, assets, and liabilities, we were assessed on our social performance? Our “sphere of influence?” What if the home we lived in, car we drove, and job offer we received were determined by an algorithm formulated by a computer scientist in Silicon Valley? These are the questions with which “Nosedive” forces us to contend.

The episode, directed by Joe Wright, is a televisual anomaly in the *Black Mirror* firmament. For starters, there is nothing “black” about it. Cinematographically speaking, “Nosedive” functions as a departure from the cold, dark color schemes of other *Black Mirror* episodes. The warm pastels dominating everything from Lacie’s wardrobe to the pink skies above her neighborhood jogs contrast starkly with what we’ve come to expect from Brooker’s palette. The colors themselves seem to echo, visually, a line from one of the episode’s characters, Ryan, Lacie’s brother. After watching Lacie practice her maid of honor speech for Naomi’s wedding, Ryan quips, “There’s sugary and then there’s diabetes.” But that’s not completely accurate. A better word might be “saccharine”—fake sugar, chemically-engineered and sickly sweet. The colors, wardrobe, and props are all evocative of the innocence and naïveté of childhood. Despite the stated mission of social media platforms to connect users in conversation, the actual ambition is to infantilize. The vivid color schemes in the episode are juxtaposed with a haunting score from contemporary classical composer Max Richter. His eerie violins are paired with a melancholic piano arrangement reminiscent of a funeral dirge. As viewers we come to

⁷ Sherry Turkle, in *Alone Together*, reminds us that “the Internet is forever.”

realize that, despite Naomi's wedding serving as the narrative impetus, it's actually the funeral for Lacie's social life we are watching. The negative-rating chimes her phone receives, reminiscent of an 80s or 90s-era video game character death, begin to crescendo as she is ignored by passing motorists while hitchhiking. Richter melds the chimes with his own score to the point they are indistinguishable from the music. The message couldn't be clearer: this behavior, this reduction of humans to stars and swipes, is now a part of everything we do. The nearly wholesale acceptance of this new normal is just the latest symptom of a disease we barely notice. And it's no accident this *dis*-ease is presented to us in the form it takes.

Why is television a medium better situated than the novel to explore themes present in "Nosedive?" From the opening title sequence, viewers are introduced to *Black Mirror*'s themes. A black screen is partially illuminated with white letters informing us that this is, "A Netflix Original Series." The words fade out and are replaced with the spinning wheel of an electronic device powering on. White geometric shapes cycle rapidly, intensifying until coming into focus as the title, "BLACK MIRROR." Some digital feedback sounds and white noise accompany the title before being split, diagonally, by a crack in the frame, presumably the screen of our device shattering before our eyes. The opening shot—a woman jogging in the pink light of early dawn—is underneath a superimposed title, also in pink, that reads, "NOSEDIVE." The wide-angle lens captures an idyllic scene reminiscent of the picturesque suburb of Pleasantville. Max Richter's haunting score—dominated by a repeating, melancholic piano riff—contrasts greatly with the scenery, as if trying to convey a dissonance between the exterior world and the inner monologue of the character.

Black Mirror functions as a postmodern critique on smartphone addiction. The television series, first created for BBC's Channel 4, is now under the Netflix original programming

umbrella. Although initially developed as the world's first online DVD rental store, Netflix's primary business is its "over-the-top" or OTT subscription-based streaming service. OTT signifies a bypassing of traditional media channels to deliver content directly to viewers. As of 2018, Netflix was the ninth-most trafficked website in the United States and made up 15% of all the world's Internet bandwidth. A report published by the Video Advertising Bureau counted over 800 million connected video devices in the U.S. with over 70% of Internet users relying upon an OTT service at least once a month. The number of OTT-only households, that is, those homes who only enjoy streaming services like Netflix and eschew traditional cable, broadcast, or satellite television, has tripled in the last five years. Although current Netflix data suggests users are mostly streaming video content via connected televisions (around 70%), content producers such as *Black Mirror* creator Charlie Brooker are presumably aware of the growing trend towards mobility. In other words, the show dealing with the nefarious side of technology and our smartphone addiction is being created for, and delivered by, smartphones and other smart devices. The irony is surely not lost on Brooker. He is relying upon the user's addiction to educate them about addiction. A show about the pacification of a people via technology uses that same technology to deliver content to its audience. *Black Mirror* uses and abuses the OTT form—a show about our troubling relationship with technology that also works to strengthen the stranglehold it has on us. The show about technology addiction relies, at least in part, on the psychology of addiction. A catchphrase was born out of this addiction: "Netflix and chill." The phrase seems designed to render media addiction—binge consumption of television—a trivial benignity. The phrase, since coopted and sexualized by the social media community—now a euphemism for casual sex, originally meant a declaration of intention to spend several hours watching streaming television by oneself. *Black Mirror*, though not episodic in the traditional

sense and therefore more resistant to binge-ability, nevertheless willfully and intentionally submits to a platform designed to keep users perpetually engaged across its suite of platforms (TV, computer, mobile device, etc.) Brooker, in his 2016 interview with Terri Gross on NPR's *Fresh Air* explained how appropriate Netflix is for *Black Mirror*:

It feels fitting. I'll tell you what it - it certainly feels fitting - it feels fitting thematically. I also think it's fitting for this type of show, i.e. a show in which it's a stand-alone story each time because they're traditionally shows that are quite difficult to build an audience for on broadcast television because obviously we don't have cliffhangers or returning characters. So it's - you know, it's difficult to ensure that viewers will come back on time the next week.

A seemingly throw-away moment in the early scenes of the episode, Lacie is touring Pelican Cove when the manager shows her a hologram designed by mining pictures from Lacie's social media feeds. Cooking in a stylish, modern kitchen, Lacie's hologram is joined by a second figure, a buff, shirtless man who embraces her. Lacie's face betrays her delight; the manager picks up on it, "Oh you like him? Unfortunately, he doesn't come with the apartment." At least a kernel of truth is contained in every joke. Lacie's desire for a fabulous life is illusory. And so is the promise of greater human connection. The one thing Pelican Cove cannot provide is the one thing Lacie so desperately wants: a real relationship with another person. "That's the sense you get from me?" Lacie asks her Reputelligent representative, Hansen Davis. He chuckles and replies, "From your analytics report." The episode makes that case that data and our lives online trump face-to-face encounters. In another scene, Lacie completely ignores the human being she is with, an older cab driver, in order to fully focus on the video call she has with Naomi. She

expresses bemusement when she gets out of the cab and finds she's been dinged with a low rating.

This postmodern paradox, “using and abusing” in Linda Hutcheon’s appraisal in *Poetics of Postmodernism*, does not end with the television series itself. In November of 2018 the creators of *Black Mirror* introduced a “Nosedive” card game. The game has two phases: a “Lifestyle” phase in which players curate lifestyles according to stacks of cards that correspond with unenviable positions like an “unpaid internship” and more coveted situations like “10 million followers” or “your own private island.” The Experience phase is administered via—you guessed it—a smartphone application available for iOS and Android devices. With it, you can assign your fellow players a range of experiences such as “reliving your own death for eternity” or “receiving an anonymous hate cake.” Like the television episode, success in the game is predicated upon sucking up to the higher-rated users. The game itself has not been highly rated by critics. However, in an ironic turn, Tasha Robinson in *The Verge* concludes:

Nosedive’s saving grace is the opportunity for discussion the Experience phase brings.

Players are encouraged to talk through how they feel about the choices they’re offered — which is worse, chipping a nail at an inopportune time or forcing a pill into your pet? — which can easily spiral into a “Would you rather?”-style social game.

This is no minor point. Sherry Turkle, in her recent work, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, argues that this is precisely how high technology products should be used—as the start of productive conversation—not as a dictatorial, algorithmic determination of our lives. In discussing wearables and the concept of the “quantified self”—the idea that data can reveal some deep truth about our nature—Turkle points out that while, “Apps can give you a

number; only people can provide a narrative” (81). This is also a perfect description of both the episode and its card game spinoff.

In a more overt example of nominative determinism, Lacie “Pound,” the protagonist of “Nosedive,” is a woman struggling with financial (the allusion to the Great British Pound reminds us *Black Mirror* was originally aired in the U.K.) and body-image issues. An interview with the actress portraying Lacie, Bryce Dallas Howard, reveals she put on 30 lbs. for the role to add another extratextual dimension to the episode: part of the anxiety of living in the ubiquity of social media is the constant pressure to conform to unrealistic standards. These would include notions of what the perfect female body should look like. The episode, dominated by a digital platform not unlike Facebook’s photo-sharing app, Instagram, encourages us to question what it is we’re trying to achieve. Perfection? Happiness? Acceptance? After being rebuked by a former co-worker whom Lacie aspires to be like, her Reputelligent representative chides her and underscores the importance of “only authentic gestures.” Jones and Schur’s dialogue, already dripping with irony, gets ratcheted up a notch here. The entire enterprise Reputelligent is engaged in is a deliberate ruse to enhance a completely superficial rating based upon the shallowest of human interactions. To use the word “authentic” in this context is beyond farcical. The potential disseminability and virality of even the most banal encounters raises each insipid conversation to thespic levels. A conversation is no longer an even exchange of pleasantries and information but two monologues competing for the screen (digital, not big or small) and the right to receive five stars. However, these competing monologues are far from the only instances of biting irony in the episode. In the days leading up to her wedding, Naomi surveys Lacie’s maid of honor speech and takes exception to one particular anecdote concerning Naomi’s past eating disorder, labelling it “over-sharing.” Brooker, Jones, and Schur are screaming out for us to do

more than ruefully shake our heads at someone in the world of “Nosedive” worrying about over-sharing. The entire social credit system there is dependent upon over-sharing. Where else would someone’s mastery of a tapenade recipe rise to the level of relevant topic of discussion? Here we’re reminded of the Circle’s mantra, “Sharing is caring.” Opacity, even translucency, it seems, is public enemy number one in this not-so-unfamiliar world. Not only can we not opt out, we cannot stop recording, uploading, posting, and sharing. To do so is to suffer a symbolic death, the death of the digital second self, a self of increasing import.

In one of the more telling scenes, Lacie underscores the plasticity of social media. In a transparent bid to raise her rating to the requisite 4.5 to receive a 20% discount at the “lifestyle community” Pelican Cove, Lacie reaches out, via social media of course, to her childhood friend, Naomi Jayne Blestow, an otherworldly blonde whom Ryan, Lacie’s brother, sarcastically refers to as “El Perfecto.” Relying upon Mr. Rags, a Teddy bear and stuffed piece of nostalgia, Lacie successfully reconnects with Naomi and secures an invitation to be her maid of honor at the upcoming nuptials. The wedding, a fete to be attended by “all 4.5s and above,” will raise Lacie’s profile and continue to enhance her sphere of influence. Lacie’s representative at Reputelligent takes a look at the guest list and confirms its social potency. Unfortunately for Lacie, a series of unfortunate events causes her to miss the flight to the rehearsal dinner and invoke Naomi’s now plainly apparent ire. The bride-to-be, showing the true colors Ryan warned of, revokes Lacie’s invitation to the wedding, quashing the chance to deliver her big speech and reach the necessary 4.5 milestone. One of the calamitous factors in her rating plummeting was an encounter with an airline ticketing agent. Furious with the cancellation of her flight, Lacie lashes out at the woman behind the counter. Her expletive-laden tirade is met with a visit from an airport security guard. In perhaps the most revelatory scene in the entire episode, the security guard is armed not with a

gun or even taser but with a tablet computer. Simply a bigger, more powerful device than the smartphone everyone carries, the tablet contains a program through which Lacie's online reputation is sent spiraling. The thesis from Brooker, Jones, and Schur is quite clear: the securitarian agents in our current, hyper-connected society need not be equipped with weapons of physical violence; they only need to be armed with the ability to injure one's reputation, the clearest sign yet that our digital second self has taken primacy over the corporeal self. The millennial catchphrase, "If it's not on social, it didn't happen" morphs into, "if you're not on social, *you* don't happen." Just like the shallowness of summing up a person's thoughts in 280 characters or their standard of living in a few carefully contrived photos, Lacie has endured the assassination of her entire character based upon a handful of unavoidable mishaps.

In another scene, Lacie is dinged with a two-star rating after a conversation with an attendant at a car-charging station. In an indignant rage, Lacie wheels around to question the man's rationale in slighting her. He simply responds with, "it wasn't a meaningful encounter." Quintessential *Black Mirror* themes of scopophilia and surveillance persist here as the attendant, while curtly rebuffing Lacie's pleadings, is simultaneously watching and listening to pornography on his smartphone and earbuds, not even bothering to turn down the sound of orgasmic moaning. The irony of a man clearly addicted to the removed gratification of digital pornography bemoaning a lack of meaningful encounters is dealt with more straightforwardly in the episode's final scene. After being arrested for first surveilling and then infiltrating the wedding reception, holding the cake knife to poor Mr. Rags's innocent throat, Lacie is booked and incarcerated. The episode's incessant videoing, selfie-taking, and posturing in front of a mirror is now distilled to a single jailhouse mugshot. After having her Google Glass-esque contact lenses extracted from her eyes, Lacie sits down on her jail cell bed, takes off the

bridesmaid's dress she squeezed herself into, and for the very first time, actually sees another person. Now finally untethered from her smartphone and unfearful of social retribution, Lacie begins telling the man in the cell across from her what she really thinks about him. The two exchange verbal insults at a rapidly increasing rate not unlike Richter's crescendoing score until the splicing of camera shots stops to create one face from the white female and black male. The screaming of "FUCK YOU" itself reveals intentionality on the part of tele-playwrights Jones and Schur. Fucking is, after all, two becoming one, so enjoined, so interconnected that the ability to discern one from the other is all but lost. It's the only time in a human being's life when her distinctness, her separateness is completely subsumed in another beyond birth itself. And it is the only moment in the episode when self-image does not matter. You cannot see yourself reflected in the sphere of influence and you cannot be seen in any other light beyond the natural illuminating of the bodily self. The only thing that matters is flesh. Maybe it is the only time anyone can ever really be authentic. The ultimate scene reminds us as viewers of an earlier encounter Lacie has with a truck driver, Susan. Previously obsessed with her own status and rankings, the former 4.6 gave it all up after her husband passed away from cancer, his spot in an experimental pancreatic treatment center given away to a patient with a higher score. After his death she began to shed her fake friends, fake smiles, and fake everything like, "taking off shoes that were too tight." This theme of tethering and constriction complicates the techno-capitalistic refrain that these new social tools are designed to free us to do what we want. This inability to break out of our confines can be followed back to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

3.3 The Mirror Stage and the stage:

Beginning with the basic biological premise that human beings are born prematurely, our skulls too large to fit through the birth canal at eighteen months, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan developed his theory of “The Mirror Stage.”⁸ In it, an infant, an entity Lacan claims is, at this moment in time, on intellectual par with a chimpanzee, recognizes his image in a mirror for the first time. Initially startled by this smiling apparition, the child, encouraged by the equally smiley mother, begins to understand that he can control this specter’s movements in the mirror. This marks, for Lacan, entrance into what he has called the symbolic order, or the Big Other—the world of language and signification we, as humans, must submit to. The child soon begins to recognize himself in the mirror as a totalized subject. In other words, the image in the mirror is complete. This contrasts starkly with the fragmented image the child has of his body in the physical real. A transformation has taken place. The “specular *I*” becomes the “social *I*” (7). At this moment a dissonance develops between the self “here” (physical real) and “over there” (symbolic order). The child is forced to reconcile this splitting (Lacan referred to it as a “dehiscence,” literally a rupturing)—a fissuring between his corporeal body/his mother and the symbolic order he now has unwittingly entered into, thus becoming a subject in both the grammatical and logical senses of the word.

We would be forgiven for simply interpreting Lacan’s treatment of the Mirror Stage as a moment in time, a specific point in the psychosocial development of a child, a moment in which infant becomes subject, becomes other. However, we can also view the Mirror Stage as just

⁸ Lacan’s work in “The Mirror Stage,” a conception he arrived at in the 1930s but delivered in a full lecture on July 17, 1949, in Zurich at the Sixteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis, follows the work of Baldwin as seen through a Freudian lens: that humans, unlike say a horse or giraffe, are not fully human at birth. We must learn to become human by entering a world of signification.

that—a platform atop which the child begins his lifelong “performance” as a socialized and totalized, human subject. Textual evidence supports this dual reading of “stage”:

This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual’s formation into history: the mirror stage is a *drama* whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure.. (Lacan 6 [my emphasis])

Works of fiction such as Franzen’s *Purity* and Brooker’s *Black Mirror* encourage us to consider the self-surveillance of social media as, at least partly, the co-construction of self to be projected out into the world. Therefore, the Mirror Stage functions as a necessary step in the development of intelligence in the child, the formation of *I*, but also the step *up* to the dais from which he launches the first of a seemingly infinite number of performances as self. Performativity online trumps analog behavior in the physical real; critically speaking, the presentation of self in everyday life should be amended to the presentation of self in digital life.⁹ Social media is a particularly pernicious breed of self-surveillance, one that taps into the worst parts of our human nature as it depends on pettiness, jealousy, and avarice to classify, divide, and exclude human beings from one another.¹⁰

⁹ Never is this more apparent than in Turkle’s interviews with devotees of Second Life, a role-playing “game” in which an avatar can accumulate wealth, have sex, and reportedly, fall in love. Turkle sounds the alarm when recounting one interviewee’s claim that he prefers his Second Life to his real one.

¹⁰ An earlier version of this chapter as it appeared at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association conference in 2017 referred to this phenomenon as “anti-social media.”

It has been at least four hundred years since Shakespeare's Jaques, in *As You Like It*, exclaimed, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players;" The line, oft-quoted and taken to mean social beings all have their roles to play, must also be read in its context. Just like Lacan's mirror stage, it must be interpreted as both a stage and an *age*; the full passage of the truncated quote describes the "seven ages" of man: "infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon, and (the implied) old man becoming a child again, facing imminent oblivion." Goffman reminds us that, "The stage presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real and sometimes not well rehearsed" (9). In the face of a completely contrived social media "presence," the presumption Goffman makes about reality and an apparent lack of rehearsal is no longer applicable. Brooker and Franzen's texts encourage us to reflect upon a world in which nearly everything is staged. Goffman writes, "the 'true' or 'real' attitudes, beliefs, and emotions of the individuals can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behavior" (2). Remember the "cerebroscope" from chapter one. This theoretical, seventeenth century device would, hypothetically, end man's most vexing quandary—what another person is thinking—and destroy the only thing propping up his tenuous privacy, an interior life defining his individual autonomy. In chapter one we saw how both *1984* and its literary descendant, *The Circle* ended with such vexation: O'Brien of the Thought Police and the newly en-Circled Mae lament the inaccessibility of their respective subjects' minds. Stephen Pinker of *Enlightenment Now* and *How the Mind Works* fame teaches us that, "Even the most sophisticated neuroimaging methodologies can tell us how a thought is splayed out in 3-D space, but not what the thought consists of" (Pinker as quoted in Stephens-Davidowitz xii). The cerebroscope aimed to solve this problem. Pinker posits, "Ever since philosophers speculated about a 'cerebroscope,' a mythical

device that would display a person's thoughts on a screen, social scientists have been looking for tools to expose the workings of human nature" (Pinker as quoted in Stephens-Davidowitz xi). Stephens-Davidowitz argues that, absent the realization of the cerebroscope, the closest we can presently get to another mind's contents is a Google search history. Early on in *Purity*, Pip Tyler reveals The Sunlight Project is predicated upon this very premise: "The fantastic thing about Andreas is he knows the Internet is the greatest truth device ever" (20). You can lie to your friends. You can lie to your boss. You can lie to your spouse and you can even lie to yourself, but you can't lie to Google. It knows what you want more than you do. It surveils you on an unconscious level. It makes traditional forms of camera surveillance seem impossibly quaint by comparison. Like an ichthyologist performing an autopsy on a tiger shark to learn of its stomach contents, the digital auditors of Google search histories, the logic goes, can ascertain everything from our political loyalties, relationship statuses, education, and much more. However, Goffman, on the other hand, is writing in those halcyon, pre-Internet days when the performance, what the person on the stage chooses to show us, is all we have to "indirectly" indicate thought. Goffman necessitated two categories for communicative behavior beyond the senses: expression and impression. The individual must act so that he expresses himself and the others (audience) must be impressed. He further splits the expressional behavior into two kinds of "sign activity": the expression the individual *gives* and *gives off*. The former is constituted by verbal symbols to convey information and the latter by "reasons other than the information conveyed in this way" (2). Goffman's conclusion that the individual will have to act so as to intentionally or unintentionally express oneself, has been, *vis a vis* the Internet, compressed into one presentation of digital second self: completely and utterly contrived, a semiotics of purely scripted deportment, the nuance of performance stripped away in a postmodern autoethnography.

In his treatise, Goffman compares two kinds of communication: “expression given” and “expressions given off” with the “more theatrical and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication be purposely engineered or not” (4). In other words, in terms of our electronic avatars, nothing escapes without first being engineering, filtered, or manipulated. Whether it is social media “influencers” selling wares to throngs of followers or far-right operatives geeing up their base, the symptoms of this New Regime are never without self-serving intention. In “Nosedive,” Lacie illustrates this precept in one scene where she carefully positions her latte and then takes a bite of the cookie beside it to make a smiley face. After snapping a pic with her smartphone’s camera app, Lacie posts the breakfast in all its adorableness to her social media feed. Her work is instantaneously rewarded as her phone erupts in a symphony of musical chimes of approval, her curation being unanimously approved, sending her rating skyward. In the chapter titled, “Growing Up Tethered” in her work, *Alone Together*, Turkle correctly points out that (in this hyperconnected world of social media) we can, “at the moment of beginning to have a thought or feeling...have it validated, almost prevalidated” (177). “Technology,” for Turkle, “does not cause but encourages a sensibility in which the validation of a feeling becomes part of establishing it, even part of the feeling itself” (177). In Goffmanian terms the expression Lacie “gives off” is that she is whimsical, creative, and cute. The impression she hopes to make is that she is a positive person who brightens up her followers’ days. And yet the performative act—the precise bite mark she makes in the cookie and pairs with her perfectly-foamed latte art—is the exact opposite of whimsy; it’s utterly contrived. Nevertheless, Lacie has succeeded in transmitting the desired impression and taken a step toward formation of an attractive online persona, the rewards of which she hopes to reap in the form of admission to the Pelican Cove community. Lacie isn’t so

much a speculative character, someone from a near or distant dystopian future, as she is a reflective character, the embodiment of a symptom of a contemporary sickness: the mandate that we cultivate and maintain a digital second self. Brooker himself, in the 2016 *Fresh Air* interview, tries to explain the paradox of multiple selves being more authentic than oneself online:

Social media has made it as - you know, and the internet and technology in general has sharpened all of those things. I guess they've always been there, that performative nature of life has always been there that you sort of perform, you know, to everyone to an extent, don't you? You sort of perform your personality, I guess, to everyone on some level. It's just that I think it's more - well, my little theory is that we've got - that - I remember - my theory is that we've got - that we used to have several personalities, and now we're encouraged to have one online. So - but by which I mean I remember once having a birthday party - or was it a book launch? - something - anyway, a party.

And people from different aspects of my life showed up. So there were work colleagues who showed up and there were people I'd known since, like, college who showed up and there were people I'd only just met who showed up. And I behaved differently with all of these people in the real world. But once they were all together in one space and they were all mingled in in one group, if I walked over to them, I suddenly didn't know how to speak, do you know what I mean? Because, like, with some of them I'd be - I tried to be all intellectual and erudite and with others I'd just swear and curse and be an idiot. And suddenly, when they're all in one space, I don't know who I am.

And I kind of feel like the one sort of thing is that online you're encouraged to perform one personality for everyone. And I wonder if that's one of the things that's feeding into the kind of polarization that seems to be going on is that you're - I think that

lends itself to groupthink in some way or some kind of lack of authenticity. I wonder if we're better - better equipped to deal with having slightly different

BROOKER: personas. Not massive - you know, not hugely different in a sinister way.

GROSS: Different sides of your authentic self.

BROOKER: Exactly, that you...

GROSS: That are brought out by different people or different environments.

BROOKER: ...That come out when you interact with different types of people. Exactly.

GROSS: Exactly. Exactly.

BROOKER: And the problem, in a way, is that online, that's sort of stripped away from you in many ways, you know?

This interview dovetails nicely with Goffman's concept of the presentation of the self: the totalitarianism of the Internet commands us to conflate our different personas into one attractive package to be presented online. We're now only allowed to be one way all the time. It's this paradox—that perhaps true authenticity comes not from singularity but multiplicity of performance—that animates “Nosedive.” Now let us turn our attention to another temporalizing of Goffman's work.

3.4 The Digital Extended Self:

A generation quickly approaching full adulthood has never known a world without social media.¹¹ First formulated in 1988 by Russell Belk, the “extended self” wittingly or unwittingly encompassed an individual's possessions. Belk posited five categories of the extended self: the

¹¹ Taylor Lorenz in *The Atlantic*, glosses a new portmanteau, “sharenting,” which apparently means the compulsive online documenting of a child's life by his or her parent. The article points to a recent study which reached the chilling conclusion that 92 percent of toddlers under the age of 2 already have their own unique digital identity.

body, its internal processes, ideas, experiences, and the people/things to which one feels attached (477-478). He was, of course, writing at a time before the advent of smartphones, social media, and the Internet as we now know it. Twenty-five years later, Belk, in taking over the baton from Goffman, unpacks five digital modifications of the extended self: dematerialization, re-embodiment, sharing, co-construction of the self, and distributed memory. By dematerialization, Belk means the digitizing of the physical— think your old record, CD, or DVD collection—and what is lost in that process. Re-embodiment centers around the construction of avatars as the ideal self, digital tools that are used to transcend the anonymity of the Web 1.0 and arrive at a life online with seemingly limitless possibilities. Of online sharing, Belk, again writing in the pre-Cambridge Analytica days of 2013, suggested, “For those active on Facebook, it is likely that their social media friends know more than their immediate families about their daily activities, connections, and thoughts” (484). In the six years since, the tools for sharing have only increased in power; therefore, the ability to share has been enhanced in terms of immediacy, frequency, and virality. If he was right then, in the nascent days of Twitter and Instagram, and before the development of Snapchat, his words resonate more deeply today. In his section on sharing in “Extended Self in a Digital World,” Belk glosses the term “disinhibition”—the apparent freedom social media users feel to share, overshare, and disclose the “true self” (484). He correctly points out that disinhibition cuts both ways: users can exhibit higher levels of intimacy than during face-to-face encounters, but at other times this distance can result in toxicity. It is precisely the fictive, extended self of the avatar Belk speaks of in his re-embodiment phase that emboldens some social media users to spew vitriol and hatred online. These same people would seldom recreate these behaviors offline. It is the fictiveness of this extended digital self and the distance (in the physical real) from others that permits the sharing of

intimate details and what Belk calls “flaming”— toxic disinhibition that leads to abuse. Belk, at times, unhelpfully veers into the Foucauldian. He points to Foucault’s argument that sharing— Foucault called it “confession”— (as in the Augustinian sense of the word), could be freeing. However, Belk quickly tempers that view with the fact that modern technology robs the confessor of the confession, taking it out of his or her hands completely. CCTV, smartphone surveillance, and home security systems now move the ritualistic cleansing of confession into the category of public shaming (485). Confession as envisioned by Augustine and Rousseau is superfluous in the face of advanced surveillance tools. In the penultimate phase of digital modification to the extended self, Belk unpacks what he calls “co-construction of the self.” He points to a study by Denton (2012) in which thirteen teenagers’ Facebook profiles were mined and analyzed. In one month, the group posted over two thousand photos which in turn garnered over two thousand comments. He puts forth one particular episode, in which a teenage girl tries on a new dress, as evidence of the assistance social media users receive in creating the online self: what was once a private act of consumerism has now been photographed and uploaded to Facebook, eliciting responses from a much wider audience. This is consistent with Lacie’s performativity in “Nosedive.” Once reserved for private conversation or simply a personal diary, a tapenade recipe, latte art, every bit of excruciatingly banal minutia is now projected out into the Interwebs as a form of thinking out loud, creating the self through an inferior form of dialogue than the interiority of the mind, decisions ratified as they’re being made through the ubiquitous thumbs-up button.¹²

The same phenomenon explicated in the third phase of disinhibition, allows users the freedom to validate, reassure, or reaffirm a friend’s posts. This phase, perhaps more than the

¹² Turkle reminds us, in *Reclaiming Conversation*, that Facebook does not feature a “thumbs-down” or dislike button. In other words, every post is always already engineered to elicit likes.

other four, undergirds the narratology at work in both Franzen's *Purity* and Brooker's "Nosedive." In *Purity*, this co-construction of self metastasizes into full-blown loss of control. The construction of self—indeed, his own origin story—was something Andreas Wolf exerted more than a modicum of control over. From the ashes of a narcissistic, reclusive sexual predator arose a public-facing defender of liberty and enemy of the East German Stasi. By transforming his completely self-serving act of destroying his Stasi file containing evidence of his crime of murder into an act of defiance against the old regime, Wolf became an overnight media sensation. He solidified his reputation as a bringer of sunlight and exposé of evils through the power of the Internet. And yet it is the Internet, ironically, that instantiates his own death. The full submission to the Internet means a loss of control of his narrative of self. What this champion of digital freedom really wants, at least for himself, is a closed system of control not unlike the Stasi network he once tried to destroy. While exposing world leaders and titans of industry to ridicule, Andreas seeks protection from that same disinfecting sunlight. His metaphoric sunscreen was effected in the form of bribes, charms, and threats meted out online and in the physical real. Once fully formed and self-fashioned into a veritable Robin Hood of the World Wide Web, Wolf is fair game to the army of bloggers, critics, and pundits looking to take him down—the construction of the self giving way to *disembodiment*.

In the final phase of the formation of the extended digital self, the distribution of memory, Belk distinguishes tangible objects from [digital] "technologies [which] allow access to an expanded archive of individual and collective autobiographical memory cues" (488). However, for the moment, let us remain focused on the co-construction of self. Belk concludes, that in the digital world, "the self is now extended into avatars, broadly construed, with which we identify strongly and which can affect our offline behavior and sense of self" (490). He

continues, “we now self-disclose and confess online, transforming the once semi-private to a more public presentation of self” (490). Belk also echoes Turkle’s sentiments from *Alone Together* in terms of the co-construction, not only of the self, but even a singular comment or feeling:

This is also evident in the more shared nature of the self which is now co-constructed with much more instantaneous feedback that can help affirm or modify our sense of self. The aggregate self can no longer be conceived from only a personal perspective and is not only jointly constructed but shared, that is, a joint possession with others. We continue to have traces of our consumption that act as cues to personal and aggregate sense of past, except that rather than being encoded only in private possessions, productions, and photos, we are now more likely to turn to digitized and shared mementos online. We increasingly outsource our memories for both facts and feelings. These memory cues are likely to be commented on or responded to by others in a much more active co- construction of collective sense of past...All in all, the self is much more actively managed, jointly constructed, interactive, openly disinhibited, confessional, multiply manifest, and influenced by what we and our avatars do online. All of this is dramatically new and suggests that only studying extended self offline is missing a large part of the influences on our contemporary self concepts and our and others’ activities in creating them. (Belk 490)

This co-construction is precisely what Lacie hopes to achieve with the digital encoding of Mr. Rags, her latte art, her tapenade recipe, each and every accoutrement of her scripted self. This co-construction could be viewed as a preliminary phase to the psychological phenomenon described by Lacan as “extimacy.” A neologism combining the prefix “ex” from “exterior” with “intimacy,”

extimacy refers to the tension Lacan saw between a person's interiority and subjectivity—the alterity of our most intimate feelings. If, in Lacanian terms, we can never really know ourselves, and the self is always alien, then maybe co-construction, or what Turkle and Belk have referred to as “validation,” is exactly what social media users are lusting after.

As alluded to earlier, in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function,” Lacan speaks of a “certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism,” by which he means the “relationship between an organism and its reality” (6). This dehiscence, a rupturing in medical terms, marks the break from totalized subject to fragmented image of the body in the mirror. In the online world, the irreconcilability of the fragmented self we perceive with the totalized—Lacan called it “orthopedic,” literally a “corrective,”—form is magnified a million times over. Instead of one “other”—typically the mother who has propped up the child and from whom the specular *I* must now break away—there are potentially millions, if not billions, of “others.” Zizek glosses Lacan's interpretation of “The Purloined Letter” as the “signifying order as (that of) a closed, differential, synchronous structure: the signifying structure functions as a senseless 'automatism', to which the subject is subjected.” There is perhaps no better description of the underlying algorithmic structure of the Facebook News feed, Twitter's promoted tweets, and YouTube's up next feature. In short, social media users are just like Lacan's formulation of the “subject subjected to the structure”: both are trapped in a seemingly ineluctable loop. In the parlance of media studies, this “filter bubble” controls everything we read, see, and hear online. Mark Zuckerberg glibly summed up this phenomenon: “A squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa” (Zuckerberg qtd. in Pariser 1).

The novel and social media: unlikely bedfellows

Performativity need not necessarily imply fictiveness. Sometimes we take the stage to perform as ourselves. Sometimes it is necessary to project not the *imago* as ideal image but as representative of the true self. As Nell Haynes suggests in *Social Media in Northern Chile: Posting the Extraordinarily Ordinary*, projection can take the form of marginality. In her study, which focuses on the industrial shanty town of Alto Hospicio in Northern Chile, she finds that social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp function as platforms for the citizens from which to launch performances attesting to their parochial pride and distinguishing them from the rest of Chile. The study follows Nicole on *Fiestas Patrias* day, a day of national pride, as she uses Facebook to understand and project her own identity and place in the world as citizen of a marginalized community.

Texts like *Black Mirror* and *Purity* reveal a mandate to submit to a second Big Other, the digitally symbolic order of social media. The second self, the “social *I*” Lacan spoke of in “The Mirror Stage” has been all but supplanted by the electronic avatars we present in digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to name but a few. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* argued for the distinction between a performative “front region,” not unlike a stage, where individuals presented themselves to society and a “back region,” something akin to backstage at a theatre whereby individuals could prepare to present themselves by donning various masks, wardrobes, and costumes. That “stage,” the physical encounters with our everyday “audience,” has been supplanted by the digital arena. There are many reasons for this development, chief among them the possibility for virality of “performance.” Recall from chapter one the focus on the shift from the anxiety of being watched in *1984* to the anxiety of *not* being watched in *The Circle*. Mae, the protagonist of the latter novel, affirmed her very existence

through her TruYou portal. Goffman's concept of the self must be augmented in light of this new reality, or perhaps more accurately, imaginary. The image of self we project through our posts, uploads, tweets, and "stories" is, by degree, far more potent than the corporeal or dramaturgical presentation of self in its ability to present a totalized view, or what Carroll and Romano have called "a fuller reflection of you" (3). Sharpe concurs:

Franzen's novel is suspicious about the possibility that there are ways of interacting with digital media that can minimize the ideological effects on human relationships, with various subplots of the novel emphasizing the power of a technocratic Internet to manufacture and revoke perceptions of an individual or cause's ideological purity, as secrets can be indefinitely stored and achieve viral status with immediacy upon reveal. Acts of confession and the voluntary disclosure of traumatic and criminal histories are thus given a privileged status in *Purity*, with the novel suggesting that the establishment of any collectivist projects necessitates transparency, but must resist the urge promoted by contemporary Internet culture to fetishize such exposure or assume its inherent radicalism. (Sharpe 1)

Franzen himself perfectly deconstructed narcissism like Andreas's in his 2011 essay for *The New York Times* titled, "Liking Is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts." In it he bemoans the culture of liking to which our society now seems betrothed:

But if you consider this in human terms, and you imagine a person defined by a desperation to be liked, what do you see? You see a person without integrity, without a center. In more pathological cases, you see a narcissist — a person who can't tolerate the tarnishing of his or her self-image that not being liked represents, and who therefore

either withdraws from human contact or goes to extreme, integrity-sacrificing lengths to be likable. (Franzen)

This extended quotation reads like notes for Franzen's novel, *Purity*. Andreas Wolf is precisely the type of narcissist who cannot bear having his reputation tarnished online. In the end he sacrifices his physical self to protect the sanctity of his online legacy. Sharpe argues:

Involving a measure of self-reflection and an acknowledgment of the less-than-complimentary qualities and behaviors of both the lover and the loved, Franzen sees love as the antithesis of the ego-gratifying act of Internet liking, with the comfortable psychological distance that it offers in lieu of personal investment. In his own words, he aims to 'set up a contrast between the narcissistic tendencies of technology and the problem of actual love [...] the dirt that love inevitably splatters on the mirror of our self-regard'. Franzen particularly takes to task the painlessness that he sees the Internet providing, claiming that a life driven by immediate gratification and the avoidance of pain compromises the moral foundations necessary for meaningful interpersonal experiences. (Sharpe 1)

A similar focus on instantaneous gratification persists in Weinstein's chapter on *Purity* in his book, *The Comedy of Rage*. In it, Weinstein locates the psychic maladies Sharpe discusses above in sex and masturbation. He reduces the latter to "self-mating that replaces mating with others, a narcissistic paroxysm of sterilized impulse" (208). While correct to take *Purity's* narrator at his word and find the locus of death vis-à-vis Internet pornography, Weinstein surprisingly fails to link Andreas's narcissism to the masturbatory machinations of social media. What could be more self-pleasuring than the incessant boomeranging of posts flung out into the Interwebs? This comparison is strengthened by a rereading of the myth of Narcissus. One of the most

misunderstood and misused tales in all of Grecian mythology, Ovid's original story in *Metamorphoses*, "Echo and Narcissus" contains the lines,

While he is drinking he beholds himself
reflected in the mirrored pool—and loves;
loves an imagined body which contains
no substance, for he deems the mirrored shade
a thing of life to love. (Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Book III, Lines 402-407)

In the next stanza, Ovid reminds us that Narcissus "knows not what he there beholds, but what he sees inflames his longing, and the error that deceives allures his eyes." In other words, Narcissus doesn't *know* he's only trying to love himself; his desire is simply to connect with someone beautiful. Internet pornography functions much in the same way: a viewer attempts to connect with someone alluring only to connect with him- or herself. Social media also relies upon the power of narcissism: the subterfuge of connection necessary to commence self-pleasure. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are all platforms whose founders take pride in connecting people with one another. But to "connect" is to link, to become enjoined. Its definition encourages us to envision links in a chain or railroad cars on a track. A connection of human beings implies symbiosis, the physical interlocking of separate entities for mutually beneficial purposes. Does that sound anything like the "relationships" forged on social media platforms produced and maintained by Silicon Valley? Sex, both emotionally and physically, despite its etymological origins (the Latin *secare* means to cut, not join), is defined by fusion. Social media, like pornography, is defined by self-flagellation. We queue up our devices to reach out into the void but succeed only in reaching to pleasure (or punish or sometimes both) ourselves. Facebook, with its billion-plus daily active users, only enjoys an audience of one.

Sherry Turkle, reminds us in *Alone Together* that in psychoanalysis, “one speaks about narcissism not to indicate people who love themselves, but a personality so fragile that it needs constant support” (177). “Constant support” could act as coded language for the need for constant self-flagellation or ego-stroking.

Another type of narcissism is captured by Franzen’s close friend, David Foster Wallace, in his first novel, *The Broom of the System*. The leitmotif of Lenore Beadsman, *Broom*’s protagonist, is storytelling. In post-coital repose, Lenore asks Rick Vigorous of Frequent and Vigorous Publishing to tell her a story. In one of the early tales Rick recounts for Lenore, a young man is plagued by a flesh-eating, disfiguring disease and the subsequent dilemma of not wanting to appear bothered by it. A “second-order vain person,” Vigorous explains, “is a vain person who’s also vain about appearing to have an utter lack of vanity. Who’s enormously afraid that other people will perceive him as vain” (Wallace 23). Andreas Wolf perfectly fits this description. He obsessively hides the fact that he obsessively Googles himself to find out if people on the Internet are speaking ill of him. This disease is, of course, nothing new. Franzen argues that Edith Wharton’s novel, *The Custom of the Country* (1913), is the first fictional portrayal of a fully modern America. One of its characters, Mrs. Heeney, carries press clippings with her everywhere as the measuring stick of the central character, Undine Spragg’s, progress. Is this any more or less vapid, shallow, or narcissistic than the celebrity Googling himself to see what people are saying about him? Weren’t the tabloids of the early twentieth century simply the analog Twitter and Instagram, just as portable but not quite as shareable? Does the virality of new media in its public-facing capacity mark a fundamental shift in the psycho-social paradigm? Lyon, in *The Culture of Surveillance* seems to be arguing just that:

Validation-seeking users now discover that they themselves are involved in the rating and ranking game – anyone can contribute their assessment of the other, with repercussions extending far beyond ‘likes.’ As in the Circle, social approval is power. Crowd-sourced review systems, like Yelp, become judgement of the world. (Lyon 158-159)

Lyon posits, “If in the twentieth century our understanding of surveillance could so profoundly be affected by fictional literature – Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – then in the twenty-first it would be worth allowing all such work to hold up a mirror so that we may recognize our own world for what it is today. Even a Black Mirror” (Lyon 197). The evolution of surveillance studies as presented in art signifies the end of allegory.

The protagonist of *Purity*, Andreas Wolf, is able to clearly identify the symmetry between the former communist bloc in Eastern Berlin and the contemporary oppression of the Internet. He correctly exposes the lies both the Stasi and the technologists traffic in: East Germans were “liberated,” yet are literally held captive by a wall; and users of the Internet are held hostage to a closed system of likes, smiles, and frowns when they were supposed to be freed to connect. The narrator, focalized through Wolf in chapter three, “The Killer,” highlights the similarity in language employed by both communism and the Internet:

Younger interviewers...had understood him to be saying something unfair about the Internet. In fact, he simply meant a system that was impossible to opt out of. The old Republic had certainly excelled at surveillance and parades, but the essence of its totalitarianism had been more everyday and subtle. (Franzen 447)

The inability to opt out fueled much of my discussion of *The Circle* and the analysis of its character, Mercer. It is no coincidence that both Mercer and Andreas are driven to suicide. Wolf gets to the heart of *Purity*’s synthesis of *1984* and *The Circle*: “If you substituted *networks* for

socialism, you got the Internet. Its competing platforms were unified in their ambition to define every term of your existence” (448). The point the narrator, focalized in this chapter through Andreas Wolf, is trying to make is that even in resisting social media networks or East German socialism, you were still defined by it. In other words, even in opposing these totalitarian forces your life is still shaped by them. The narrator also underscores the smallness and pettiness of it all, how juvenile it seems at a distance:

The privileges available in the Republic had been paltry, a telephone, a flat with some air and light, the all-important permission to travel, but perhaps no paltrier than having *x* number of followers on Twitter, a much-liked Facebook profile, and the occasional four-minute spot on CNBC. (448-449)

Elevating the paltry to the crucial is just one of the tricks Big Tech has performed. The psychosocial malady of “FOMO” or “fear of missing out” undergirds this trick. If Turkle is to be believed, this fear is the reason the teenagers she interviewed admitted to texting while driving and revealed zero interest in giving up the dangerous practice. FOMO is also the reason why, despite having a smartphone, tablet, laptop, and desktop, many have chosen a “smart” watch that replicates the same functions and duplicates the data, albeit on a much smaller screen. It’s “FOMO” to the nth degree. The early adopters and pioneers such as Wolf were palpably aware of the Internet’s capabilities in this regard:

The sudden wide availability of porn, the anonymity of access, the meaninglessness of copyright, the real world, the global dispersion of file-sharing communities, the sensation of mastery that mousing and clicking brought: the Internet was going to be huge, especially for bringers of sunlight (465).

Wolf, a young man who became an overnight sensation when Western television journalists chronicled his searing take-down of the East German Stasi, starts an Internet whistleblower and hacker organization called The Sunlight Project. Sunlight, Wolf preaches, is the only thing that can disinfect the lies, cover-ups, and conspiracies perpetrated by the socialist regime and later totalitarian regimes and corrupt corporations of different stripes. His character, however, is a bundle of contradictions: the world-famous bringer of sunlight harbors many secrets, not least of which is the murder of an unofficial Stasi collaborator. Indeed, his primary motivation in storming the Stasi archives is not to expose the lies of the regime but rather to repossess his own secret file which may or may not contain the report of his brutal murder of the informant. Couple this with the fact that Wolf serially indulged in rendezvous with dozens of underage girls in his capacity as church counselor, and the mythic truth-teller has a vested interest in keeping his own story a secret. An avowed feminist in online interviews, Wolf's whole house of cards would come tumbling down if his acolytes learned of those temptations of the (young) flesh. He acknowledges as much in an honest appraisal of his situation compared to Assange's entanglements in legal and sex scandals. His brand, like Pip Tyler's legal name, is *Purity*. The success of The Sunlight Project depends upon the pervasiveness of its origin myth and the squeaky-clean image of its founder. Being seen as a murderer, philanderer, and statutory rapist does not comport with that image. Again, Franzen alludes to authoritarian, socialist regimes like the one found in *1984*:

But smart people were actually far more terrified of the New Regime than of what the regime had persuaded less-smart people to be afraid of, the NSA, the CIA—it was straight from the totalitarian playbook, disavowing your own methods of terror by

imputing them to your enemy and presenting yourself as the only defense against them—and most of the could-be Snowdens kept their mouth shut (450).

Never has this strategy been more evident than Big Tech’s latest maneuver: providing more tech to save us from...tech. Amidst the myriad Facebook privacy scandals—Cambridge Analytica, Russian-generated fake accounts and troll ads, and a “market research” app Facebook paid teenagers to install on their phones—a growing tech backlash (“techlash” in the vernacular of the day) has intensified. Couple that with the fact some health care professionals have likened smartphone addiction to heroin use and the techlash is fully underway. To counter this worrying trend, Silicon Valley has, at least publicly, sought to save users from themselves. This digital methadone takes the shape of smartphone applications designed to reduce your time spent on...smartphone applications. Like then-candidate Trump wondering aloud on the campaign trail, “Who better to stop the corruption in D.C. politics than a man who has spent his entire adult life benefiting from a corrupt, pay-to-play system?” companies like Apple would have users believe the only inoculation against smartphone addiction is more software from smartphone makers. Franzen himself, in an essay titled, “Capitalism in Hyperdrive” in the recent collection, *The End of the End of the World*, expresses skepticism about this tech-as-savior-from-tech view. In the essay, a reflection on the work of the aforementioned clinical psychologist and technology writer, Sherry Turkle, Franzen finds her argument for more face-to-face interaction with fellow humans “compelling” but finds her belief that through the “collective action...we can and must ‘design technology that demands we use it with greater intention’ less than persuasive” (Turkle as quoted in Franzen 72).¹³ Franzen is quick and correct to point out the holes in this leaky-boat strategy: “But an interface like this would threaten almost every business model in Silicon

¹³ We’d be remiss not to point out that Turkle has since done an about-face, a complete 180 on this issue. This evolution of thinking can be seen in her recent work, *Reclaiming Conversation*.

Valley, where enormous market capitalizations are predicated on keeping consumers riveted to their devices” (72). This is simply Franzen unpacking the logic behind the analogy from chapter one, that smartphone and application makers telling us to use our phones less is akin to brewers and distilleries urging us to “drink responsibly.” Intentional scrolling (or no scrolling at all) would all but cut off the nose to spite the Valley’s face. Or as the narrator, focalized through Andreas, reminds us:

Like the old politburos, the new politburo styled itself as the enemy of the elite and the friend of the masses, dedicated to *giving consumers what they wanted*, but to Andreas [...] it seemed as if the Internet was governed more by fear: the fear of unpopularity and uncoolness, the fear of missing out, the fear of being flamed or forgotten [my emphasis].
(449)

Wolf understands that preying upon people’s anxieties is something both regimes, the German Democratic Republic and the neoliberal monopolies of Silicon Valley, do in order to maintain a society of control. Recall from chapter one the seismic shift in the sourcing of anxiety. Whereas the central characters of Orwell’s *1984* lived in constant fear of being watched by the state surveillance network, The Thought Police, the central characters of Eggers’s *The Circle* lived with the constant anxiety that their lives might go unwatched, undocumented, and unratiified by the surveillance network of social media. Andreas, in the above passage, alludes to the psycho-social phenomenon underpinning this shift. FOMO keeps the social media user connected, engaged, and therefore exposed to surveillance. Thus, *Purity* represents a bridging of the space between what Franzen refers to as the Old Regime, socialism, and the New Regime, the totalitarianism of the Internet gatekeepers. In this way, Franzen also bridges the gap between the Party of *1984* and eponymous company of *The Circle*: both rely heavily upon surveillance, state-

sponsored in the former and self-generated in the latter. The narrator underlines the power the new gatekeepers wield:

Twice, though, insiders had reached out to Andreas (interestingly, both worked for Google), offering him dumps of internal email and algorithmic software that plainly revealed how the company stockpiled personal user data and actively filtered the information it claimed to passively reflect. In both cases, fearing what Google could do to him, Andreas had declined to upload the documents. (450)

Not only is Wolf compromised by his past illegal acts as a young man trying to survive East German socialism in Berlin, he succumbs to the totalitarian pressure of Internet giant Google. Even sunlight, it seems, has its limitations. The architects of Google's shadowy, algorithmic software might as well live on the dark side of the moon.

Speaking of the moon, a poignant comparison is made between the nefarious enterprise undergirding the totalitarian dream of the Sunlight Project and "Moonglow Dairy" of Pip's youth. Weinstein is right to point us to the passage in which Pip likens the experience of discovering TSP's *raison d'être* to the revelation that Moonglow Dairy, a farm from Pip's childhood, didn't make its money selling milk: "It came from selling high-quality manure to organic farmers. It was a shit-factory pretending to be a milk-factory" (Franzen qtd. in Weinstein 205). This masquerade is now all too familiar to users of "free" social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. An ad factory that pretends to be a "global town square," Facebook doesn't simply connect people, it sells them to corporations. Users came to the square for milk, something to nourish and sustain them, and all they got was shit: targeted ads for products and services. Franzen is an unabashedly and self-proclaimed moral writer. For him, the role of the author is that of teacher. In an email to Weinstein in the fall of 2015, a few weeks before the

publication of *Purity*, Franzen revealed the novel to be his “longest and least comedic” to date and “a deliberately risky move that might alienate a portion of his readership” (Franzen as quoted in Weinstein 203). One of those risks seems to be alienating millennials whose whole worlds seem to be entangled with the Web. He took the risk to teach a lesson: be wary of “free” in the form of free love, free jobs, and free software that are never quite what they seem. If you cannot figure out what someone is selling you, it’s you.¹⁴

3.5 Sharing is caring:

But if Facebook and Google used its treasure trove of users’ personal data against their users wouldn’t that act do a far better job of indicting itself than Wolf ever could? Wouldn’t retaliatory efforts by the Internet giant against users prove all the conspiracy theorists right? Retaliation would go beyond passive, benign reflection and rise to the level of active persecution of dissenters. In this example, the whistleblower is immunized against persecution. If data can be weaponized by the collectors against the whistleblowers it only strengthens the import of their work, not merely in martyrdom, but by proving the point in the first place. Recall chapter one of the Circle—how critics of the company’s campaign to have everyone “go transparent” would suddenly be ensnared in some online sex scandal. Mercer’s tragic end is reminiscent of something Wolf says in *Purity*: the Internet defines you no matter what. You can be its most ardent supporter or its most fervent critic; you still stand somewhere in relation to it. It’s like a black hole sucking in everything around it. Take for instance the millions of children who were born after the founding of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram; many of

¹⁴ A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* discussed the pros and cons of a “free” FitBit device given to employees of a company; the wearable is used to track employees’ sleep patterns, steps, and heart rate. In West Virginia, teachers were outfitted with the devices; those who did not meet the requisite number of points suffered a \$500 rate hike in their health insurance plans.

them will grow up to discover the entirety of their lives has been photographically documented on the World Wide Web for all to see, completely without their consent.

The similarities in theme and motif between *The Circle* and *Purity* do not end there. The inversion of light as a symbol for truth and honesty in *The Circle* (Mercer warns the constant light will burn us alive) reverts to light as disinfectant in *Purity*. Yet both Mercer and Andreas seem to be saying that too much of a good thing isn't good. The constancy, the inability to switch off and unplug drives both men off a cliff, literally. Too much exposure to sunlight and you will be burned. Early on in the novel, Pip differentiates between Assange and Wolf, pointing to the former's sex scandals and rape charges: "But Wiki was dirty—people died because of Wiki. Wolf is still reasonably pure. In fact, that's his whole brand now: purity" (47). In a decidedly Lacanian turn, Andreas Wolf explicates his "theory of secrets" to Pip:

There's the imperative to keep secrets, and the imperative to have them known. How do you know that you're a person, distinct from other people? By keeping certain things to yourself. You guard them inside you, because, if you don't, there's no distinction between inside and outside. Secrets are the way you know you have an inside. A radical exhibitionist is a person who has forfeited his identity. But identity in a vacuum is also meaningless. Sooner or later, the inside of you needs a witness. Otherwise you're just a cow, a cat, a stone, a thing in the world, trapped in your thingness. To have an identity, you have to believe that other identities equally exist. You need a closeness with other people. And how is closeness built? By sharing secrets. (275)

Let us pause on the phrase "radical exhibitionism" for a moment. Wolf correctly identifies this as one pole on the axis of construction of the self (the other being private thoughts). To be a "radical exhibitionist" is to turn the inside out. To turn the inside out and divulge every thought,

every secret, is to engage in a campaign of erasure of the line demarcating self from society. Once this line is erased, the social media user has returned, comically and ironically, to infancy. His incessant spewing forth of “secret” words has led him back to a time when he was indistinguishable from his mother. Selisker reminds us that secrets operate at both the micro and macro levels:

we can note that secrets are a motor for intimacy at the individual level at the same time they create the precondition for abuses of power at the governmental level. In much the same way that network scientists describe various network effects as scale-free, this particular description of power—the power exercised through conspiracy or privacy—applies in the same way to powerful and to disempowered actors. (Selisker 762)

This is a perfect lens through which to view *Purity* and its anti-hero, Andreas Wolf. The exposure of corporate and governmental secrets to the disinfecting sunlight is what created Wolf’s online persona, which elevated him to a fame without parallel; and yet, on the personal level, secrets are what allowed him some semblance of identity.

The climactic scene of *Purity*, Wolf’s flight from the cliff, is the result of that brokering of secrets failing to prevent an overlapping of information and people, the sordid details of Wolf’s tryst with Tom’s biological daughter, Pip, coinciding with the merger of “The Killer” inside Wolf and the man desperately trying to hold on to his sanity. Selisker, in what reads like a passage from Miller’s *The Novel and the Police*, maintains that Franzen’s novel is not necessarily unique in this regard: “In *Purity*, as with many other novels, narrated interiority takes shape in a near-constant interplay with interpersonal forms of information and relationship management” (763). How we use secrets—trade in them, hoard them, divulge them to everyone and anyone—defines how we present ourselves to the social world. By letting people into our

interior life, the life of our mind, we forge a bond of intimacy. By shutting people out, by donning various masks, we erect an impenetrable wall of extimacy. By divulging all, thereby reducing and cheapening the secret to fodder, we undermine the constitutive element of liberal personhood. Selisker explicates the fall of Wolf, who has failed to negotiate this delicate balance:

The end of Andreas's character arc, his suicide, seems to accomplish exactly that: reunited with Tom on a cliff near his Bolivian compound, and after most of his misdeeds have come to light, Andreas attempts to confess everything he can to Tom, including the details of his sexual encounters with Pip, in hopes of being thrown off the cliff. They constitute a strange inversion of the cliffs of Dover scene in *King Lear* (1606); unlike Shakespearean benign deception, here the self-loathing Andreas shares secrets in the full knowledge that it will prompt revulsion, not, as he theorized, create intimacy. (Selisker 764)

In Lacanese, the *word* is “no-thing,” the murder of the thing the word represents. The thing is the thing. The language, the word, is the no-thing. This other Big Other, this other Symbolic Order, the ubiquity of the LCD screen and communities contained therein, constitutes another “Hegelian murder” through which the word murders the thing. This time it does not merely kill symbolically. The avatar, it would seem, in the end, takes up too many terabytes and the physical self is wiped from memory. According to Selisker, we can attribute Wolf's fall to his failure to manage this data: “This logic of character privileges the savvy information manager, and the subject's power comes from gathering information and contacts, and, most of all, waiting until one is in a position to use it” (Selisker 764).

Bauman and Lyon also take up the subject of secrets and lament, “*We seem to experience no joy in having secrets, unless they are the kinds of secrets likely to enhance our egos by*

attracting the attention of researchers and editors of TV talk shows, tabloid front pages and the covers of glossy magazines” (Bauman and Lyon 28). The New Regime the narrator of *Purity* speaks of is typified by a discernible lack of secrets. There are no secrets, only leaks. We let people see what we want them to see. We carefully assemble a profile, a timeline, an avatar to project out into the world. This avatar, as Wolf comes to realize, becomes realer than the self in the physical real. Its disseminability, its potential virality, gives rise to a particularly potent form of self-promotion. In Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, a proto-FaceTime videophone product fails miserably because it reveals too much of a person’s intentionality through facial expressions; it gives too much away. How can you pretend to listen to someone talking while doing the laundry when that someone is staring you right in the face? The old adage, “you can be whoever you want on the telephone” is impossible with the addition of video. But the device’s successors, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, don’t make the same mistake: the feeds and profiles created on the platforms allow users to control the narrative of the self and, once sufficiently controlled, project out onto the screens of potential billions. “We are what we eat” becomes, “we are what we tweet.” Revelations aren’t revelatory; they’re performatory. Unlike the TP, we can be whomever and whatever we want on social media.

Brooker’s *Black Mirror* episode “Nosedive” complicates this premise with the introduction of a human rating system. Brooker’s thesis couldn’t be clearer: social media has been weaponized. The New Regime will not exercise its power through force; its policing won’t be executed with guns. The New Regime will enforce its laws, both written and implicit, through complete control of the narrative. After all, a gun will only assassinate the corporeal. The death that occurs online—the destruction of reputation—reverberates through the cyber-sphere for all to feel. By comparison, physical death is meaningless in its finiteness. A business without an

online reputation in today's connected world is a business with a not-so-distant expiration date.

Croce argues:

Another forum of the modern process of capital interpellation is social media. People use social media through the construction of “profiles,” which are electronically-constructed, doubly-fictive identities. The profile allows for the ideological recognition that Althusser speaks of, guaranteeing users as “concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects.” A recent television series *Black Mirror*, illustrates—perhaps with slight albeit foreboding exaggeration—the consequences electronic, ultramodern capital could hold for society. (5)

Three years on, this language sounds naïve and perhaps even irresponsible. We know social media has been monetized since its inception. Serious Twitter users might already be aware of the service that assigns, down to the penny, the cash value of a profile. This app operated contemporaneously with Croce's article; though he might be forgiven for failing to mention the advent of the Instagram “influencers”—celebrities formed in and outside of the digital arena—and multimillionaire YouTubers, vloggers who have dipped into the seemingly bottomless well of “electronic, ultramodern capital.” To his credit, Croce walks back his appraisal of the episode's exaggeration noting:

While fiction, *Nosedive* illustrates that complete mediation of social interaction by electronic capital is not so removed from the modern Western-globalist reality. Perhaps in the past a mark of social prowess was how many parties one attended, but today most visible is how many likes a person's latest profile picture received, or what designer clothing they have chosen to wear—or has it chosen them? (5-6)

“Nosedive” introduces a techno-capitalistic strain of Moore’s law—the theory that circuit chip power doubles annually—that must be applied to any analysis of self-surveillance tools: their power continues to increase at such an exponential rate so as to render any serious contemporaneous analysis of it obsolete. It is as if the entire electronic-consuming public is a helpless car owner listening to an auto mechanic rattle off a litany of technical terms for repairs his car absolutely needs.

The introduction to this dissertation discussed the shift from the panopticon to post-panoptic phenomena like the synopticon, the shift from the few watching the many to the many watching the few. Commercially speaking, a refusal to participate, to submit, to the surveillance of applications such as Facebook, Yelp, Foursquare and other software of its ilk, is to refuse to participate in modern surveillance capitalism. “Nosedive” takes those principles, those anxieties over digital perception, and ports them over to our non-commercial, purely social, interactions. The power of one to surveil and control the many has been supplanted by the power of the many to surveil and control the one. Reducing human beings to numbers is, of course, nothing new. From Auschwitz to the American slave trade, certain humans’ flesh and blood have been viewed and used by other humans as mere meat machines—cattle, horses, mules—to build the pyramids, pick the cotton, lay the railroad track. Is there anything new in the underlying desire to corral and manipulate those who have wittingly and unwittingly subjected themselves to these advanced systems of control? Deleuze, in “Postscript on Societies of Control” said exactly as much: “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons” (1). “Nosedive” asks us to consider social media the most potent weapon in the hyper-connected digital age. A recent article in *Wired* explicates another new weapon in the war against the individual human person:

China's social credit system expands that idea to all aspects of life, judging citizens' behaviour and trustworthiness. Caught jaywalking, don't pay a court bill, play your music too loud on the train — you could lose certain rights, such as booking a flight or train ticket. 'The idea itself is not a Chinese phenomenon,' says Mareike Ohlberg, research associate at the Mercator Institute for China Studies. Nor is the use, and abuse, of aggregated data for analysis of behaviour. 'But if [the Chinese system] does come together as envisioned, it would still be something very unique,' she says. 'It's both unique and part of a global trend.' (Kobie)

Although we will explore the social classification systems in terms of their ethnographic elements further in chapter three, it behooves us to consider China as the real-life incubator for themes persistent throughout “Nosedive”:

One city, Rongcheng, gives all residents 1,000 points to start. Authorities make deductions for bad behaviour like traffic violations, and add points for good behaviour such as donating to charity. One regulation Ohlberg recently read specifically addresses stealing electricity. Of course, you'll have to get caught first or be reported by someone else. While facial recognition is infamously used to spot jaywalkers, in some cities it's not so automated, Ohlberg notes. (Kobie)

Rongcheng's debit system is simply the inverse of “Nosedive's” rating system. Whereas Lacie must positively accrue points via social encounter, citizens of Rongcheng start with a bank balance to be debited for bad behavior. Both systems use social media to publicly shame users into behaviors consistent with the respective values of each society. Kobe continues:

While it varies by programme, in some local pilots a positive rating means discounts and benefits, such as a simplified process with bureaucracies. If you have a low rating, you

may have extra paperwork or fees. ‘Once you’re in a low category, it makes it difficult,’ she says. ‘I see a huge potential for negative spiral.’ Such a system could further divide society, creating classes of people depending on their social credit — and this is where comparisons to *Black Mirror* pop up.’ (Kobie)

This is one risk associated with the cooption of the insipidities of life by Big Tech, the merger of *laissez-faire* techno-capitalism (the mythology that software will solve all) with a state-sponsored program of social eugenics: the very companies whose stated mission is to deeply connect users simply succeed in categorizing, stratifying, and dividing human beings. Long before Google achieves its reported goal of implanting a version of its search engine in our brains, companies like Apple, Facebook, and Microsoft will continue to enjoy the dividends gained from a veritable bounty of data gleaned from wearables, shareables, home portals, and personal assistants. Works of art like *Black Mirror*’s “Nosedive” offer a sobering reflection of our tech-obsessed visages but also a chilling indication that the smartphone is the tip of the self-surveilling iceberg.

If a viewer blinked, he missed it. It is during moments like these that *Black Mirror* feels like it was filmed with the small screen in mind. In the theater, without the capability to go back (we used to call this rewind) and freeze the frame, a viewer would miss a gesture that, perhaps more than any dialogue in the episode, underscores the emphasis on Goffman-esque performativity. In the scene, Naomi, Lacie’s glamorous friend, gushingly, in a voice two octaves higher than normal, human conversational tone, asks Lacie, over the Skype/FaceTime-type software, to be her maid of honor. After showing off her massive rock of an engagement ring and boasting of the equally massive and important guest list, Naomi giddily shrieks in anticipation of her nuptial fete. But right before Naomi pushes the off button on her Internet-connected device and the scene cuts to black, her face turns from perpetually-plastered smile to a frown of

disdain—disdain for what we don't know— Lacie, perhaps? Her own sickeningly saccharine performance? Perhaps it's the nearly subconscious realization that her entire life is a sham. Perhaps it's all three. But a subsequent clue contained in the climactic scene seems to lend credence to the last theory. Naomi, with smartphone glued to her palm and snapping off pics and ratings of her guests, spies her husband, an insufferable jock, chest-bumping his best man in a not-so-subtle moment of homoeroticism. The look on Naomi's face, again fleeting and nearly imperceptible, is the same as the face she made following her videophone performance to Lacie. It's almost as if she realizes that not only is her wedding a callous arrangement of sheer superficiality, the marriage itself might be a sham. The mask only slips for a half-second, but in that frame, we see Naomi's true colors. This reading of the gesture is emboldened by what follows: Naomi's husband refuses to have Lacie physically expelled from the reception for fear of "how that would play." This functions as a more overt reference to performativity in both the Goffmanian and Lacanian senses. The phrasing is reminiscent of political rhetoric. Perception is reality. How a candidate gestures, postures, and "plays" is even more important than how he articulates his platform. The veneer that masks what's "true" is, at times, paper-thin, translucently revealing intention.

It might be helpful to be mindful of the different usages of the word "film" here. As a verb, "film" harkens back to that time when the only way to capture moving images was to do so with a film camera and then splice those images together to create a reel to be projected on to a screen. Even though most television and motion pictures are no longer shot on "film," the term persists. Naomi, Lacie, and the dozens of nameless people walking around the episode's version of "Pleasantville" perform as if they're being filmed, because in a way they are: their every action is rated on smart devices. There is also the literal filming via videoconferencing of

conversations—that ubiquitous mediation of human contact—that the characters partake in. It also encourages an application of “film” as a noun, in particular its secondary definition. A “film” is something that covers, albeit lightly and at times translucently, a person or thing. This film is invisible but covers everyone. It’s another form of mediation. It prevents real contact. The pervasiveness of social media in our contemporary society, and reflected in *Black Mirror*’s “Nosedive” episode, makes politicians out of all of us. We no longer engage in meaningful conversation, an even exchange of feeling and idea, we perform monologues and stream them, in 4K HD to our audiences, as the recipient waits patiently to respond with their own performance. We, the users of social media, concern ourselves not with how our actions comport with our own moral values but rather how they “play” to our throngs of online followers. In this sense, and in many others, our digital avatars have rendered our corporeal persons superfluous.

In the film adaptation of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, David Mamet’s 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Blake, the hot-shot real estate broker played by a young Alec Baldwin, trots out the now infamous catchphrase: “A.B.C.: Always. Be. Closing.” The update, in the hyper-connected era reflected in *Black Mirror*’s “Nosedive” is clear: “A.B.O.: Always. Be. Online.”¹⁵ One of the play’s many cinematic descendants, the 2000 film *Boiler Room*, features a Blake-like character, Greg, who exhorts his new recruit: “For now you only have to remember one thing. You can be whoever you want on the phone. So say what you have to. Use a different name if you want. Tell them you’re a vice-president here. Just get them on the line.” “You can be whoever you want on the phone” has been transformed to “you can be whoever you want online.” The effect of this phenomenon is to reduce the human person to data, information represented in binary code, lines of the number one and zero. “Information” is used here to

¹⁵ In a battle in the war against A.B.O., French workers won a recent court case granting them the legal right to disconnect and avoid checking email out of work hours.

contrast with the ingredient necessary to achieving wisdom: knowledge. Mining a social media profile for statistics—education, occupation, relationship “status,” likes and dislikes, hobbies, and most creepily, precise, geo-located spaces in physical reality—is a poor substitute for real knowledge of a person. This can only be garnered through intimacy. The definition of intelligence is the capacity to see two or more sides of an issue. An algorithm, the mathematical set of instructions governing the decision-making process of an artificial intelligence application, is the exact opposite of this definition: it only sees one solution to a problem.

If we can agree with Wolf that our individual identity is inextricably linked to secrets—thoughts we don’t reveal to others—then we can conclude that it is what others do not know about us that is just as important as what they do. The only way we know we are entities both a part of and *apart* from society is that society does not know our entire story. This productive tension, the delicate balance between the known and unknown, is central to the concept of liberal personhood outlined in chapter one. If everyone knew everything about us, we’d cease to be a person. On the other hand, if no one knew anything about us, we’d cease to be a worthwhile person. Franzen emblemizes this dialectic in the form of the character Andreas Wolf. Wolf, at the time of the novel’s contemporary narrative thread, is perhaps the most famous man in the world. He must grapple with a public persona he has cultivated. And yet he harbors dangerous secrets: his Humbert Humbert-esque predation of under- or near-underaged girls in the church basement, his prominent role in the cold-blooded murder of a Stasi informant, and the far-from-healthy and classically Oedipal relationship with his mother, Katya. Who is the real Wolf? Franzen offers no easy answers.

In the Mirror Stage, before the moment the infant is propped up by the *trotte*, the orthopedic device (literally “corrective”), he inhabits what Lacan called “the yolky sea of

indifferentiation.” In other words, the child cannot distinguish himself from his mother. The pleasure, satisfaction, and nourishment he receives from her is, at this moment, no different from himself. It’s only after his mother gestures, with a finger of signification towards the mirror, that the child realizes he is *apart* from her. He is not “here” per se; he is “over there.” Once he follows the finger toward the mirror and recognizes the totalizing image in it as himself, he enters into society. His own view, not the reflection in the mirror, but his body itself, looks fragmented and incomplete by comparison. He is never quite able to reconcile the two. Which is the real person? The complete view reflected in the mirror and visible to his mother and the world out there? Or the fragmented, incomplete version that he’s only able to take in in pieces?

The great irony at the center of Wolf’s evolution in Franzen’s novel is that by becoming singularly famous, breaking away from the Stasi, escaping East Germany and his mother, he is more trapped and less in control of his persona than ever before. He has, unwittingly, returned to the yolk sea of indifferentiation. He is not merely a part of society; he is indistinguishable from it. He no longer belongs to himself. He belongs exclusively to the world out there. In this sense, he is a piece of art: once the painting, song, film, or story is completed it no longer belongs to the artist. He has forfeited control. In his lust for fame, Wolf succumbs to a similar fate. A key piece of evidence to support this claim rests with Tom Aberrant, the investigative journalist that travels to Berlin to document the fall of the wall and communism, and who is, as we later learn, Pip Tyler’s biological father. Wolf reveals to Tom that he murdered Annagret’s stepfather and even involves him in the disposal of the corpse. In doing so, he has lost control of the narrative. It’s telling that Franzen has chosen journalism as the occupation for Tom. A journalist’s bread and butter is getting people to open up and spill their secrets. Let us return for a moment to Selisker’s gloss on secrets:

Franzen is clearly invested in the idea of the secret, so much so that Andreas will expound to Pip on his ‘theory of secrets’ which, we will see, complements that of the real-life Assange. For Andreas, there are two ‘contradictory imperatives,’ the one ‘to keep secrets’ and the one ‘to have them known.’ Keeping ‘certain things to yourself’ is a way to know that you are you; ‘secrets are the way you know you even have an inside,’ an inside that, for characters, is always textual—an idea to which we’ll return. Sharing secrets, the second impulse, is what generates ‘closeness with other people.’ (761)

To know that you are you and to know someone else, is a negotiation that seems more and more difficult to manage in these trying times. The technologist Sherry Turkle, in the preface to the 2017 edition of *Alone Together*, asks, “What is democracy without privacy? What is intimacy without privacy?” (xxv). Selisker attempts to answer these questions with his analysis of Pip, a character he says is dominated by the transgressing of boundaries: she reads Jason’s text messages, submits to an invasive questionnaire from Annagret, and eventually, reads Tom’s password-protected memoir. But all the main characters—Pip, Tom, Annabel, Andreas, Annagret, and Leila—trade in secrets.

Leila, Tom’s partner after Annabel, is still married to Charles, a once-famous novelist now paralyzed from the waist down after drunkenly flipping his motorcycle. In a seemingly throw-away line, Leila sarcastically asks Charles if he ever has a thought he doesn’t express.¹⁶ Charles flippantly (but tellingly) replies, “I’m a writer, baby. I have to express every thought” (213). The writer, with all his thoughts down on paper, ceases to be an individual distinct from others. It’s this lack of filtration, in the writer, the journalist, and their subjects, that is omnipresent in social media. The Twitter feed, the Instagram posts, the Facebook musings all

¹⁶ This could be an homage to Franzen’s friend, David Foster Wallace, asking of John Updike, “Has the son of a bitch ever had one unpublished thought?”

represent an unfiltered diary for all to see. It's this paradox undergirding the tension between known and unknown that is central to the thesis of *Purity*: the fulfillment of the desire for being seen does not bring with it a sense of specialness or uniqueness; quite the opposite, being surveilled, in its complete obliteration of the line between known and unknown, returns the user to Lacan's yolk sea and returns him to complete subservience to the nourishment of the other, the desire for the adoration of millions.

The connection between *1984*, *The Circle*, and *Purity* is clear: political philosophies like communism and the Internet require forfeiture of the self to the collective. That is precisely why Franzen chose East Berlin in the 1980s as the setting of his novel and hatching site of his protagonist, Andreas Wolf. It is also the irony at the heart of the novel's narrative: Wolf escaped soul-crushing uniformity of the communist bloc only to submit to the conformity of the Internet. In trying to fashion a more independent self he became totally dependent on others' opinions of him.

In perhaps the clearest Lacanian turn in the novel, Annabel, Pip's mother, as a young graduate student at The University of Pennsylvania in the early 1980s, undertakes an experimental film project to photograph every square inch of her body. Her body, she surmises, is the one thing she'll have to carry for 50, 70, or 90 years and yet she will never be fully acquainted with it. There are parts—the backs of her arms, the bottom of her feet—that she will rarely, if ever see. This project of reclamation (and perhaps an homage to DeLillo's *The Body Artist*), is a reaction to the Mirror Stage.¹⁷ It's a desire to become the other and to see herself as

¹⁷ Don DeLillo's 2001 novella, *The Body Artist*, follows the story of Lauren Hartke, a performance artist who becomes completely disconnected from the physical real while immersing herself in a routine of yogic stretching and bodywork. The ghost of the story proclaims, "The word for moonlight is 'moonlight.'" Sayer uses this line to explicate Derrida's concept of *differance*—the capacity of the signifier to exceed the signified (146).

she's seen by others. She spends eight years painstakingly photographing her body and hand-cutting and splicing the footage to create a montage effect. Annabel never completes the project, partly because she never completes anything, but also because of the fundamental impossibility of ever knowing ourselves completely—the “extimacy” of which Lacan spoke.

Whereas Annabel seeks to reclaim her body from the male gaze and the gaze of the other, reclamation of the self for Wolf is only possible through suicide. His complete forfeiture of his persona via social media and the cultivated character of the head of the Sunlight Project precedes and instigates the complete forfeiture of his corporeal body. He gives the individual self over to the collective void. For Wolf, only in committing suicide can he retake control of the narrative of his self. It's his final and only autonomous act. Only in those fleeting seconds between taking flight from the Bolivian cliff and hitting the ground below is he, in the Lacanian sense, perfect and perfectly himself:

He was so immersed and implicated in the Internet, so enmeshed in its totalitarianism, that his online existence was coming to seem realer than his physical self. The eyes of the world, even the eyes of his followers, didn't matter for their own sake, in the physical world. Who even cared what a person's private thoughts about him were? Private thoughts didn't exist in the retrievable, disseminable, and readable way that data did. And since a person couldn't exist in two places at once, the more he existed as the Internet's image of him, the less he felt he existed as a flesh-and-blood person. The Internet meant *death*. (492)

And yet, if we're to believe Lacan, a person absolutely exists in two places at once. He exists here as the fragmented self and over there as the total self. The over there is represented in Lacanian psychology as the Big Other, the symbolic order we must all submit to as human

beings. A second order has arisen following the advent of the Digital Age: we must now submit to the totalitarianism of the Internet. If we want to communicate, run a business, or have a career, we must give in to it totally. Just as characters in *The Circle* in chapter one challenged and dismissed the efficacy of paper communication (Mae's paper map) for being indisseminal, so too does Andreas Wolf of *Purity* bemoan the utter lack of importance of an individual's private thoughts. There used to be a side of the self that remained hidden from public view. We knew we were a distinct, at least semi-autonomous beings because of those private thoughts. Wolf is right to question, which is the realer self?

Stephens-Davidowitz in *Everybody Lies* argues that the algorithmic software being perfected by Google and Facebook already know more about us than we know about ourselves. A previous generation led us to believe we "are what we eat." Compelling evidence exists to suggest we more likely are "what we Google." So, what does that make Andreas Wolf if not a narcissist? He obsesses over his online reputation. The persona he has carefully constructed online is vulnerable to assassination at the hands of the jealous, the petty, the small. The narrator, again focalized through Wolf, underscores the appeal of the Internet:

The aim of the Internet and its associated technologies was to "liberate" humanity from the tasks—making things, learning things, remembering things—that has previously given meaning to life and thus had constituted life. Now it seemed as if the only task that meant anything was search-engine optimization...but it was a metaphor for something real: if—and only if—you had enough money and/or tech capability, you could control your Internet persona and, thus, your destiny and your virtual afterlife. Optimize or die. Kill or be killed." (492)

Don DeLillo, in his latest novel, *Zero K*, explores such an afterlife: “Do you ever feel unfleshed? All the sensors in the room that are watching you, listening to you, tracking your habits, measuring capabilities. All the linked data designed to incorporate you into the megadata. Do you feel steeped in some horrific digital panic that’s everywhere and nowhere” (239)?

Bauman and Lyon, in *Liquid Surveillance*, point to Turkle’s thesis in *Alone Together*: “These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and to protect us from them at the same time” (Turkle as quoted in Bauman and Lyon 36). To be in and to protect us from relationships is the ultimate mediation. Hasn’t a screen always been the culprit? We watch the 11 o’clock news because we want to be engaged and informed; and yet, we watch it on the television because we want to be protected and at a safe distance from everything that’s going on out there. Social media is simply the logical extension of this phenomenon. As Bauman and Lyon recall a user admitting, “[Facebook brings me] ‘Closer to people I’m far away from but maybe farther from the people I’m close enough to’” (Bauman and Lyon 38). This is anathema to intimacy. Intimacy—face-to-face, human interaction—is messy, unpredictable, and frankly, sometimes, hurts.

3.6 Go for What Hurts:

What do the societal maladies brought on by the Internet as portrayed in Franzen and Brooker’s works portend for the future of human relationships? For some, like the late neurologist Oliver Sacks, the inability to opt out augurs the death of culture itself:

Everything is public now, potentially: one’s thoughts, one’s photos, one’s movements, one’s purchases. There is no privacy and apparently little desire for it in a world devoted to non-stop use of social media. Every minute, every second, has to be spent with one’s device clutched in one’s hand. Those trapped in this virtual world are never alone, never

able to concentrate and appreciate in their own way, silently. They have given up, to a great extent, the amenities and achievements of civilization: solitude and leisure, the sanction to be oneself, truly absorbed, whether in contemplating a work of art, a scientific theory, a sunset, or the face of one's beloved. (29)

Sacks points to E.M. Forster's 1909 story, "The Machine Stops" as an incredibly prescient example of humanity being overtaken by a machine. He likens the techno-anxiety of contemporary street life—pedestrians "glued almost without pause to phones"—to the young man in Forster's story begging his mother: "I want to see you not through the Machine...I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine...We have lost a part of ourselves...Cannot you see...that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine?" (Forster as quoted in Sacks 29). Sacks looks to contemporary technocrats as a particular source of disdain. In his essay published in *The New Yorker*, Sacks recalls being invited to a panel on twenty-first century communication. After listening to one of his fellow panelists, an early pioneer of the Internet, wax philosophical on his precocious daughter's daily web-surfing, Sacks asks the man whether the girl has read any of Jane Austen's novels or any classic novel for that matter. When he replies that she hasn't, Sacks questions whether she has a solid understanding of society and human nature or simply has greater access to information. Sacks is right to distinguish information from knowledge. Social surveillance, the perusal of myriad digital profiles, also confuses information with knowledge of a subject, in this case a human subject. To glean data, the likes and dislikes, tweets and retweets, pins and posts, from a social media user is not the same thing as enjoying intimate knowledge of another person. The "machine" in Forster's story, much like the *soma* of Huxley's *Brave New World*, "provides all comforts and meets all needs—except the need for human contact" (Sacks 29). Brooker's *Black*

Mirror and Franzen's *Purity* urge us to see social media for what it really is: an approximation designed not to connect us, as advertised, to anything worthwhile, but keep us at a safe distance; or as Franzen himself put it in his *New York Times* op-ed piece, to "like" instead of "going for what hurts."

In a world devoid of mediation and filtration, an algorithmic existence determined by our clicks and swipes, gestures and glances, the great irony of platforms designed to connect people is that they succeed only in disconnection and dislocation. The machine doesn't stop, we do. The danger of submitting to the totalitarianism of the Internet, the inability to find a way to successfully opt out without driving or throwing ourselves off a cliff, proverbial or otherwise, is the danger of solipsism. Without intimate knowledge of others, we fill the void with information. The biggest lie the denizens of Big Tech would have us believe is not simply that technology will solve all of our modern maladies, but that information is the same thing as knowledge, that data is the same thing as wisdom. It's not.

Far from solution oriented, Franzen and Brooker's texts seek to function diagnostically: they productively complicate the techno-capitalistic culture that we've come to readily accept. It's this utter capitulation and blind adoption that has the "smart people" Andreas referred to so worried. This lack of critical thinking—call it faith—hands the keys and *carte blanche* to the technocrats. Considering the two characters who eventually resist, rather than acquiesce to, the totalitarianism of techno-capitalism, Andreas and Lacie, fall and experience death—the former figuratively and literally and the latter just symbolically—the texts cannot be viewed as acts of resistance themselves. The space for that, it would seem, is left to the reader. George Orwell insisted *1984* was a hopeful book—not a warning so much of what *must* happen as what it would look like if it did. It was supposed to wake up the Brits and the world. The only speculation in

the minds of writers like Orwell, Eggers, and Franzen is whether readers will see themselves in the text or if the distance in time and geographical remoteness is enough to protect the aegis of self-image. Franzen and Brooker, with their respective art, problematize techno-consumerism and betray an incredulity towards the Silicon Valley master narrative: that every problem, even the technology of social surveillance itself, can be solved by technology. It is a familiar refrain and one that, up until very recently, Sherry Turkle herself trotted out. In the preface to the 2017 edition of *Alone Together*, Turkle recalls a conversation with a researcher whose studies found, in college students, a 40 percent decline in markers for empathy over a 30-year period.

Depressed by her findings, she told Turkle her first instinct was to set out to make “empathy apps” for the iPhone. Technology got us into this mess, she said, technology is the only thing that can get us out of it. Two years ago, Turkle had an opportunity to reflect upon this conversation and reconsider *Alone Together* as containing, “materials to fight against this tempting idea. It encourages readers to see themselves as the empathy app. For this is my fundamental belief: we are the empathy app” (xxvi). This dissertation argues that literature is the original and enduring human empathy application.

**4 CHAPTER THREE: RESISTING THE BANOPTICON: SURVEILLANCE
CAPITALISM AND CRITICAL REVOLUTIONARY PEDAGOGY IN MOHSIN
HAMID'S *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST* AND JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE
LOWLAND***

“Remember that the revolution is the important thing and that each one of us alone is worth nothing.” – Che Guevara

4.1 Introduction:

Whereas the previous two chapters focused on the shift from panopticon to synopticon and the psychosocial forces undergirding that shift—from the few watching the many to the many watching the few—chapter three concerns itself with another phenomenon in surveillance studies, something Didier Bigo has referred to as the “banopticon.” A portmanteau of Giorgio Agamben’s “ban” and Michel Foucault’s “opticon,” the banopticon functions as a surveillance system utilized by securitarian forces to restrict the free movement of people across borders both real and imaginary. While the first two chapters relied upon a psychoanalytic lens through which to view Orwell, Eggers, Franzen, and Brooker’s projects, this chapter shifts to a Marxist and postcolonial lens as it analyzes two exemplary works, the 2007 novel by Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and a 2013 National Book Award Finalist, *The Lowland*, a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. In further support of the thesis that surveillance has evolved beyond the Orwellian Big Brother and the Foucauldian panopticon, this chapter explores how both Hamid and Lahiri’s texts encourage us to ruminate on twenty-first century surveillance systems and how those are used to classify, divide, and exclude undesirables from specific national, social, and economic structures. After a brief synopsis of both texts, a

gloss on Bigo, and an analysis of “the production of danger”—the Copenhagen School’s argument that danger is something produced by language (a speech act)—I analyze key passages, characters, themes, and motifs in the novels before concluding that Lahiri and Hamid’s projects are pedagogically-oriented, both in terms of plot and narrative structure. I argue in this chapter that Canadian scholar Peter McLaren’s concept of critical revolutionary pedagogy can serve as an antidote to the divisiveness of the banopticon. Bigo’s banopticon can be paired with Oscar Gandy’s concept of “panoptic sorting”—a “triaging” of consumers according to their worth to the corporation—to highlight the intersection of security studies and surveillance capitalism (Lyon 6). This chapter analyzes some contemporary, real-world examples of the banopticon as facilitated, enhanced, and supported by surveillance capitalism. Questions driving this chapter are: who decides who is permitted entrance to a society? How is danger created through cultural production? How do the novels in question reveal the McLarenian concept of revolutionary love? How do we defeat what Bigo has called the “professionals of the management of unease”—those forces who submit a truth claim about others based upon the algorithmic “knowledge” of big data, statistics, and biometrics? Banita argues that “surveillance—whether as visual panopticon or postoptic data-mining system—can be used as a thematic and structural heuristic to interpret how post-9/11 literature dramatizes the ethical challenges posed by increased securitization to the public’s privacy rights” (252). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Lowland* are two novels that exemplify this heuristic.

This chapter endeavors to draw comparisons between traditional surveillance features of colonialism and what chapters one and two described as the totalitarianism of the Internet. The architects of the surveillance economy, the surveillance capitalists and technocrats, and the architects of colonization, imperialists and globalists, share a lexical and strategic framework.

Both see their subjects—users of the Internet and colonial subjects—as objects.

Uncoincidentally, both employ militaristic language in describing their subjects as “targets.” In the case of surveillance capitalism, users are targeted for advertisements according to the “data exhaust” their online behaviors leave behind. The introduction of phrases like “data exhaust” and “cookies” are strategic inasmuch as they mask nefarious intention behind benign or even desirable-sounding signifiers. Keen observers of food marketing strategies will no doubt be able to draw comparisons with the process of defamiliarizing the slaughter of animals for food production. Cute, cartoonish cows, pigs, and chickens adorn the plastic packaging of animal products in order to displace from consideration the act of slaughter, thereby absolving the consumer of guilt. A similar process occurs when an Internet user accepts “cookies.” We now know that we’re not talking about chocolate chip or oatmeal raisin when we accept these cookies; rather, we are consenting to a surveillance system designed to record every click and keystroke we register. This information is then sold to myriad third-party companies who package and sell it to corporate monoliths like Facebook and Amazon which in turn populate the margins of our web pages and banners in our email inboxes with targeted ads. This front-facing language stands in stark contrast to the militaristic mention of “targets” in company materials—language the public isn’t intended to see. This chapter deals with the liminal, oftentimes lawless space between surveillance capitalism and outright militarized surveillance designed to track, record, and act upon the movement of individuals (or preclude their movement). Through readings of Hamid and Lahiri, this chapter wrestles with how these practices are absorbed, normalized, and finally accepted by our culture. This chapter also offers, *a la* Lyon in *The Culture of Surveillance*, a glimmer of hope in the recognition that culture is the product of human creation and that we alone can submit to this system of surveillance, as Subhash and

Gauri of *The Lowland* do or seek to change it, like Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. To do so might take a revolution. In *The Motorcycle Diaries*, Che Guevara's travelogue through Latin America, he argues with his friend and fellow doctor, Ernesto. A revolution without guns, he suggests, would never work. However, surveillance capitalism reveals to us that the new weapons in this technological age are not guns. And the weapons in the resistance are not guns either. One weapon in this fight might come in the form of Peter McLaren and his concepts of critical revolutionary pedagogy and critical revolutionary love. In both plot and narrative structure, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Lowland* are deeply informed by pedagogy. The central figures, Changez from Hamid's novel and Subhash and Gauri from Lahiri's, become professors. The novels themselves also function as works of moral teaching. The lessons contained therein both offer up and problematize resistance to capitalism. In Hamid's work, the reluctant fundamentalist of American capitalism gives way to the eager resistor of American imperialism. On the other hand, Subhash and Gauri of *The Lowland* capitulate, and in many ways, acquiesce to the same system their Naxalite brother and husband fought to undermine.

Mohsin Hamid structured his post-9/11 novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in second-person narration representing one side of a dialogue (or a series of dramatic monologues) just as Albert Camus did with his 1956 novel *La Chute* or *The Fall* (in English.). Lau and Mendes ruminate on the deployment of this rarely utilized point of view:¹⁸

Just as the character of the American in Hamid's novel — the diegetically addressed “you”, often a direct address to the reader — seems to be left with no choice but to accept Changez as interlocutor, the narrator–protagonist has apparently inveigled a place for

¹⁸ Hamid's 2013 novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, also employs the second-person, direct address.

himself by monopolizing the script, presenting him-self as our spokesman not just for Pakistan, but also, audaciously, for America. (Lau and Mendes 79)

Parallels in plot and theme also exist between *The Fall* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: both protagonists, Changez and Jean-Baptiste, lament their inability (or unwillingness) to prevent a girl from committing suicide. Whereas *The Fall* functions as a confessional for Jean-Baptiste, a once-respected Parisian lawyer, the protagonist and narrator of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez, a Pakistani-born and Princeton-educated man, recounts his own fall to an American visiting with him in Lahore, Pakistan. Changez recalls being seduced by the materialistic trappings of his new job at a New York valuation firm. Yet he also describes an about-face he performs after witnessing the post-9/11 invasion of Afghanistan, his one-time neighbor to the north, by the U.S. military. Changez comes to realize he feels more kinship with his Muslim brothers in Afghanistan than with colleagues in his adopted homeland, the U.S. Increasingly disillusioned with life in the west, Changez resigns from his position at Underwood Samson and returns to Lahore to become a university professor critical of U.S. involvement in the Middle East and beyond. The novel ends with the reader and Changez unsure whether his companion for tea is an American assassin pulling out a gun or a tourist pulling out a credit card to pay the check. Jayasuriya highlights the unresolved tension at the heart of text:

The novel...does not provide readers with a definitive resolution or a heavy-handed moral, meaning that part of the experience of reading the novel is the interpretive aftermath itself. The writer's use of a multivalent literary form makes us question our certainties and binaries and thereby forces us to grapple with what Peter Morey calls the "Them" and the "Us" narratives that drive the war on terror. (Jayasuriya 249)

In other words, the assignation of labels like “us” and “them” are productively complicated through Hamid’s novel. The black-and-white binaries are almost completely greyed out.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist features cosmopolitan characters who move through continents swiftly. Changez, Lahore-born and New Jersey-educated, works for a multinational financial company, Underwood Samson. He holidays in Greece with his fellow fabulous Princetonians. He flies business-class to exotic locales such as the Philippines and Chile. He enjoys a swanky Manhattan apartment and parties in the Hamptons. But he, and other characters like his love interest, Erica, long for home. Home, we come to learn, is not a fixed point in geographical coordinates. Changez, even before returning to Lahore, finds home in other people: a Filipino cab driver, and Wainwright, the only other person of color at Underwood Samson. Hamid, in an essay published around the time of the novel’s release, locates Changez’s conflict inside himself, remarking of his novel: “The style was that of a fable, of a parable, the kind of folk or religious story one looks to for guidance, because of course guidance was what I needed” (Hamid March 2007 powells.com). Rather than a Pakistani-British man lecturing an American audience, Hamid himself struggles to come to terms with his own place in a fractured, post-9/11 world. Two motifs reveal this conflict.

One motif persistent throughout *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the beard. Although not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an, the beard has been seen as a symbol of Islamic devoutness and manliness in *fitrah* or the natural order. In the novel, the beard comes to signify Changez’s changing posture toward the United States. As his beard grows, so too does his animus for the ruthless capitalistic ambitions of his employer and the ruthless military campaign being waged in Afghanistan by the U.S. government. Assuredly more than coincidence is the fact that the initials for Underwood Samson and the United States are the same –a symbolic recognition of the city as

the center of the nation's financial capital and through "Wall Street," metonymically, capitalism itself. In the days following 9/11, at a time when anyone looking vaguely middle-Eastern was subject to extrajudicial detention, Changez decides to let his beard grow out, prompting untoward glances from colleagues and outright censure by his employer. Even his mother implores him to "not forget to shave" before returning to the U.S. because "they" have beards. And as the reader comes to find, who gets to say "us" and "them" is not an inconsequential prepositional advantage. A beard is pertinent to this chapter's focus on surveillance inasmuch as it is a specular phenomenon. In other words, the Islamic beard can be noted by securitarian forces, fellow passengers on a plane, and of course, hundreds of surveillance video cameras positioned everywhere from hospitals to schools to the sidewalks of city streets.

This is not to suggest that the beard should be equated with skin color. Pigmentation, of course, is not a choice. Even before the symbolic gesturing of his facial hair, Changez is subjected to a strip-search at the hands of armed security guards while boarding a return flight from a work trip, presumably because of his vague resemblance to a middle-Eastern person. He boarded the flight "uncomfortable in [his] own face" and "aware of being under suspicion" (Hamid 74). The scene functions as the first instance in the novel of what Bigo calls the "banopticon"—surveillance for the purpose of exclusion, a preemptive disciplinary action designed to determine who is admitted to a society. In the days following the attacks, Changez shrugs off worry, reminding coworkers and himself that Pakistan had "pledged its support to the United States" [in their war in Afghanistan] (94). The banopticon ignores national identity and stated allegiances. These concerns cannot be extricated from conversations about class. As Changez struggles to ignore the rumors of "Pakistani cabdrivers being beaten to within an inch of their lives," he consoles himself with the knowledge that these types of attacks only happen to

the poor, not to “Princeton graduates earning eighty thousand dollars a year” (95). The sheen of respectability, this white mask that Changez adopts, only carries one so far. Loomba reminds us: “Colonialism was the means through which capitalism achieved its global expansion. Racism simply facilitated this process, and was the conduit through which the labour of colonized people was appropriated” (Loomba 124). Lahiri, in *The Lowland*, has taken Hamid’s anecdote of race and cab drivers and inverted it. Like Changez, who despite his pedigree cannot efface his “Pakistaniness,” Gauri, the Bengali professor living in America, remained, a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable” (Lahiri 286). It is this appearance and complexion that leads a driver to “mistake her for the person paid to open another person’s door. Tell her, whenever she’s ready, he’d said” (286). The advancement of their careers cannot, it would appear, efface the otherness of Changez’s and Gauri’s brown skins.

Another motif related to surveillance operates in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, albeit more subtly—the island. Most of the story Changez tells his American interlocutor is set on the isle of Manhattan. Manhattan, before and after 9/11, signifies the world epicenter of financial capital, a symbol of urbane affluence. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, New York City serves as the next stop on Changez’s journey that takes him from the old-world, faded glory of Lahore, Pakistan to the hallowed halls of Princeton University to the *nouveau riche*, corporate credit card-wielding world of Underwood Samson. And of course, the setting of Erica’s novella, that “platypus of a beast,” is a deserted island. Changez remarks, “Yet her novel was no tortured, obviously autobiographical affair. It was simply a tale of adventure, of a girl on an island who learns to make do” (166). The setting, Changez concludes, was most likely influenced by one of Chris’s sketches: “It depicted under stormy skies a tropical island with a runway and a steep

volcano; nestled in the caldera of the volcano was a lake with another, smaller island in it—an island on an island—wonderfully sheltered and calm” (52). In the multivalent reading the novel encourages, the island on the island could be Erica trapped inside Chris’s love or Changez stranded on the isle of world capital, cut off from his comrades, ashamed of what he has become. Later, after Erica’s death, Changez sees a rock in a small puddle standing straight up, an island defiant: “As raindrops fell and water filled the banks of this little lake, I noticed a stone standing upright in the center, like an island, and I thought of the joy Erica would have had at gazing upon that scene” (173). Perhaps this represents Erica herself—an island alone in the lake of Chris’s love while the hatred of 9/11 erupted all around her. Or perhaps this is the reformed fundamentalist, Changez, refusing to capitulate, refusing to surrender his moral positioning for the accoutrements of the jet-set class. An island isn’t just a topographical or geological manifestation of isolation. An island is also a fortress, a fortification against invasion. Changez says as much when he recalls his trip to the Greek isles, singling out Rhodes for special mention: “Its cities were fortified, protected by ancient castles; they guarded against the Turks, much like the army and navy and air force of modern Greece, part of a wall against the East that still stands. How strange it was for me to think I grew up on the other side!” (23). An island, therefore, represents the ultimate geographical and metaphorical expression of privacy, intimacy, and protection. Erica retreats there to be alone with Chris, an island for her realer than the real. The Bush administration, Changez laments, in its post-9/11 “crusade,” retreats into an island of its own mythological making, “unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you” (168). And in the end, Changez retreats to his own island, but not of protection and privacy; he is exposed to the surveillance of the American interlocutor, “like a Kurtz waiting for his Marlowe” (183). And yet it *is* intimate—the intimacy shared between

predator and prey—a shared pain and pleasure in its relentless rapaciousness. The predator hunts its prey wherever he finds it. The American assassin taking the fight to supranational arenas and perhaps extrajudicial ends means that the banopticon can go on the offensive.

Gauri, of *The Lowland*, constructs a similar island of isolation. Her island is not a withdraw into a relationship, but rather comfort in the absence of relationships: “isolation offered its own form of companionship: the reliable silence of her rooms, the steadfast tranquility of the evenings” (Lahiri 287). It is jarring when this self-induced sabbatical from serious relationships is broken by one of Gauri’s graduate students. The student, Lorna, is seeking an outside reader for a dissertation on relational autonomy. She gushingly tells Gauri she has read every single thing she has ever written. The narrator reveals, “Gauri felt disoriented in the little office that was so familiar to her. At once ambushed and flattered” (288). We’re reminded of Louis Brandeis’s original legal opinion on the issue of privacy. The Internet allows Lorna to pierce the bubble of isolation.

4.2 The banopticon:

Bigo highlights “three criteria [for the banopticon]: practices of exceptionalism, acts of profiling and containing foreigners, and a normative imperative of mobility” (6). “The banopticon,” according to Bigo, “deconstructs some of the post-September 11 analysis as a ‘permanent state of emergency’.” This phrase alludes to Giorgio Agamben’s book *State of Exception*—crises which empower the sovereign state to transcend the rule of law.

Developments such as the September 11th attacks and subsequent bombings in London and Madrid have created the field of “unease management.” “The governmentality of unease,” Bigo suggests, “is characterized by practices of exceptionalism.” (6) Or as Fierke argues, “The

securitization of terrorism after September 11 consolidated American identity, providing the basis for both the projection of power and the suspension of normal politics” (112). “The ‘unanimism’ of the professionals of politics after September 11th” according to Bigo, “created a specific period for the enunciation of a discourse of necessity of war against terrorism and suspicion against terrorism and suspicion against foreigners, ethnic and religious minorities” (6). In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Changez begins to feel this suspicion palpably as he is “subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers, and at Underwood Samson...seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares” (Hamid 130). Even his best friend at the firm, Wainwright, the only other person of color at Underwood Samson, begins to question Changez’s appearance: “Look, man,” he said, “I don’t know what’s up with the beard, but I don’t think it’s making you Mister Popular around here” (130). As long as the carrot of financial independence and all the spoils that go with it is still dangling in front of him, he is expected to keep pace on the treadmill of capitalism. His loyalty is supposed to lie not with his neighbors, Afghanistan, or even the country of his birth, Pakistan, or even his adopted country, the United States, but rather the almighty dollar. This is the ironic wordplay in Hamid’s title. The “fundamentalist” he refers to, we come to learn, is not, at least initially or entirely, allusive of Islamic dogmatism or theocratic conservatism, but rather capitalistic fundamentalism, the notion that the accumulation of capital will raise the standard of living of the capitalist and will lift all boats. As Jayasuriya reminds us, “global capitalism, the system in which Changez lives and works and into which he has become acculturated, is as much a belief system as Islam or Christianity” (Jayasuriya 256-257). The beard reveals intention on the part of Changez to mutiny—that he may revolt against the fundamentals of capitalism and reveal loyalty to his homeland and its people over the pursuit of the dollar. Because of this, he is, in short, a person

now under surveillance and suspicion. “The principle of suspicion,” Bigo argues, “subverts the principle of innocence” in a situation like this (11). It seems the veneer his Princeton pedigree and Underwood Samson business card provide only goes so deep. The principle of suspicion leads to exceptional practice. Changez encounters “[a]rmed sentries [at the] check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection” (Hamid 157). Bigo argues that the great trick governments have performed is to reduce the exceptional practice to banality; in other words, to normalize the banopticon. Bigo contends, “It is not the declaration of exception that frames the boundary between the norm and the exception, but the routines of technologies of surveillance” (53). We saw in chapters one and two how the battle for hearts and minds in the fight over privacy is won through normalization. The speed at which the technologies of surveillance are developed and implemented does not allow users and subjects time to reflect or object to them. Once they do, it’s often too late. These practices are instantaneously adopted, rolled out, and normalized by companies so as to inoculate themselves to criticism. We now adopt a posture of defeatism and offer little more than a shrug, a resignation toward surveillance practices like Google’s monitoring of its “free” email client Gmail.¹⁹ Similarly, we resign ourselves to the banopticon and the practices of a permanent state of exception. One needs only to think of the now ubiquitous and routine, but once intrusive and invasive, practice of airport body scanning. Once a practice becomes routine it ceases to be a subject of contestation. In rendering the banopticon banal, securitarian agents have accomplished what surveillance capitalists set out to do: they have normalized assaults on personal privacy in the names of safety and convenience. Again, we’re reminded of the weak, “I have nothing to

¹⁹ In one of the more egregious examples of surveillance capitalism, CNBC, in May of 2019 reported that Google uses Gmail to track years of user purchases, even those made outside of Google.

hide” counterargument. But the danger the banopticon requires to operate isn’t inherent; it must be produced.

Bigo concludes that, “The reactivation of border controls after the bombing of September 11th was not the sign of renewed efficiency, it was a sign of a ritual against fear of the unknown” (52). Fierke locates the cause of this securitization of borders in the “production of danger”—the impetus for suspending normal politics and entering into a permanent state of exception. However, the power of the banopticon is not limited to gateways; it travels to ensure the securitization of targets abroad. Changez, even after he retreats to a university in Pakistan, is one such target. He laments: “I have endeavored to live normally, as though nothing has changed, but I have been plagued by paranoia, by an intermittent sense that I am being observed” (Hamid 183). However, Bigo reminds us, “Not everyone is put under surveillance, identified, categorized and checked” (52). Just as the Proles in *1984* were beneath suspicion, so, too, are those citizens outside a “minority”—racial, ethnic, religious— that projects “virtually violent behavior.” (Bigo 52). And, as Lyon posits, “By the late 1980s, Gary T. Marx argued that ‘the state’s traditional monopoly over the means of violence is supplemented by new means of gathering and analyzing information that may even make the former obsolete’” (Marx qtd. in Lyon 105). Marx’s neat neologism, “categorical suspicion,” helps describe Changez’s position both in New York and later in Pakistan: in the former he inhabits the categorical niche of Muslim and then in the latter, the niche of anti-American (Lyon 106). These categories are managed via database. “The database,” Bauman contends, “is an instrument of selection, separation and exclusion. It keeps the globals in the sieve and washes out the locals” (Lyon 118). In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid cannily blurs the line distinguishing global from local with the character of Changez. His Princeton *bona fides* and Wall Street salary suggest he moves freely as a global; however, his

skin pigmentation and Islamic beard mean he is eventually washed out as a local. Lyon, writing in 2007, claims, “The question of whether or not or not biometrics represents a fundamentally flawed means of identification due to its apparent racialized character has yet to be resolved” (136). Resolved, no. But there is nothing stopping us from condemning it.

4.3 Fuel for the banoptic engine: surveillance capitalism

“Sur-veil-lance Cap-i-tal-ism, n.

1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales;
2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification;
3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history;
4. The foundation framework of a surveillance economy;
5. As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth;
6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy;
7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty;
8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of people’s sovereignty” (Zuboff vii).

One could be forgiven for interpreting the title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, as an allusion to the novel's narrator and his untraditional path to Islamic fundamentalism. Changez did not grow up poor, subjugated, and hungry in some desert, cave, or slum. He grew up in the relative comfort of the Lahore elite class. He only became a "terrorist" after tasting the American good life and rejecting it. It's no accident Hamid has chosen finance and valuation as his hero's occupation. Changez's job consists entirely of telling people how much they're worth. Therefore, another way to interpret the title might be as an allusion to Changez's reluctance to embrace American fundamentalism, capitalism. Some textual evidence to support this interpretation exists in the form of advice from Wainwright: "Focus on the fundamentals" (98) he tells Changez. Changez smiles at the collapse of the twin towers on September 11th, not because he's a sociopath indifferent to suffering, but because he recognizes what the World Trade Center represents ideologically: the carrot to dangle and the stick with which to beat. Hamid explains that Changez:

is a reluctant fundamentalist because his environment sees him as a religious fundamentalist though he isn't one. He, on the other hand, rejects the economic fundamentalism of the business world to which he belongs – a world oriented solely around gains and losses. For me, this is what fundamentalism is: looking at the world from a single perspective, thereby excluding other perspectives. What fundamentalism is not, for Hamid, is 'necessarily a religious phenomenon'. (Hamid qtd. in Kennedy 2)

Hamid forces us to ask ourselves, as Americans, the uncomfortable questions: Are Americans the fundamentalists? Are Americans the terrorists? We must ask this not only because the U.S. military uses drones to kill people in Africa, "accidentally" drops bombs on weddings in Pakistan, or even fights proxy wars for Saudi Arabia in Yemen, but because the U.S. invades

countries with its ideology and capital by holding them hostage to the inflexibility of American dogma through a bottomless well of financial debt. As Changez puts it, “Moreover I knew from my experience as a Pakistani—of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions—that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power” (156). The turning point in the novel, whereby Changez shifts from being focused on the fundamentals to actively resisting the American neoliberal and capitalist system, is punctuated by the act of watching. Changez feels something inside him change when he sees American soldiers on television invading Afghanistan, the neighbors of his homeland. The scene Changez watches fills him with shame as underfed farmers armed with nineteenth century weapons are slaughtered by the most advanced military technology the world has ever seen. A presidential aide for George W. Bush described the conditions whereby this breed of neo-imperialism would create a new reality in the wake of 9/11: “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out” (Suskind qtd. in Redfield 49). Through the ever-changing cycle of economic sanctions and aid, the United States continues to isolate rogue Muslim countries, particularly theocratic states like Iran, while spreading its own brand of fundamentalist capitalism. The interconnectedness of global financial systems requires countries to fall in line or wither on the vine. Canadian education professor Peter McLaren echoes Bigo’s concept of the production of danger and insecurity:

The so-called "war on terrorism" is more accurately viewed as a war against those who threaten the interests of transnational corporate domination and the neo-con quest for world Empire. This phony, duplicitous Orwellian phrase has meaning only as a smokescreen for transnational corporations and the global capitalist class to gain control

over oil markets and world resources in general, while crushing anyone who dares to oppose the exploitation of animals, people, and the Earth.²⁰ (McLaren)

Ironically, that very system is, in a way, propped up by “Islamic terror.” Invasions of countries such as Iraq have the double-benefit of flattening an Islamic country seen as injurious to globalization while enriching the American military complex. Now under what Changez calls “the guise of the war on terror,” the U.S. can perpetually wage war on non-state actors as “extremists,” “fundamentalists,” and “terrorists.” McLaren writes, “Once the war on terror was announced, some doyens of the establishment right must have been so thrilled at the prospect of limitless political military opportunity that they were driven mad...especially after the consentaneity of the public was secured, federal dragnets for rounding up suspicious Arabs were launched across the nation...” (215). Changez gets lumped into this category. However, in another maneuver to complicate the binaries of “us” and “them,” Changez, before becoming a professor, engages in surveillance practices himself: as an Underwood Samson analyst, he surveils companies to determine their profitability. Ironically, the man racially profiled at every checkpoint after 9/11 engages in spying, watching, and recording. He operates as a corporate mole for Underwood Samson. Just as drones are deployed to engage their targets, Changez, as financial predator, is loosed on his unwitting prey by Underwood Samson. Changez, with his brown skin and dark, increasingly Islamic beard, shows up on the radar of securitarian forces at the ports of egress. The companies he surveils show up on his own radar—the fissures in the balance sheet widening just enough for him to insert his probing instruments and render its

²⁰ The current U.S. President, Donald J. Trump, an inveterate liar, is known to punctuate his falsehoods with moments of astonishing honesty, such as the time he expressed regret for the Iraq War—not the hundreds of thousands of casualties, mind you—but the fact that we, “didn’t get the oil.”

employees surplus to requirements. These practices function as products of a pre-digital, analog surveillance capitalism.

Chapter one highlighted the overt marine metaphor Eggers employs in *The Circle*: Bailey, the avuncular, energetic octopus; Ty, the beautiful, reclusive seahorse; and Denton, the insatiable, avaricious shark. This image of the shark as an indefatigable, indiscriminate killing machine can be traced back through Peter Benchley's *Jaws* and into ancient folklore. In *The Circle*, Eggers evokes it to describe Denton's ruthless capitalistic ambition. The Big Tech monoliths function much in the same manner as sharks: rather than compete with the other fish in the sea—smaller tech companies (think Google's acquisition of YouTube and Facebook's semi-hostile takeover of Instagram)—they simply chew them up and spit them out. These passages dovetail with Jim's appraisal of Changez. His boss at Underwood Samson looks him up and down and concludes, "You're a shark. And that's a compliment, coming from me. It's what they called me when I first joined. A shark. I never stopped swimming" (70). This lionizing of the solitary hunter, the apex predator, is complicated by Jim and Changez's shared outsider status. Jim feels kinship with Changez as an outlier. On the surface, Jim has it all: a well-remunerated position at a top financial firm, a modern loft in TriBeCa, a Gatsby-esque house in the Hamptons, the financial freedom to come and go as he pleases. And yet, he is an outsider. After surveying the artwork on the walls of Jim's loft, spying a "not insignificant number of male nudes," Changez inquires as to the whereabouts of Jim's family. Jim laughs off the question, responding that he is childless and unmarried before reminding Changez, "I know what it's like to be an outsider" (119-120). Here, Jim's presumed homosexuality functions as counterpoint to Changez's own minority status (and perhaps his presumed theological orientation.) The distinction Hamid seems to be making is that while Changez suspects his,

“Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account...” (71) we know his appearance after 9/11 does not go unnoticed. Boarding a flight home to New York from a work trip to Manila, Changez’s “entrance elicited looks of concern” as he flew “uncomfortable” and “aware of being under suspicion” (74). Jim’s otherness, on the other hand, his sexual orientation, is never betrayed; the only conspicuous clues to his preference line the walls of his TriBeCa loft, *not* the Hamptons mansion where he hosts Underwood Samson parties. In other words, Jim is able to fly under the radar both literally and metaphorically: his whiteness allows him to fly without suspicion while the invisibility of *his* otherness, his homosexuality, allows him to remain undetected. The net effect of Jim’s otherness may very well result in feelings of outsider-ness; however, the decision to disclose that status is something he alone controls. Changez can don a fifteen-hundred-dollar suit, a handsome attaché, and freshly shaven face, but cannot escape looking vaguely Middle Eastern in the days marked by racial violence following the attacks on New York on September 11, 2001. This is not to diminish the challenges a gay man faces in the hyper-masculinized world of Wall Street, but rather to distinguish between otherness that can be concealed from that which cannot. The banopticon, therefore, relies far more heavily upon televisual surveillance like cameras and facial recognition software than the synoptical dataveillance which relies almost exclusively on computer surveillance. The cloak of invisibility allows Jim to evade the banopticon and move freely in and out of his desired spaces.²¹ Unfortunately, Changez cannot enjoy the same luxury. The banopticon, emboldened by the post-9/11 state of exception, restricts Changez from the enjoyment of free movement in the same spaces, across borders, and through checkpoints. Racial overtones, therefore, are powerfully

²¹ In the future this sentence might prove a quaint anachronism as surveillance capitalism continues to partner with theocratic states like Brunei whose Sultan, in April of 2019, made gay sex a capital crime punishable by stoning.

present in Hamid's text. Sartorial affluence and a posh zip code can only take one so far; they are features of the white mask that slip from the black skin, particularly in a time of exception to political, legal, and societal norms.

After leaving his job in finance, Changez adopts a posture of resistance to American fundamentalist capitalism. He secures a job as a university lecturer in Lahore and makes it his "mission on campus to advocate a disengagement" from the U.S. He uses his popularity in the classroom to try to persuade Pakistanis of the merits of greater independence in foreign and domestic affairs, a campaign that would later be dubbed "anti-American" by the foreign press. He organizes a protest of the visit by the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan; he uses his office hours to meet with "politically-minded youths"; and when one of them is abducted for an assassination plot, makes "intemperate remarks" about the U.S. to international journalists. This form of praxis-based resistance might be akin to what McLaren calls "revolutionary critical pedagogy." This pedagogy "attempts to create the conditions of pedagogical possibility that enables students to see how, through the exercise of power, the dominant structures of class rule protect their practices from being publicly scrutinized as they appropriate resources to serve the interests of the few at the expense of the many" (McLaren 5). Changez, therefore, sees his work in opposition to Underwood Samson's, an inversion to (or perversion of?) economic valuation, ascribing to what McLaren might describe as "a critical revolutionary praxis where one understands the internal relations of capital and struggles to overcome them, to transcend them by means of creating a world where value production ceases to exist" (7). "A pedagogy of critique," according to McLaren, "is a mode of social knowing that enquires into what is not said, into the silences and the suppressed or the missing, in order to un-conceal operations of economic and political power underlying the concrete details and representations of our lives"

(10). The entire narrative structure of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* could be viewed as a similar inquiry into the unsaid. Changez investigates and expresses indignation at the disappearance of one of his students, someone he worries is stuck in some “lawless limbo” between Pakistan and the United States. After departing Underwood Samson and the U.S. to return to Lahore and join the academy, Changez reflects on the post-9/11 geopolitical climate:

A common strand appeared to unite these conflicts, and that was the advancement of a small coterie’s concept of American interests in the guise of the fight against terrorism, which was defined to refer only to the organized and politically motivated killing of civilians by killers *not* wearing the uniforms of soldiers. (Hamid 178)

The military industrial complex Eisenhower warned of in his 1961 farewell address to the nation is, like Big Brother, quickly being replaced by Big Tech, the architects of surveillance capitalism. In other words, the military industrial complex is nearly superfluous in the face of advanced digital technology.²² The weaponization of this technology by state actors can be recognized as the banopticon, the post-panoptic surveillance structure identified by Didier Bigo designed to sort, categorize, and exclude particular elements of a society from entry, or, in the case of the Uighurs in China, from exit or free movement within the country. Power for the sake of power in *1984* becomes power for the sake of marginalizing, subjugating, and at times, perpetuating genocide.

In *Purity*, Franzen cannily fuses two regimes in juxtaposing East German socialism and surveillance capitalism. Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, according to Lau and Mendes, reorientalizes 9/11. The novella allows us to view surveillance capitalism through a postcolonial

²² A recent article about quantum computers suggests that whoever wins the race to create one will effectively leave the loser powerless. The article suggests one will be the United States and the other China.

lens and situate our conversation in the broader discussion of neoimperialism. If the protagonist of Hamid's novel, the titular Changez, represents resistance to capitalism and the West; the protagonists of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, Subhash and Gauri, as we will see, can be viewed as counterpoints, a capitulation to a system hellbent on quashing dissent.

Chapter two discussed an example of the logical extension of a system of social credit as seen in the “Nosedive” episode of *Black Mirror*. This self-surveillance system evaluated a person's social performance and attached a numerical rating to it. Changez's boss at Underwood Samson, Jim, is abnormally adept at evaluating people and companies. Changez recalls his first meeting with Jim: “His eyes were cold, a pale blue, and *judgmental*, not in the way that word is normally used, but in the sense of being professionally appraising, like a jeweler's when he inspects out of curiosity a diamond he intends neither to buy nor sell” (Hamid 7). The purpose of the banopticon, and to some extent, the broader impetus of surveillance capitalism itself, is to a judge a person's worth the way Jim initially summed up Changez's worth, and later, how Changez would do the same to several struggling companies in valuing their economic viability.²³ Of course, surveillance itself is always-already a practice steeped in valuation. As mentioned in chapter one, the word “surveillance” comes from the French *sur*—“over” and *veiller*—“watch”—literally to watch over or see from above. This prepositional orientation itself suggests the atmospheric stratification which the banopticon then extrapolates to economic, social, and racial difference. Surveillance capitalism, the economic logic undergirding the banopticon, both deciphers and determines the stratification. In the shift from Big Brother to Big

²³ Although Bigo coins the term “banopticon” in 2006, the concept of social sorting according to personal data was discussed much earlier, most notably by Oscar Gandy in *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy Of Personal Information (Critical Studies in Communication and in the Cultural Industries)* (1994).

Data, the empirical evidence is no longer behavior in the corporeal real but behavior online. User data is packaged and sold to third-party companies so they can appropriately target users with ads, services, and if you're of a particularly credit-worthy class, opportunities. Therefore, class can never be extricated from the discussion of surveillance as it manifests itself in the banopticon. Changez becomes a dissident of surveillance capitalism. In continuing to mine the extended metaphor the title alludes to and in adopting Islamic terminology, Changez might more accurately be labeled an "apostate" of the capitalistic fundamentalism to which he once subscribed. Apostasy, in Islam and capitalistic fundamentalism, is punishable by death. Indeed, it is fitting the novel ends with the ostensible assassination of the fundamentalist defector, Changez.

Chapters one and two argued that Big Tech bears resemblance to religion inasmuch as both speak in absolutist terms and claim divine rights. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, despite its title, is a profoundly secular work, and yet Islam is a specter looming over its story. The only time Changez invokes the name of "God" is when he gets the job at Underwood Samson. This is the reader's first clue of many that "fundamentalism" is not what it first appears to be. When Changez answers Erica's question, "So what's Pakistan like?" with, "Pakistan was many things..." (27) it is hard not to think of Hamid's contemporaneous essay, "Islam is Not a Monolith." In it, Hamid problematizes a one-size-fits-all approach to Islam. He begins the essay with an anecdote from a reading in Germany. Exasperated with questions relating to how "we Europeans" see the world compared to "you Muslims," Hamid recalls pulling out his British passport and waving it around to prove his Europeanness. In another example Hamid recalls an acquaintance of his declaring Muslims to be united by a deep sense of hospitality. He promptly explodes that myth by telling the story of a Saudi immigration officer throwing a passport into

the face of a Pakistani laborer. Islam, Hamid argues, is not a choice; like most religions, it is something one is born into and then the people of faith (or no faith) build their own relationship with it. A similar episode appears in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. While a dinner guest at Erica's Upper East Side penthouse, Changez spars with her father who flatly declares, "You guys [Pakistan] have got some serious problems with fundamentalism" (55). When Changez regales Erica with tales of Christian bootleggers, trips to China along the Karakoram Highway, deserts and seaside and farmlands and rivers of Pakistan, we're reminded of Hamid's description of the cornucopia that constitutes Islam in "Islam is Not a Monolith": "I have female relatives my age who cover their heads, others who wear mini-skirts, some who are university professors or run businesses, others who choose rarely to leave their homes. I suspect if you were to ask them their religion, all would say "Islam" ("Islam"). In *Welcome to The Desert of the Real*, Zizek ruminates on the term fundamentalist: "...are not 'international terrorist organizations' the obscene double of the big multinational corporations – the ultimate rhizomatic machine, omnipresent, albeit with no clear territorial base? Are they not the form in which nationalist and/or religious 'fundamentalist' accommodate itself to global capitalism?" (38). While fundamentalist Islam undoubtedly wields significant subtextual power over the thrust of Hamid's narrative as a specter looming over the story, the actual terrorist organization is the exploitative multinational corporation at which Changez is employed.

Like capitalism and colonialism/imperialism, the Internet exploits and dehumanizes its user. It is within this very system that the user/subject must work to reassert human rights and work towards a logic of autonomy. The link between postcolonialism and totalitarianism of the Internet is the link between language and oppression and later, revolution: India needed the language of the colonizers to overthrow the colonizers just like citizens need the Internet to voice

concern over the Internet. Perhaps the Internet, like colonization before it, is a precondition to freedom from surveillance capitalism. As Loomba points out, “Marx himself regarded colonialism as a brutal precondition for the liberation of these societies: ‘England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest interest, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution’” (Marx qtd. in Loomba 21). In other words, counterintuitively, revolution is only possible by working within the system the revolutionary seeks to subvert.²⁴ Technology such as facial recognition software and the algorithms that support it further exacerbate these tendencies as seen in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in the systematic surveillance of the largely Muslim Uighur minority in China. Perpetual war, in the Orwellian sense, is now executed, at least from the perpetrator’s perspective, virtually. But the banopticon isn’t exclusively the purview of state actors; there are an increasing number of private companies whose practices center around the disciplinary tool.

Ring, a consumer surveillance company, maintains a social network for neighborhoods. The network features, among other tools for users, a database for “suspicious persons.” Now the mailman, UPS driver, and Amazon package deliverer are subjected to daily surveillance via tiny cameras installed on the doorbells of urban, rural, and suburban homes in the U.S. and other countries. The cameras are connected to servers which deliver video and still images, in real-time, to users via a mobile and desktop computer application. Many workers in this laborer class tend to be persons of color. This technologic “advancement” is the neighborhood watch run amok. “Suspicious persons” is a purposefully nebulous category, about as broadly defined as

²⁴ One particularly striking example of complicitous critique was the Bengali *bhadralok*—a gentleman from the upper caste group which was heavily influenced by European values, but would also go on to become the most scathing critics of the West and comprise what Fraser called the “classic Indian revolutionary”—intelligent and educated young men from the elite communities (257).

“terrorism.” These surveillance practices raise a plethora of legal, moral, and ethical concerns, not least of which would be, “Who gets to determine who constitutes a ‘suspicious person?’” Just as Redfield determined the sovereign state to be the one to make the “terrorist” label stick, the executors of the banopticon—think the NSA armed with its PATRIOT Act—get to affix the label of “suspicious person” with impunity. George W. Bush’s Vice-President, Dick Cheney, one of the architects of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the broader “War on Terror,” framed the aforementioned impunity—to surveil, invade, and even torture—in ontological terms: “If the U.S. does it, then by definition, it can’t be terror” (Redfield 56). By applying Redfield’s concept of sovereignty, this ontological argument can be extrapolated to tautology, a useful syllogism which includes terrorism: terror is not produced by a state; the U.S. is a state; therefore, the U.S. cannot produce terror.

In a novel as spare as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, oftentimes what is not said is just as important as the words on the page. This chapter has already discussed the conspicuousness of the absence of the word “God” from a book presumably about religion. Another notable absence is any mention of “drones.” Although Changez briefly glosses the precarious situation with Pakistan’s neighbors, India—nuclear war on a knife’s edge—he does not or cannot make mention of the drone program instituted by George W. Bush’s administration and greatly expanded under President Obama. Darda begins his article, “Precarious World: Rethinking Global Fiction in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” by parsing the difference between combat soldiers and what critics of Leon Panetta’s Distinguished Warfare Medal have called, “the Nintendo medal” or “drone medal” (Darda 107). Drone technology allows combatants to abrogate moral responsibility for their targets. Bearing more resemblance to playing a video game than fighting on a battlefield, drone operation can eliminate “targets” the

way a gamer would take down a boss to level up in a first-person shooter-style video game. The ability to dehumanize an enemy is directly correlated to the ability to eliminate him. The Netflix series that provided the subject of chapter two, *Black Mirror*, features an episode called “Men Against Fire” in which soldiers are implanted with devices that alter their vision so much so that they see their human enemies as subhuman, hideous monsters and thus easy to eliminate. As Darda argues, “Who we are able to recognize as a living being is always conditioned by social norms, and these norms are all the more limited during times of war” (110). Drone technology simply takes this one step further: the operators simply don’t see beings at all, just blips on a screen. Zygmunt Bauman, in *Liquid Surveillance*, reminds us that drones are not just used for killing but seeing and that they, too, will fly under the moral radar: “Even the technicians who send drones into action will renounce control over their moments and so become unable, however strongly pressed, to exempt any object from the chance of falling under surveillance” (20). The drone program forces us to ask of surveillance practices employed under the banopticon: How is this technology designed to abrogate moral/legal/ethical responsibility for racial, ethnic, religious targeting? The answer lies, perhaps, with distance and dehumanization. The operator directs his weapon from such dizzying heights (again the original etymology of “surveillance” comes to mind) and his target is something subhuman anyway, something akin to vermin to be exterminated a la the “roaches” in the “Men Against Fire” episode.

Misdirection is one of many narrative techniques Hamid employs in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In one passage, after Changez and Erica make love, the former feels shame for pretending to be Chris, Erica’s dead lover: “Perhaps, by taking on the persona of another, I had diminished myself in my own eyes; perhaps I was humiliated by the continuing dominance, in the strange romantic triangle of which I found myself a part...” (106). The violence of 9/11 ports

Erica back in time to those grief-filled days after Chris succumbed to lung cancer. By embodying him in order to make love, Changez does violence to his own identity. But there is a doubling at play here. Like so many other instances in the novel, what isn't said is every bit as powerful as what is. Like Erica's slim novella, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* leaves space for the reader's thoughts. It is hard, reading this passage, not to think that when Changez speaks of shame in "taking on the persona of another" he is not merely speaking of Chris but also of his role as a New Yorker, a Western capitalist, and an agent of high finance in the world epicenter of finance. Textual evidence exists to support this reading. Changez speaks of shame one other time during his dramatic monologue, when comparing the U.S. to Pakistan: "Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out on grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians" (34). Point of view also plays a prominent role in deciphering Hamid's metaphors. In adopting the second-person narration *a la* Camus in *The Fall*, Hamid bestows Changez with the power of hindsight. Many sentences in his monologue begin with phrases such as, "Looking back now" (4). In other words, Changez, although yet to reveal the details of his journey from New York financial analyst to Pakistani activist, sees everything through that pedagogical lens as he recalls events to his American companion for Kashmiri tea.

The first draft of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was set in pre-9/11 New York. But Hamid came to realize that, "just as in my exterior world, there was no escaping the effects of September 11 in the interior world that was my novel" (powells.com March 2007). The final draft took the shape of a post-9/11 rebuke of American neoliberalism. The aftermath of 9/11 also marked a period of intense nostalgia for Americans—a collective yearning for a golden era of America that may not have ever existed. It is this unreliability in narration—of history, of current

events— that permeates the story of Changez, Erica, and the country in those early days of the twenty-first century. Changez is an interesting paradox: he’s able to quite clearly see the dangers in Erica’s nostalgia for Chris, a nostalgia reignited by the attacks on September 11th, and the dangers of American nostalgia at that time, or as he calls it, “something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*” (115). However, he is unable to see the dangers in his own nostalgia, his own golden age thinking, a myopia for a Pakistan that may not have ever existed. There is also a powerful nostalgia for analog media.

It is striking and ironic that the industries of the companies Underwood Samson and, by extension, Changez, set out to value utilize technologies that were beginning to be rendered obsolete by emerging twenty-first century digital media: his first assignment is a compact-disc company in the Philippines, then a cable company in New Jersey, followed by an aborted effort in valuing a book publisher in Valparaiso, Chile. It is as if these producers of artifacts—compact-discs, cable television boxes, paper books—mirror, much to Changez’s chagrin, the demise of once glorious cities like Lahore and Valparaiso and the once glorious love between Erica and Chris and the once glorious family from which Changez descended. But that is the business in which Underwood Samson finds itself ruthlessly, bloodlessly relying upon the fundamentals to reduce a company and its people to their economic value in the marketplace. Retrograde when applied here, but progressive when utilized to propagate war, nostalgia, like so many other elements in the novel, depends on perspective.

4.4 The United States of Exception:

Chapter two discussed the “Nosedive” episode from season three of *Black Mirror*. In it, Lacie Pound falls prey to a social credit system which determines her livelihood. This chapter

discusses a similar program being rolled out in Chinese cities like Rongcheng. Citizens there are not ranked from zero to five stars like Lacie; instead they begin with a bank of one thousand points. The points are then debited according to misdemeanors and other minor legal transgressions. If you jaywalk, points are deducted. If you fail to pay your taxes or fines on time, points are deducted. If you litter, points are deducted. On its face, this system may seem neutral at worst and efficient at best. After all, these acts constitute a breach of city ordinances; transgressors should be dinged. However, the difference lies within a new mode of public shaming. The Internet, in its inscrutable omniscience, never forgets. If the debt to society has been paid via fines, imprisonment, community service, etc. should the transgressor be followed, seemingly into perpetuity, by these acts? The difference lies within the right to be forgotten.

Chapter two spoke of the Lacanian concept of humanicity—prematurity at birth—which defines our specific malady of being born inhuman and forced to learn our humanness. Another defining feature of humanity is our capacity to forget. Data which are no longer useful or important are pushed out, forgotten. In the pre-Internet days, mistakes were made, but transgressions quickly forgotten. The embarrassing, damaging details—the minutia of quotidian existence—faded into the background. Each passing moment was a chance to turn it all around. The Internet, on the other hand, does not forget. Fortunately, in some countries, it will need to start. In May of 2014, the European Court of Justice ruled that individuals could exercise their “right to be forgotten.” The ruling was precipitated by a Spanish case in which an attorney claimed his reputation was irreparably damaged by a link to an article about an auction for his foreclosed home. The man paid the debt owed yet continued to be professionally haunted by the story. After a protracted legal battle, the court ruled against Google and ordered them to remove the link and comply with

EU data privacy laws. The ruling resulted in Google being inundated with thousands of requests for removal in the EU.

The city of Rongcheng, China, offers no such protection to its citizens. The government there, and in other parts of the country, has undertaken a systematic campaign of identifying suspects via facial recognition software and then publicly shaming them via the Internet.²⁵ Some suspects are then, absent warrant, arrest, or conviction, placed on a blacklist. The blacklist, officially called the “Dishonest Persons Subject to Enforcement by the Supreme People's Court” precludes some citizens from being able to purchase plane or train tickets, obtain a home loan, or buy property. The terrifyingly totalitarian feature of this system is that it is not limited to legal misdeeds; it is also used to mete out punishment for political activists. It is a feature of the banopticon—surveillance technology with the express purpose of limiting or outright denying the free movement of people across borders real and imaginary. It is a form of imprisonment. It creates exiles within a country. Although China may be the most egregious example of this new feature of the banopticon, it is not the only one. In fact, the American mainstream media’s hyper-focus on China as the sole privacy transgressor may just be another form of reorientalizing.²⁶ After all, the Chinese surveillance system might simply be a facsimile or upgrade of the SIS or Schengen Information System. The Schengen Area was designated in 1985 by the Schengen Agreement in the town of the same name in Luxemburg. The convention provided “Belgium, Germany (then still West Germany), France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands agreed upon the

²⁵ In May of 2019, San Francisco became the first American city to ban the use of facial recognition software by the police and other city agencies.

²⁶ This recent turn of events represents, historically, an inversion of colonial roles. Aime Cesaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, angrily quotes the 19th century French philosopher Ernest Renan: “Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honour...let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well” (*La Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale de la France*, 1871).

measures needed to create a transnational space in which people could move freely” (Lebbe). Later, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal would be joined by the Scandinavian countries and then later, all of the EU. According to Bigo, “the main focus of the system is to ensure that persons who are or might be considered unwanted by any participating state are not permitted into the territory. Thus, the rules focus on who must be excluded and provide little guidance on who should be admitted” (Bigo qtd. in Lebbe). The system was originally set up to combat crime and search for missing persons. However, Bigo now believes the system functions as a *de facto* immigration policymaker and “database that maintains dossiers on individuals in order to prevent illegal immigrants from returning to the EU” (Bigo as quoted in Lebbe). Bigo argues, “Using databases of information from police records and mixing them with records from the public sphere (social security, taxes, and so forth) and the private domain (insurance, credit bureaus, supermarkets), it becomes possible to categorize people and ultimately determine who should be checked further” (Bigo qtd. in Lebbe). Therefore, although it is *en vogue* to single out China, the conflation of police and public records into one system of surveillance and exclusion is not unique to the communist superpower; it is predated by a supposedly liberal European Union “that considers freedom of movement essential to its existence yet maintains strong external borders and monitors people” (Lebbe).

Beginning with 9/11 and escalating precipitously, the extrajudicial limitation or ban on movement is simply another tool in the totalitarian toolkit. This chapter examines persons stuck in that liminal space, the intercontinental purgatory that is at once everywhere and nowhere. It is Orwell’s Room 101 manifested thousands of times over and yet undetectable. The chief difference between *1984* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the racial component. Changez of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not a jaywalker or electricity thief. He doesn’t have unpaid

parking tickets. He is a brown man with a beard living in those early, nearly lawless post-9/11 days in the United States of Exception. And later he is an activist, a threat to American neoliberalism, militarism, and most crucially, capitalism. As a result, he is a target of surveillance, a target to be eliminated. The novel, Morey argues,

refuses to articulate the kind of confession, charting the road to Islamist radicalism, one might expect from the title, and instead employs hyperbole, strategic exoticism, allegory and unreliable narration to defamiliarize our reading experience and habitual identifications, forcing us to be the kind of deterritorialized reader demanded by the emerging category of world literature. (135)

Because machines must be trained on finite datasets, with humans refereeing from the sidelines, algorithms have a tendency to amplify our pre-existing biases concerning race, gender and class. An internal recruitment tool used by Amazon until 2017 presents an exemplary case: trained on the decisions of its internal human resources department, the company found that the algorithm was systematically sidelining female candidates. Tracy warns, “If we’re not vigilant, our AI super-partners can become super-bigots” (*Aeon* April 2019). Changez castigates his American interlocutor in Lahore as an agent of the U.S. incapable of recognizing this point of human solidarity: “As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your superiority” (Hamid 168). Mark Redfield, in *The Rhetoric of Terror*, echoes the “production of danger” argument made by the Copenhagen school: “In short: war, as terror, has always already been started by the other, the terrorist. Under such circumstances, sovereign is he who decides on terror—who can call the other a terrorist and make it stick” (Redfield 56). Rather than

empathically recognizing the shared pain, it's the sovereign who uses the charade of the state's authority to distinguish between violent means and violent ends.

Darda reminds us of Agamben: "Although Agamben does not see the politicizing of biological life as bound to modernity—as Foucault did—he does characterize Bush's conduct after 9/11 as the moment at which the emergency became the rule,' when we were all hailed as bare life" (Agamben as quoted in Darda 117). While it is true critics often situate *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* within the genre of post-9/11 fiction and that the banopticon has, to a certain extent, been born out of the post-9/11 state of exception described above, the Muslim or Muslim-looking person is far from the first target of that pernicious blend of technology and racialism. Darda's reading of the novel encourages us to challenge the origin story of Bigo's banopticon:

The Reluctant Fundamentalist thus distinguishes precarity from the generalized condition of precariousness, and it makes clear that this is not an outcome of the War on Terror alone but an enduring feature of the globalizing world. Changez's "apprehension" of this "politically induced condition" does not begin on September 11, 2001 but in a pre-9/11 Manila traffic jam. The ongoing War on Terror has no doubt worsened this condition for many Western and South Asians, but it may not be the universalizing moment Agamben makes it out to be. (Darda 117)

Just as Hitler sought to deliver the Storm Troopers from "the destitution and disconsolation of lives long disenfranchised by personal circumstance or character" by scapegoating the European Jews, world superpowers today cunningly stoke Islamophobia to identify a new stain on human progress. Hamid discusses bigotry in the form of Islamophobia in his 2013 essay, "Islam Is Not a Monolith":

There are more than a billion variations of lived belief among people who define themselves as Muslim – one for each human being, just as there are among those who describe themselves as Christian, or Buddhist, or Hindu. Islamophobia represents a refusal to acknowledge these variations, to acknowledge individual humanities, a desire to paint members of a perceived group with the same brush. (“Islam” 2)

Hamid glosses the phenomenon: “Islamophobia, in all its guises, seeks to minimise the importance of the individual and maximise the importance of the group. Yet our instinctive stance ought to be one of suspicion towards such endeavours. For individuals are undeniably real. Groups, on the other hand, are assertions of opinion” (Hamid 3). Hamid, in the same essay, grapples with the ambiguity at the heart of the novel’s title:

I often hear it said, at readings or talks ranging from Lahore to Louisiana, that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is about a man who becomes an Islamic fundamentalist. I'm not sure what that term means, exactly, but I have a reasonable idea about the sentences and paragraphs that are actually present in the book. Changez, the main character, is a Pakistani student at Princeton. When he gets his dream job at a high-paying valuation firm in New York, he exclaims, "Thank you, God!"

That's it. Other than that exclamation (a common figure of speech), there's no real evidence that Changez is religious. He doesn't quote from scripture. He never asks himself about heaven or hell or the divine. He drinks. He has sex out of marriage. His beliefs could quite plausibly be those of a secular humanist. And yet he calls himself a Muslim, and is angry with US foreign policy, and grows a beard – and that seems to be enough. Changez may well be an agnostic, or even an atheist. Nonetheless he is

somehow, and seemingly quite naturally, read by many people as a character who is an Islamic fundamentalist. (Hamid 6)

When we allow technology, an instrumentally neutral application, to be coopted by capitalism, we are shifting the fiduciary responsibility of corporations from serving users to serving shareholders. A simple metonymical exercise might be useful in illustrating these points: in American colloquial language, a “good” job does not mean a job that provides some beneficial service to the community, humanity, or the world; a “good” job does not necessarily even make the worker feel good; a “good” job is simply a job that pays well. Therefore, syllogistic logic leads us to conclude that a “good” corporation is not the currently fashionable “B-Corp” which must prove some benefit to society in order to secure its filing, but rather dividends to shareholders.

A counterpoint to this focus on the capitalistic fundamentals, this do-gooding as stand-in for high earning, is a character from Lahiri’s *The Lowland*, Bela. Bela did “good” in the strictly moral, utilitarian sense of the word. The narrator reports, “She helped to convert abandoned properties into community gardens. She taught low-income families to grow vegetables in their backyards, so that they wouldn’t have to depend entirely on food banks” (Lahiri 272). Through his teaching and activism, Changez similarly becomes “reluctant” to adopt capitalism and becomes a liability to Underwood Samson. His vocal opposition to the contemporary brand of American neo-imperialism makes him an enemy of the state. It is easy to conflate author with narrator, writer with protagonist. Hamid works to simultaneously feed into and problematize this reading.

This chapter began with a description of Hamid’s narrator as engaging in a dramatic monologue or one side of a dialogue with an American interlocutor *a la* Jean-Baptiste in

Camus's *The Fall*. Hamid, in an essay published at the time of the novel's release, complicates this reading: "People often ask me if I am the book's Pakistani protagonist. I wonder why they never ask if I am his American listener. After all, a novel can often be a divided man's conversation with himself" ("My Reluctant Fundamentalist" 2007). The janissary, it would seem, also occupies the position of the narrator/listener in what could be seen as not dramatic, but inner monologue. A conversation with oneself would strengthen the idea of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* being a fable, parable, or pedagogically oriented text. Changez, the character, becomes a professor to educate the world about the intrusions of the U.S. into other countries' affairs. The narrator, perhaps, has a conversation to educate himself about what has happened to him, his love Erica, and his love for two very different places, Lahore and New York. The novel, therefore, functions as a pedagogical text both in form, as the one-sided dialogue, and thematics as Changez becomes a professor and activist. *The Lowland* operates along similar lines: two characters, Subhash and Gauri, join the American academy, and the novel also takes on the role of moral teacher—a cautionary tale of misguided ambitions.

4.5 Marxism and the academy: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*:

"...in Bengali, the word for yesterday, *kal*, was also the word for tomorrow" (Lahiri 178).

The Lowland, one-part bildungsroman and one-part historiographic metafiction, is a political thriller which follows the stories of the two Mitra brothers from Calcutta, Subhash, a chemical oceanographer and Udayan, a part-time physics student and full-time revolutionary, and their wife, Gauri. *The Lowland* begins in South Calcutta in the district of Tollygunge, the center of the Bengali film industry, and moves on to Rhode Island and California before

returning to the lowland, a marshy enclave near the Mitra house where two ponds lie, indistinguishable after a flood and then separate again following the end of the rain. *The Lowland* is concerned with the Naxalite movement in India, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory, Western philosophy, Eastern theology, and the American academy. *The Lowland* spans the better part of seven decades from the early years of Indian independence in the late 1940s to present-day America and Kolkata. Lahiri's sparse and elegant prose belies the deep philosophical nature of its subjects: Descartes' wax argument, German Idealism, the Frankfurt School, the question of free will, and the difference between freedom and power are all interwoven into the narrative. While *The Lowland* charts the evolution of a constellation of characters in West Bengal, India, and the United States, this chapter focuses on three of its protagonists: Gauri, the Calcutta philosophy student turned unwitting Naxalite revolutionary turned American academic; Subhash, a chemical oceanographer; and their daughter, Udayan's child Bela.

Although outside the scope and intent of this study, it is worth noting the marketplace's desire to view *The Lowland* and its author as "postcolonial" is fulfilled through the Orientalizing of Lahiri—fetishizing the foreign and exotic. In short, an American writing about American concerns such as the struggles of the American family is perhaps more like Philip Roth than an Indian woman living in Italy and writing in Italian. Lahiri goes so far as to reject the classification of her work as "immigrant fiction":

I don't know what to make of the term "immigrant fiction." Writers have always tended to write about the worlds they come from. And it just so happens that many writers originate from different parts of the world than the ones they end up living in, either by choice or by necessity or by circumstance, and therefore, write about those experiences. If certain books are to be termed immigrant fiction, what do we call the rest? Native

fiction? Puritan fiction? This distinction doesn't agree with me. Given the history of the United States, all American fiction could be classified as immigrant fiction. Hawthorne writes about immigrants. So does Willa Cather. From the beginnings of literature, poets and writers have based their narratives on crossing borders, on wandering, on exile, on encounters beyond the familiar. The stranger is an archetype in epic poetry, in novels.

The tension between alienation and assimilation has always been a basic theme. (Lahiri in *The New York Times* 2013).

Lahiri begins *The Lowland* with a description of the Tolly Club, a British country club near the Mitra home in Tollygunge. As young boys of the middle caste, Udayan and Subhash are prohibited from entering the property. However, it is the fact that land and resources are so scarce in West Bengal and all of India that offends Udayan, not necessarily the Britishness of the club. Many comparisons both explicit and implicit are made between Udayan and Che Guevara throughout the novel. Udayan despises golf courses and sees them as symbols of bourgeois waste just as Castro and Che immediately ordered all golf courses destroyed after taking power in Cuba. Subhash first broke his brother's heart by abandoning him to move to the U.S. to pursue a PhD. We can only imagine how Udayan would have felt if he had lived to see his brother patronize the Tolly Club—the place they and their father were excluded from as poor Bengalis. And the reader will never know how Udayan would have felt about his brother marrying his wife, Gauri.

Gauri represents both the contra-conventional Indian *and* Western woman. She forces her way into the male-dominated arena of academia while redefining and, at times, renouncing, her marital and maternal duties. She embodies free will: Udayan chooses to marry her rather than wait to have a spouse arranged for him by his parents per Bengali custom. Contrapuntal to Jim's

homosexuality as isolation and outsidership in Hamid's novel, the manifestation of Gauri's latent homosexuality via her tryst with Lorna, her graduate advisee, liberates her from the romantic prison she has locked herself inside of for so many years. Now forty-five and "conscious of her growing imperfections," Gauri has "been preparing to retreat, not rush headlong, as she'd done" (Lahiri 290). Nair sees Gauri's affair with Lorna as proof of her development from simple rural woman to self-sufficient urban woman and argues, "Gauri's integration into the host culture invests her with a sense of freedom and a spirit of assertiveness. She deviates from the heteronormative approach to life to enter into a lesbian relationship with Lorna" (Nair 143). Ironically, her second marriage of choice, to Udayan's older brother, Subhash, does not feel like much of a choice at all. Following Subhash to Rhode Island is the only way to escape the guilt, blame, and shame of Udayan's death at the hands of the secret police. Gauri also exercises free will with the irrevocable decision to abandon her daughter Bela in Rhode Island and set out to advance her career as a philosopher and academic in California. These two acts mirror the revolutionary path Udayan takes. Eschewing a life of scientific inquiry like his brother, Udayan embarks on a Che-like journey throughout India to first learn of, and then later try to alleviate, the anguish of the poor. Gauri, like Subhash before her, betrays Udayan's ideology and joins the academy. She will spend a life inside books and buildings, "thinking instead of seeing" (66). These two acts are pitted against one another by Gauri early on in the narrative as she explains Descartes' wax argument and the limits of perception: "Held up to heat, the essence changed. It was the mind, not the senses, that was able to perceive this, she said. Thinking is superior to seeing, Udayan asks? For Descartes, yes" (66). Udayan challenges the practicality of philosophy in asking Gauri, "Why do you study philosophy?" She tells him it helps her understand things. He asks, "But what makes it relevant?" In a foreshadowing, perhaps, of Udayan's execution at

the hands of the Indian police, Gauri responds, “Plato says the purpose of philosophy is to teach us how to die” (Lahiri 66). Udayan, on the other hand, thinks pursuing a university degree a waste of time. He comes to see another thinker, Gandhi, as a pawn responsible for disarming India. We are again reminded of Che in *The Motorcycle Diaries*: “A revolution without guns? It would never work.” Conviction, in Udayan’s and the Naxalites’ eyes, is measured by the force of violent resistance, and as demonstrated by his complicity in the murder of a policeman, the willingness to turn ideology into praxis. Udayan explains away this callous disregard for human life with a Maoist motto from Sinha: “Revolutionary violence opposed oppression. That is was a force of liberation, humane” (Lahiri 412).²⁷

Years later, on American soil and interested in unpacking the philosophy undergirding her husband’s ideology, Gauri asks her professor about Hegelian dialectics. Thematically, the structure of *The Lowland* is a dialectical ordering, the binary theses and antitheses of seeing and thinking, duty and vocation, East and West, capitalism and Marxism, Naxalite and neo-colonialist, dominating its pages. The greatest tension in the novel, however, seems to be between free will and determinism. While exercising her autonomy in one way, Gauri succumbs to the fate of abandoning her child, Bela. Later, Gauri aids Udayan in the assassination of a police officer, orphaning his son in the process. Abandoned by Udayan and trapped by his child and a hasty marriage to his brother, Subhash, Gauri responds by leaving both, and it must be said, the east (Rhode Island) for the west (California). This continuation of movement from east to west completes her break with the past and the present. Through Gauri, Lahiri seems to be saying, “not every woman is a mother; even the ones already with children.” It’s a matter of choice: to be present in all senses of the word, a gift to the child. Gauri finds her true home

²⁷ The idea of evolutionary violence as a humane force is reminiscent of a contemporary example: antifa.

outside the biological family. Gauri treats her dissertation as her real baby; Bela is simply a distraction from it. The narrator in chapter six, focalized through Gauri, reflects on her career: “She remembered the slow birth of her dissertation, behind a closed door in Rhode Island. Aware that the exigencies of her work were masking those of being a mother” (Lahiri 283). Gauri seems to revel in the maturation of her work from dissertation to manuscript, but takes no such joy in her biological child, Bela’s, physical or intellectual development.

The academy was welcoming to Gauri in a way her in-laws in Tollygunge never were. She uses the academy, and philosophy in general, to reject the rigidity of Bengali customs, patriarchal structure, and Udayan’s strictly ideological worldview. The practicality of both the convention of marriage and role of motherhood proves an obstacle to the theoretical world of professional philosopher, intellectual, and academic. Gauri leaves Calcutta on the first full day of spring, coincidentally on the day that would have been Udayan’s 27th birthday. Upon escaping to Providence, Gauri quite literally sheds her skin, taking scissors first to her long, braided hair and then to the collection of colorful saris, she, as a married Bengali woman, is expected to wear. The temptation exists to label this scene “cultural hybridity”— that catch-all phrase signifying a suppression of indigenous culture and adoption, by way of mimicry, of the dominant culture. However, the reader knows Gauri at this point in the novel in a way that contradicts this interpretation. Her act seems to collapse the act of capitulation, mindlessly mimicking Western dress or subversively pantomiming American culture, with destroying the person she was in Calcutta, to become both “conspicuous and invisible” as she puts it. The destruction of her former self in appearance is followed by the attempt, albeit in vain, to extinguish the ghost of Udayan by abandoning Bela. We learn that Bela is not the first child Gauri has orphaned. She was complicit in the extrajudicial killing of a policeman. Working as a spy for the Naxalite

movement, she furnished Udayan and his comrades with the information that would lead to the murder of the policeman walking to pick his son up from school. The narrator, focalized through Gauri, reports, “She’d been linked into a chain she could not see. It was like performing in a brief play, with fellow actors who never identified themselves, simple lines and actions that were scripted, controlled” (Lahiri 357). Udayan plainly stated that the officer was simply someone they “needed out of the way” (358). Why Gauri acquiesces to this request is less clear. The philosopher, the thinker, the student moves beyond the classroom and into a contact zone of an altogether different kind and emerges with blood on her hands. Gauri’s complicity in orphaning a child precludes her from fully embracing her own role as parent. Bela will grow up without her mother. However, she still represents a synthesis of her biological parents.

Bela works the land as a farmer—the practical person who sees and does not simply think like her mother, the professor who spends a life indoors. Bela, too, proves a challenge to the notion of free will: she becomes her parents through the genealogy of their morals but also as a reaction against and rejection of, their ideology; nothing that we do, it would seem, prevents us becoming our parents: “She had learned enough from books and labs. She didn’t want to cut herself off that way” (269). Learned behavior is trumped by something innate as Udayan is reincarnated in Bela. Udayan dies fighting for the rights of farmers. Bela becomes one. Bela is also a Che-like character in that she is nomadic and concerned with the welfare of the poor. She goes door-to-door in high school to seek signatures for a petition to raise the minimum wage. She is wholly disinterested in material wealth. The narrator, focalized through Subhash, notes, “Over the years her work started merging with a certain ideology. He saw that there was a spirit of opposition to the things she did” (272). “Her dedication to bettering the world was something that would fulfill her, he imagined, for the rest of her life” (273). This contrasts starkly with

Gauri, about whom the narrator confirms, “Her ideology was isolated from practice, neutered by its long tenure in the academy” (284). Bela is unlike Gauri in so many ways and yet, like her mother, her vocation takes precedence, Subhash notes. Bela, in an attempt to distance herself from her mother, ends up making a similarly unilateral decision about Meghna, her own child: she would never know her father. Bela reveals the history of the conflict within her to Drew, her new lover: “Finally she told him about Udayan. That though she’d been created by two people who’d loved one another, she’d been raised by two who never did” (367). Creation and destruction, synthesis and antithesis—Bela represents a dialectical reckoning of her parents’ flaws.

The temptation always exists to label and categorize cultural phenomena and possibly all of human experience. We like to know what we’re looking at and to put a name to what we’re feeling. However, this has a tendency to reduce individual and varied human experience to fit inside neatly drawn boxes of understanding. In doing so we efface the specific human and Marxian realities that people face. We become ourselves not simply because we’ve been colonized or decolonized but through a million different variables both learned and innate. We become ourselves because of our parents, or in spite of them. We become ourselves because of love, a revolutionary love that McLaren argues will bring ecumenical change and world peace. Nadiminti in her article, “‘A Betrayal of Everything’: The Law of the Family in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland*,” argues that Gauri, rather than submitting to a form of surveillance in the academy, actually turns to the academy as a respite: “Gauri finds a way out of both a national and domestic predicament by taking recourse to American university life. Instead, Gauri becomes what Sara Ahmed calls a “willful subject” by choosing a life devoted to intellectual

labor” (247). Lahiri goes out of her way to distinguish intellectual labor from agrarian labor and from the labor of parenthood—the difference between Gauri and Bela.

The visage of a Janus face permeates both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Lowland*. In Hamid’s novella, Changez must come to terms with the Americanness of his gaze when he returns to visit his family in Lahore. In *The Lowland*, Gauri, in her own retreat, must deal with the abandonment of her Naxalite origins and Marxist values—the lifetime of yesterdays impinging on the lifetime of tomorrows—as she navigates, first, the American system of higher education and then, later, the American academy. It’s safe to say Udayan, Gauri’s first husband, operates more like a reformed, “reluctant” Changez than Subhash, Gauri’s second husband and Udayan’s older brother. The narrator portrays Subhash as a coward almost from the start of this Asian-American *bildungsroman*, only to later complicate this characterization with the newly minted doctor of philosophy enthusiastically taking on the role of single parent. In fleeing Rhode Island for California, her semi-arranged marriage of convenience for the independence of academic life, Gauri also flees parenthood. Bela, her daughter with the departed Udayan, represents her link to the past and Naxalite rebellion. The academy, therefore, is an escape route for Gauri from her domestic shackles, much in the same way it was for Subhash in escaping the political violence in late-1960s West Bengal.

One of the ways in which American soft power functions is through the double-edged sword of talent acquisition and dilution. By dangling the carrot of an Ivy League education, a six-figure salary, and a life in the materialist and consumerist West, the U.S. can attract the top 1% of students from South Asian countries such as Changez’s Pakistan in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Subhash and Gauri’s India in *The Lowland*. In recruiting the best and brightest minds in the fields of science, medicine, business, and law, the U.S. also weakens its

neo-imperialistic nation-states. This soft power—the recruitment process—conveniently converts to what Gary T. Marx has called “soft surveillance” (Lyon 106). Therefore, far from a respite from surveillance as Nadiminti has suggested, the academy functions as acquiescence to the banopticon. Neutered of her Naxalite revolutionary anger, Gauri submits to the Western capitalistic system. The narrator, focalized through Gauri, begins chapter seven with an extended treatment of the Internet: “She turns on her laptop, raises her spectacles to her face. She reads the day’s headlines. But they might be from any day. A click can take her away from breaking news to articles archived years ago” (335). The academy, an incubator of critical revolutionary pedagogy for Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, becomes the site of capitulation to western neo-imperialism for Gauri. Her daughter functions as a foil.

Bela, whose name in Bengali means both yesterday and tomorrow, represents an analogue to the Internet’s ability to collapse time. Bela seems to always be in the moment, always in the present. Her pain and pleasure are always in the now. Her abandonment by her mother is not something she suffers as a ten year-old returning from Calcutta, but as a thirty-five year-old starting her own journey as a mother. The Internet allows Gauri to similarly experience the past as present. Naxalbari is never too far away as long as she can queue up archived stories of the uprising and its defeat. Gauri is overwhelmed by the Internet and its vastness, its indefatigability. We’re reminded, once again, of Mercer from *The Circle* and his plea not to overload our puny brains with the limitless treasure trove of information the Internet provides, when we are permitted entry into the mind of Gauri: “Too much is within her grasp now. First at the computers she would log on to at the library, replaced by the wireless connection she has at home. Glowing screens, increasingly foldable, portable, companionable, anticipating any possible question the human brain might generate. Containing more information than anyone has

need for” (336). The fascinating thing is how Gauri reverts from the totalitarianism of the Internet to its origins as a democratizing force and egalitarian space: “A revolutionary concept, already taken for granted. Citizens of the Internet dwell free from hierarchy. There is room for everyone, given that there are no spatial constraints. Udayan might have appreciated this” (Lahiri 336). The narrator, again focalized through Gauri, bemoans the death of the tangible library and physical books and wistfully recalls the painstaking process of research that has all but gone extinct:²⁸ “Summaries of philosophical arguments in online encyclopedias, explanations of modes of thinking that took her years to comprehend. Links to chapters in books she’d once had to hunt down and photocopy, or request from other libraries” (336). Chapter one argued the Internet is totalitarian inasmuch as its users cannot opt out. In *The Lowland*, Gauri, first the wife of the Naxalite revolutionary, Udayan, and now the wife of his Westernized, academic brother, Subhash, submits, albeit begrudgingly, to the same system. She cannot avoid it; she is a member of the virtual world, an aspect of her visible on the new sea that has come to dominate the earth’s surface” (337). She’s caught up in it—the watcher becoming the watched.

Bela appears impervious to this system of digital totalitarianism. She exists in a totally corporeal dimension; she embodies earthliness. A reincarnation of her biological father, Udayan, Bela makes her own pilgrimage, assisting farmers when she can. In this sense, she is outside of the synoptic, surveillant power of the Internet. The narrator, focalized through Gauri in chapter seven, tries to digitally track down her abandoned child: “Her name in the search engine leads to nothing. No university, no company, no social media site yields any information. Gauri finds no image, no trace of her. It doesn’t mean anything, necessarily. Only that Bela doesn’t exist in the dimension where Gauri might learn something about her” (Lahiri 338). Asl argues *The Lowland*

²⁸ Jonathan Franzen goes so far as to say that researching subject material for a novel has been so sufficiently cheapened by the ease of access of the Internet as to render it superfluous to creative writing.

is an anti-communist narrative that shifts sympathies from the Naxalite martyrs like Udayan to the state:

This is thus very much like the production and surveillance of the anti-Communist experience of Lahiri's narrative within the public opinion in the media of mainstream culture that exposes the covert dynamics of an existing repressive political consciousness. In accordance with the re-emergence of a security-oriented state discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks in America, *The Lowland* revives the American demonology of Communism as the source of anxiety to the national security which was initially introduced during the Cold War period and continued throughout the final decades of the twentieth century. (Asl 392)

This is a narrow interpretation of the text and a misread of the narrative focalization employed throughout. It is true that Udayan's revolutionary efforts are depicted as misguided when the narration is focalized through Gauri's perspective, but to end the analysis of Marxism there is woefully incomplete. Bela functions as a correction of Udayan. Whereas Udayan's efforts at enhancing worker's rights and bringing about agrarian reform literally blew up in his face, Bela succeeds in not only living a life completely off the grid, but in helping to improve the lives of workers, farmers, and children living in those spaces. Considering she never knew of her biological father and his Naxalite activities, Bela's own proclivities toward the Marxist-Leninist empowerment of the worker is the result of nature, not nurture. Bela, the child Udayan never wanted to bring into the world after "what he'd done," is strictly a force for social good, atoning for the crimes he committed. Asl, in her condemnation of Lahiri's novel as a revival of "the American demonology of Communism," mistakenly conflates an idea with its execution. It's true: Udayan accomplished nothing in aiding in the assassination of a policeman, a symbol of

authority. But that fact needn't be an assassination of the Naxalite movement itself and it doesn't mean Lahiri's novel is anti-Communist. The policeman functions as a symbol of the inversion of surveillant authority in the text. Instead of performing surveillance of Udayan, Gauri, and their Naxalite comrades, the policeman himself is the target of intense observation. Gauri, leveraging her role as a tutor for neighboring children, spies the policeman through a window, making careful notes of his comings and goings, when he is armed, and when he is in uniform. The police uniform is an important detail. With it on, the policeman embodies an agent of the state hellbent on quashing dissent and bringing about a swift and violent end to the CPI(M) rebellion. Without it, in his plain clothes and accompanied by his young son, the policeman is sufficiently humanized so as to elicit sympathy in the reader. Lahiri is warning of the dangers in making categorical errors: the policeman is not the state just as the pipe bomb is not Marxism. In other words, killing a policeman won't ameliorate the misery of peasant farmers just as the premature implosion of one bomb won't stop the revolution. Lahiri seems to be complicating tidiness—reminding us there are no easy remedies for complex problems such as poverty, parenthood, and marriage. These problems are exacerbated by the tensions of diasporic migration.

Chapter one discussed how the term “Orwellian” and indeed “Orwell,” “Big Brother,” and *1984* themselves have unhelpfully become synonymous with surveillance. Perhaps a weakness of this dissertation, and all surveillance studies, could be the unhelpful connoting of “surveillance” with nefarious intentions. The same might be said for the treatment of “technology.” After all, both words, on their faces, must be neutral. Surveillance simply means to watch from above. Is getting to know some person, place or thing always-already imbued with nefarious intention? Isn't arriving at knowledge of a person also the first step taken towards friendship and understanding? Yes, it is, but the production of knowledge of the colonial subject

is always-already filtered through a taxonomic surveillance system. As Shuddhabrata Sengupta reports, “Anthropometrical data, in the form of cranial radii, nasal indexes and finger length, were tested for their utility in developing the science of criminology, often aided by an ethnographical discourse that constructed an elaborate taxonomy of criminal tribes, deviant populations, and martial races” (Sengupta as quoted in Lyon 129). But the colonial or postcolonial subject is not simply a target. The study from which the above passage has been lifted is called *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. The title, Lyon tells his readers, is deliberately ironic. It reminds us we’re all implicated in surveillance, both as watchers and the watched. No character in *The Lowland* embodies this combination of watching and being watched more than Gauri. Even before she agrees to surveil the policeman, making careful notes of his schedule, surveillance binds Gauri to Udayan. Indeed, a gorgeous passage contains an extended treatment of surveillance as it manifests itself in a benign form—a balcony: “She’d observed the world, she told him, all of life, from this balcony. Political processions, government parades, visiting dignitaries. The momentous stream of vehicles that started each day at dawn. The city’s poets and writers passing by after death, their corpses concealed by flowers” (64). The balcony is not only the vantage point from which Gauri takes in the entire world, it’s the place where she and Udayan fall in love and the place where Gauri, an auto-didact, decides to pursue a life of learning: “She was used to the noise as she studies, as she slept; it was the ongoing accompaniment to her life, her thoughts, the constant din more soothing than silence would have been” (65). Teaching and learning enjoy a prominent place in both novels. It’s through pedagogy that we might grapple with the problematics contained therein.

4.6 Critical revolutionary pedagogy:

Despite their eventual ideological divergence, parallels exist between the two sets of characters from each novel. Changez quits his job at Underwood Samson, walks away from handsome remuneration, and becomes a professor and activist, railing against American imperialism from his faculty office in Lahore, Pakistan. Subhash and Gauri also become academics, but instead of doubling down on their Naxalite origins and cementing Marxist ideology within their pedagogy, they submit to the capitalistic system of surveillance of which the American academy is part. Lahiri's novel is grounded in historical fact. In *Stalking Sociologists: J. Edgar Hoover's FBI Surveillance of American Sociology*, Keen reports that the bureau spent thousands of man-hours and millions of dollars surveilling members of American sociology departments, particularly those involved in the development of a Marxist tradition within the discipline.²⁹ Although both take up positions within the academy, the two sets of characters inhabit those spaces differently. Subhash and Gauri move from East to West while Changez moves from West to East. Ideologically, Subhash and Gauri move from a flirtation with the radical, Marxist-Leninist left to a marriage with the milquetoast center. Changez, for his part, moves from the non-partisan center to far left. Changez goes from focusing on the fundamentals of financial valuation in New York City to questioning the way finance is weaponized as a stick with which to beat countries who fall out of line. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* encourages us to reflect on the history of the United States, a history which is inextricably linked to the history of late capitalism and neoliberalism. Canadian scholar, teacher, and activist Peter McLaren offers a call to arms in the form of critical revolutionary pedagogy:

²⁹ In a related study, "F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature," William J. Maxwell reveals an extensive surveillance network targeting the lives and work of more than 50 prominent African-American writers like Wright, Ellison, Hansberry, Hughes, and Baldwin.

Critical educators across the country must continue to oppose what we are now seeing throughout the United States: a senseless xenophobic statism, militarism, the erosion of civil liberties, and a quest for permanent military interventions overseas within the fracture zones of geopolitical instability that have followed in the wake of the attacks, all of which can have only unsalutary consequences for world peace. (McLaren 275)

Changez rails against the post-9/11 xenophobia and Islamophobia he observed while working in New York City. In one scene, Changez is approached in a parking lot by an angry man making unintelligible monkey noises. It takes him a few seconds to realize the man is parodying some crude form of Arabic, baiting Changez into a fight. It's episodes like this that shape his view of America and inform his subsequent pedagogy and activism. And it's among the reasons, of course, why Changez makes his "intemperate remarks" about American meddling abroad, the reason he becomes the focus of a surveillance campaign.

In glossing the Foucauldian *dispositif*, Charlotte Lebbe describes the panoptic design as "the architectural expression of a more general power mechanism" (Lebbe). According to Lebbe, this mechanism by which surveillance establishes order, inverts the principles of the cell—the concealment and solitariness of the dungeon, its darkness—is traded for the visibility, the perpetual daylight of the panopticon. Chapter one discussed how Mercer of *The Circle* warned Mae, "You people are creating a world of ever-present daylight, and I think it will burn us alive" (Eggers 431). If the panopticon relies upon an inversion of the principles of the cell, its concealment and solitude becoming visibility and togetherness, the reversion to the principles of the cell could lead to emancipation. Unfortunately, the banopticon relies upon another inversion of principles for its success. In the years following 9/11, the states of exception, the Orwellian, perpetual war waged against the ethereality of global terror, the guiding legal principle of U.S.

criminal code—innocent before proven guilty—has been inverted to guilty before innocent. As Lebbe argues, “The justification for monitoring migrants is weak in itself, but not in light of the fight against terrorism. Lumping transnational threats together provides support for the logic of ‘acting before it is too late’ – a logic that is very much alive in the public discourse” (Lebbe). In other words, this “new threat” necessitates an abandonment of the legal principle of the presumption of innocence, in Latin, *ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat* (“the burden of proof is on the one who declares, not on one who denies”).³⁰ McLaren describes this new post-9/11 “reality zone” as, “a world where order has given way to disorder, where reason has given way to unreason, where reality is compromised by truth, where guilt is presumed over innocence” (McLaren 214). For McLaren, a single letter changes the phony prepositional phrase, “the war on terror,” to the reality few want to see, an imperialistic “war of terror.” Perhaps this shift—from prepositional to genitive phrase—is what Mark Redfield was alluding to in “The Sovereign and the Terrorist” when he concluded that, “war as terror, has always already been started by the other, the terrorist. Under such circumstances, sovereign is he who decides on terror—who can call the other a terrorist and make it stick” (Redfield 57).³¹ Or, as Bourdieu more succinctly put it, “The fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them” (as quoted in Bauman and Lyon 150). In *The Lowland*, Udayan embodies this nominative capacity. Despite his work tutoring the neighborhood boys and girls who could not afford to go to school; despite collecting and distributing goods to families living in the colonial slums; despite taking medicine to some of the poorest sections of the city, he was branded a “miscreant” and

³⁰ Indeed, not only is presumption of innocence a legal right in the U.S., it appears in Article 11 of the U.N.’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

³¹ Redfield’s parsing of sovereign and terrorist here is supported by Said’s observation that, “bombing senseless civilians with F-16s and helicopter gunships has the same structure and effect as more conventional nationalistic terror” (3).

“extremist” by the police, a “member of an illegal political party,” a “boy who did not know right from wrong” (220-221). A more accurate set of binaries, however, might be “right from left.” Like Changez, Udayan is identified as an enemy of the state and an oppositional force to capitalism. Udayan’s politics were shaped on his Che-like pilgrimage throughout India. Walking fifteen miles each day through the poverty-stricken countryside, Udayan met tenant farmers, living in desperation, who, in their disconsolance, would sometimes kill their own families before ending their own lives. Loomba locates the power of British colonialism in the taxing of Bengali farmers: “Millions of Indians never saw an English person throughout the term of the Raj, although that did not mean their lives had not been woven into the fabric of the empire. This kind of ‘shallow penetration’ can be seen as a prototype for modern imperialism, which functions largely through remote control” (111). The narrator, focalized in this passage through Udayan, describes the farmer’s reality: “Their subsistence was contingent on arrangements with landowners, moneylenders. On people who took advantage of them. On forces beyond their control. He saw how the system coerced them, how it humiliated them. How it stripped their dignity away” (410). This passage functions as another neat rebuttal of Asl’s argument that *The Lowland* demonizes communism. It represents a more nuanced, contextualized analysis of capitalism. Loomba argues that:

‘Classical’ Marxism attributes capitalism’s efficiency to its having replaced slavery and crude forms of coercion with the ‘free’ labour market in which the force is exerted through economic pressure. But under colonialism, these other supposedly outdated features of control carry on, *not as remnants of the past but as integral features of the capitalist present*. Race and racism are the basis on which unfree labour is pressed into colonialist service. (125)

Udayan, at least initially, saw his violent plotting as a revolutionary force designed to avenge the deaths of these laborers. However, without the requisite sovereignty Redfield posits is necessary to make the terrorist label stick, Udayan is the one designated as such. A contemporary example best illustrates Redfield and Bourdieu's points: antifa. First organized as a response to Mussolini's creation of fascism in 1920s Italy, *Antifaschistische Aktion* has spawned similarly aligned, but loosely affiliated antiracist and antifascist groups through Europe, the U.K., and the U.S. The Independent describes antifa as, "shorthand for anti-fascist organisations, refers to a loose coalition of militant, decentralised, grassroots groups which are opposed to the far-right" (*Independent* 2017). Noah Chomsky famously decried the movement as, "a major gift to the right." Chomsky argued, "What they do is often wrong in principle – like blocking talks – and [the movement] is generally self-destructive" (Nelson). This is precisely how Subhash came to see Naxalbari and Udayan's wasted life—as self-destructive. Lahiri concretizes the metaphor of "this will blow up in your face"—Udayan quite literally and accidentally explodes a bomb that severs the fingers of one hand, leaving him with a "useless paw." The narrator, focalized through Subhash, in language not too dissimilar to Chomsky's in denouncing antifa, laments the course of his brother's life: "Udayan had given his life to a movement that had been misguided, that had caused only damage, that had already been dismantled. The only thing he'd altered was what their family had been" (137). Perhaps the key for the reader to reconcile Subhash's flat rejection of Udayan's subversive activities and his admiration for Bela's activism lies within the difference between violence and non-violence, destruction and creation. Udayan's actions result in damage and destruction: the mutilation of his hand, the murder of the policeman, his own execution, the subsequent abandonment of his family, wife, and unborn child. Bela's actions, on

the other hand, result in creation, in growth: the fruits of labor in the fields and in giving birth to and nurturing her daughter Meghna.

Although his mother fondly remembers her son as a loving boy with Tolstoyan tendencies—he gave his time to tutor peasants in their village—Udayan was far more closely aligned, ideologically, with Che Guevara than Tolstoy or Gandhi. He even signs his letters with Maoist quotations like, “War will bring the revolution; revolution will stop the war” (Lahiri 52). One day Subhash finds a collection of essays under Udayan’s bed by Majumdar, one of the Naxalite leaders: “He compared the method of active resistance to the fight for civil rights in the United States. *If we can realize the truth that the Indian revolution will invariably take the form of civil war, the tactic of area-wise seizure of power can be the only tactic*” (Lahiri 29, original emphasis). Again, Redfield’s gloss on the sovereign and the terrorist rings true. Without the state to sanction the violence, like the forces who quickly brought the Naxalbari rebellion to its heels, the farmers are branded terrorists. Although not possible federally, some U.S. states have taken steps to similarly brand antifa “extremist,” “terrorist,” “anarchist,” etc. However, the Antidefamation League has courageously come out and warned against conflating antifa with the fascists and racists with whom they do battle: “That said, it is important to reject attempts to claim equivalence between the antifa and the white supremacist groups they oppose. The antifa reject racism but use unacceptable tactics. White supremacists use even more extreme violence to spread their ideologies of hate, to intimidate ethnic minorities, and undermine democratic norms” (adl.org). Antifa members, belonging mostly to a generation palpably aware of facial recognition software and digital profiling, have adopted a “black bloc” style of dress in an attempt to evade surveillance. As a 2017 *New York Times* article indicates:

As surveillance techniques have advanced and proliferated — the rise of the high-resolution portable phone camera along with social media means more documentation and more distribution than ever — practitioners have evolved from covering up obvious markers like tattoos, birthmarks and scars to hiding biometric indicators like ears and noses. (Paulus)

Chapter one spoke of a Sartrean economic view of surveillance—that social surveillance proliferates as a result of user input far more than governmental intrusion—that this cultural shift was the root cause of the formation of the synopticon. The banopticon functions much in the same way: it relies, at least in part, upon the citizenry of the sovereign state. McLaren argues: “The U.S. government proposed a plan to recruit one million domestic spies to report any suspicious behavior in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods, not unlike the operations once put in place by Joseph Stalin, behind the Iron Curtain. And not, of course, unlike the child Spies of 1984: “With those children, he thought, that wretched woman must lead a life of terror. Another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy”” (McLaren 215).

McLaren looks to Marxism as inspiration for educators to act as forces for social justice and to establish a positive humanism. Ollman argues for Marxism’s continued relevance to these trying social and political times: “Marxism encourages us not to moralize about good and evil and who is more good or evil...Marxism encourages us to contextualize what happened and who is involved; of how this happened in our world today and how it fits into history, into time” (7). McLaren shows the way forward in adopting a critical revolutionary pedagogy in the classroom: “The idea here is not to adapt students to globalization but to make them critically maladaptive so that they can become change agents in anticapitalist struggles” (McLaren 276). Changez, in

his role as university lecturer in Lahore, attempts to implement a critical revolutionary pedagogy: “I had in the meanwhile gotten a job as a university lecturer, and I made it my mission on campus to advocate a disengagement from your country by mine” (Hamid 179). He continues: “When the international television news networks came to our campus, I stated to them among other things that no other country inflicts death so readily upon the inhabitants of other countries, frightens so many people so far away, as America” (182). This type of non-violent resistance is preferable to Arundhati Roy, but the novelist also works towards an understanding of violent resistance: “Terrorism is vicious, ugly, and dehumanizing for its perpetrators, as well as its victims. But so is war. You could say that terrorism is the privatization of war. Terrorists are the free marketers of war. They are people who don’t believe the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence” (Roy as quoted in McLaren 322). McLaren argues, “In order to be effective in the fight against terrorism, teachers also need to move beyond solutions that legitimize or naturalize capitalist-driven globalization as the only viable option available for humanity, and instead focus on the needs of the world’s population” (253). Although Subhash and Gauri are the only two characters of *The Lowland* that actually become researchers and professors, it is Bela who becomes the true teacher in the novel. Bela, in her deeds more than words, embodies another viable option for humanity: she becomes a sustainable farmer concerned with the dignity of other farmers. Unconcerned with careerism in any capitalistic sense of the word, Bela, for a time, lives and works in Brooklyn, adjacent to, but not within, that ultimate symbol of American enterprise:

It was an opportunity to live cheaply in Brooklyn for a while. There was a job she could walk to, clearing out a dilapidated playground, converting it into vegetable beds. She trains teenagers to work there after school, showing them how to shovel out the

crabgrass, how to plant sunflowers along the chain-link fence. She teaches them the difference between a row crop and a cover crop. She oversees senior citizens who volunteer. (310)

Therefore, Bela represents a do-over for Udayan more than his reincarnation; she resists the same things he fought to subvert—capitalism, imperialism, neocolonialism—but does so by living an exemplary life, creating and not destroying, showing the way forward.

This section of the chapter began with an epigraph, a quotation from *The Lowland*: “in Bengali, the word for yesterday, *kal*, was also the word for tomorrow” (Lahiri 178). Lyon and Bauman end their study, *Liquid Surveillance*, in much the same vein. In contemplating Derrida’s seminar on Levinas’s *la responsabilite*, Lyon points out to Bauman that, “... the New Testament enjoins us to live in the present now *as if* the future *shalom* had already arrived.³² We live out now the life of worship, of finding ourselves in the face of the Other, of besting swords to ploughshares, of pressing to enable the voices of the marginalized – the categorically suspect – to be heard, without fearing the consequences of so doing” (Bauman and Lyon 157). Time plays an important role in *The Lowland*. The subject of Gauri’s dissertation, and a constant theme in the novel itself, the nature of time is given ample page-space. In that liminal space, that post-partum hell between her prenatal auditing of an ancient philosophy class in Rhode Island and her daily care for Bela, Gauri meditates on the inscrutable nature of time: “The present was a speck that kept blinking, brightening and diminishing, something neither alive nor dead. How long did it last? One second? Less? It was always in flux; in the time it took to consider it, it slipped away”

³² The concept of *la responsabilite* comes from *Entre Nous*, Levinas’s collections of essays on Otherness, in which he proclaims, “A face is a trace of itself, given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty. It is as though I were responsible for his mortality, and guilty for surviving.” The moral “authority” of the face of the Other is felt in my “infinite responsibility” for the Other. The face of the Other comes toward me with its infinite moral demands while emerging out of the trace.

(Lahiri 181). It's no wonder then, that the architects of 1984's *INGSOC* wanted to obliterate collective memory and install in its place a perpetual present. Far from a gift, this perpetual present makes historically contextualizing or humanizing the actions of the Other impossible. Which is, of course, precisely the point. Oceania must have always been at war with Eastasia and never an ally much like the fact that Donald Rumsfeld "wishes that his supportive visit to Saddam Hussein in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war on December 20, 1983, would remain (at least with the American public) an unknown known" (McLaren 215). Analyzing her through a McLarenian lens, Gauri has committed the doubly duplicitous act of retreating from Naxalbari to the American academy and into a philosophy department. McLaren warns, "we can no longer take refuge in the *mundus imaginalis* of neoplatonic philosophy in which we can dream our world ever anew in the hyperspace of a consumerist utopia" (277). The way forward, for McLaren and for critical revolutionary pedagogists, is to be less like Gauri and more like Changez in advancing "a philosophy of praxis centered around a Marxist humanist pedagogy of negativity. Negativity, in the dialectical sense of that we are using the term, can lead to a new beginning" (277). Or perhaps, more precisely, Gauri could marry her philosophy as "contemplative act" to theory to become, as McLaren advocates, "dialecticians, philosophers of praxis armed not with formulaic answers but with an openness of mind and spirit and creative vision of what we can—and must—achieve" (McLaren 327). This last bit—"openness of mind and spirit and creative vision"—perfectly describes Bela's praxis; she's not a Heideggerian *per se* like her mother but instead a philosopher of daily life. And what is a philosopher of daily life apart from someone who is intentional in his thinking about the course of her action, grounded and in touch with the materialist realities that shape her world?

4.7 Conclusion:

The octopus of surveillance capitalism extends its tentacles into affairs mundane and critical. As users of social media (or more insidiously, simply friends of users of social media), we subject ourselves to this new economic logic.³³ It works to reduce complex human behaviors to clicks, swipes, and gestures of a mouse. Our “data exhaust” is not the silt left behind in the pan but the gold itself. It’s the fuel powering the surveillance economy. A futures market, the surveillance economy does not trade in traditional commodities like oil, wheat, or natural gas; it works to capitalize on the prediction of human behavior itself. It’s the algorithmic super-science of the next step. But human behavior cannot be distilled into neat boxes of categorical understanding. It cannot be extricated from questions of historical materialism. Surveillance capitalism cannot be separated from Marxian realities. After all, the “fundamentals” of surveillance capitalism are centered around one simple principle: return on investment. The panopticon functions as a panoptic triaging: it sorts out the worthwhile targets and casts aside those deemed economically unviable. While surveillance capitalism is, on its face, politically neutral, colorblind, and objective, it is also unconcerned with how it reaps its bounty of profits. Surveillance capitalism began with IBM, its furnishing of the Hollerith machine, and the technology to first identify and then help eliminate the Jews in Prussia, and its callous disregard for the human life extinguished in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, and continues on through into the twenty-first century and American companies like Thermo Fisher supplying China with gene-mapping software to help identify its Muslim-minority Uighur population so they, too, can be sent to concentration camps. This horrifies, or at least should horrify, a liberal society. But the layering of buffers in between the technocrats and the genocidal outcomes of their profiteering

³³ Facebook has recently been found to maintain “shadow profiles:” databases of non-users.

work to abrogate moral, legal, and ethical responsibility. To put it more simply, they work, like myriad smartphone applications, to allow the surveillance capitalists to sleep at night. After all, what debt do capitalists owe humanity? What about their worldview suggests human rights are anything more than a fleeting thought? As Richard Powers depicted in *Gain*, the advent of the corporate age also brought with it the holy trinity of companies, shareholders, and profits. As long as capital and dividends continue to flow unimpeded, the fiduciary responsibility fulfilled, what matters if a few million souls are trampled upon?

David Bazan, the singer-songwriter better known as Pedro the Lion, in “Penetration” from the 2002 record *Control*, sings, “Cause if it isn’t making dollars Then it isn’t making sense.” Bazan’s homonymic line reminds us of capitalistic logic and the scene in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in which Changez is tasked with valuating a publishing company in Valparaiso, Chile. Plagued by slow growth in its literary fiction arm but buoyed by its corporate and textbook publishing business, the firm is on the verge of financial ruin when Changez jets into town to pour over its records. The managing editor, a septuagenarian with glasses so thick they could burn through paper, regards Changez as a predator closing in on its prey. But rather than chew him up and spit him out, Changez lunches with the old man and strolls through the city’s faded glory—the home of Pablo Neruda—and comes to feel kinship with what we could obliquely call a fellow member of the Global South. The fundamentals of economic valuation—the current and future profitability of a company—at least in this moment, take a backseat to a more esoteric view of value. Hamid, the author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, shortly after finishing the novel, wrote of his own inner conflict: would he swap his work in management consultancy firms like McKinsey and Company to fully focus on writing? Would he be a part-time management consultant and part-time writer? McKinsey and Company, the world’s most

prestigious consultancy firm, boasts of many CEO alumni and a portfolio containing more than 80% of the world's largest corporations. The firm is primarily engaged in the quantitative analysis necessary to evaluate management decisions. What would they make of poetry? Mathematical in its metricality, poetry can certainly be analyzed. *But if it isn't making dollars it isn't making sense.* Hamid eventually threw his Harvard J.D. and position at McKinsey in the dustbin to focus on what he came to see as his true calling—writing fiction. He's been fortunate to go on to sell millions of copies of his books and win a whole trophy case of awards for novels such as *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* and *Exit West*. And yet, through his characters he betrays a soft spot for less-profitable pursuits such as literary fiction and poetry. They have a place, his novel seems to suggest, in our hyper-capitalistic world, despite their failure to be “fundamentally” sound.

The Lowland represents the dialectical fusion of theory and praxis. Its pedagogy is dependent upon the idea that philosophy must be married to practice to make a difference. Resistance begins with contemplation. It begins with being observant—about our world and our place in it. Action without contemplation is simply reaction—the logic of eye for an eye—the fake cowboys and their holy wars and the dogs of war that are sicced upon the helpless. In other words, we must return to that discussion in *The Lowland* on the balcony in Tollygunge overlooking the busy street, the conversation between Udayan, the Naxalite, and the professor-in-waiting Gauri: which is better, thinking or seeing? The answer is both. Or neither, at least by themselves. Thinking by itself leaves us stranded on an island of our own indifference, incapable of seeing the materialist realities under which our “enemies” have been forced to operate. Seeing by itself, without contemplation of the shared realities which bind us together as human beings, allows us to instead elevate the differences, allows us to cordon off our environs with walls both

real and imagined. Bela, the daughter of the philosopher Gauri and the revolutionary Udayan represents the appropriation and cooption of the term “janissary” from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Rather than the Janus face turned to one direction—the way forward to capitalistic perfection—Bela, just like her Bengali translation would suggest, represents the past informing the future. Bela is the synthesis of philosophy and praxis: seeing and thinking and acting. She honors the past while preparing to ensure success in the future. But a human future must include a recognition of, and resistance to, the forces impinging upon privacy, contemplation, and the right to enjoy our own interconnected islands of enjoyment, free from surveillance.

Rather than provide ready-made answers and neat solutions, literature problematizes and productively complicates knowledge and certainty. Or, as Banita aptly puts it, “Plotwise, what the post-9/11 surveillance novel has relinquished, in contrast to the detection techniques promoted by the realist novel, is a sense of solvability (and intelligibility) with regard to the phenomena that are described and supervised, frustrating the expectation of a conclusive outcome” (254). The surveillance capitalists are selling human behavior and the tools to surveil and exclude those human beings whose behaviors the banopticon has deemed economically unviable or whose racial and religious “impurities” are viewed as contaminants. The banopticon, while armed with advanced technology like facial recognition software, is actually fueled by something far more ancient, primal, and base: fear. Resistance to surveillance capitalism begins with resistance to our primitive fear of the Other, that xenophobic projection of our failures onto the face we fail to recognize as the face of our brother, our sister. It begins with thinking and with seeing and with acting; it begins with imagining—what we want to use our time on this

earth for and what a more just society looks like. It begins with the realization that the other is us—a critically revolutionary act steeped in love.

5 CONCLUSION: EVERYTHING LIVES WITH PAPER.

“I woke up with the word Shakespeare on my lips.” – George Orwell, *1984*

Writing itself functions as a point of resistance for the protagonist of *1984*, Winston Smith. His clandestine journaling works to counter the techno-totalitarianism of the telescreen. The creamy paper he seeks out in antique shops helps remind him of a purer, simpler time in his life, a time that’s being erased from his and the collective mind of Oceania society. Reading can also operate as resistance to technocorporatism and surveillance capitalism. Much has been made in recent years of the empathic benefits of reading, particularly fiction. Franzen, in *The End of the End of the Earth*, ruminates briefly on the paradox created by reading fiction: we can feel closer to a person by reading his or her words than if we are sitting right next to them. That this form of media, this technology, is now being marginalized, pushed to the sidelines by technocapitalism and perhaps more precisely, surveillance capitalism, is no accident. In *The Circle*, Mae’s paper map of the San Francisco Bay isn’t denigrated by her boss simply because it’s made of felled trees and pulp but because it isn’t easily up-loadable to the hive mind; it isn’t easily disseminable, shareable; you can’t click in its margins. To put it more concisely, when her boss says that, “everything dies with paper” what he’s really saying is “once paper is sold there’s no further opportunity to monetize it.”

It is with great irony then that we read Franklin Foer’s *World Without Mind* and are forced to realize the uncomfortable truth that one of today’s foremost techno- and surveillance capitalists, Jeff Bezos, made his bones selling books; that books were the one commodity the young financier latched onto as saleable, scaleable, and possessing wide enough margins to start his online marketplace, Amazon. That is perhaps the least nefarious activity from Big Tech.

It is clear from the analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The Lowland*, the glossing of the banopticon, a sober look at People's Republic of China and their systematic surveilling and targeting of the Muslim Uighurs, that the very tools advertised to help us connect with other human beings—social media—are the same tools currently being used to foment social, political, and economic discord; they are also the same tools being used to track, surveil, and ultimately punish certain groups. Literary fiction is the true social medium, the one that brings us closer to another human being. And not in the cliched, “walk a mile in her shoes” type of way, but in the paradoxical and yet original basis for the development of the novel—to surveil—to get inside the mind—to know what someone else is thinking—to know what someone else is feeling. We pantomime this today with our incessant scrolling, clicking, tweeting, and posting. We approximate empathy and compassion—real connection. That fiction actually accomplishes this comes as no surprise to those of us who have spent a lifetime studying it. However, only recently have our suspicions been confirmed—our hypotheses falsified by the so-called “hard sciences.” The jury has returned from deliberation: neuroscientists agree that reading fiction creates empathic pathways in the brain. And what, if anything, have the past three or four years taught us? This cementing of the digital age, the social media age, has precisely coincided with the death of empathy. Sharpe writes of Franzen's *Purity*:

Confrontation and confession, Franzen suggests, while important, must be conducted not through screens, but through in-person acts of bearing witness, with all of the related discomforts and experiences of strangeness that inhere in closeness to the other. The Internet may not be a system that one can opt out of, Franzen's novel suggests, but it is one whose determining reach can be neutralized by practices of turning inward toward the local. Though absent the numbing (and thus comforting) mediation of the digital, the

experience of being in physical proximity to those to whom one has ethical obligations, Franzen's novel suggests, is indispensable for the production of a loving relation that is necessary for interpersonal empathy. (Sharpe in "Economies of Reputation" 21)

To put it bluntly, we just don't seem to give a shit. Not about ourselves, each other, our planet, its animals.

Is it a coincidence? The digital town square Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg imagined his product creating has instead resulted in a digital wasteland, which, in the best of times is populated with funny cat pics and videos of people's grandkids, and at worst, some of the vilest vitriol ever spewed. Herein lies another paradox: fiction ends up being truer and realer than the "news." Stories bring us closer to understanding the human condition. For all the techno-sophistication of "machine learning" and "artificial intelligence" and "computational intelligence" and "extended intelligence" and for all the billions spent on predicting our behaviors, our thoughts, and our habits, they will never help us understand ourselves. Franzen, in "The Essay in Dark Times," posits the novel as much-needed reflection device:

Kierkegaard, in *Either/Or*, makes fun of the "busy man" for whom busyness is a way of avoiding an honest self-reckoning. You might wake up in the night and realize that you're lonely in your marriage, or that you need to think about what your level of consumption is doing to the planet, but the next day you have a million little things to do, and the day after that you have another million things. As long as there's no end of little things, you never have to stop and confront the bigger questions. Writing or reading an essay isn't the only way to stop and ask yourself who you really are and what your life might mean, but it is one good way. And if you consider how laughably unbusy Kierkegaard's Copenhagen was, compared with our own age, those subjective tweets and

hasty blog posts don't seem so essayistic. They seem more like a means of avoiding what a real essay might force on us. (6)

Eggers cannily disguises the dystopia of the Circle as utopia. He leaves it to us, the reader, to be shocked or horrified—or not. But if we can return, for a moment, to Mae's boss at Circle HQ and his conclusion that "everything dies with paper," maybe what Eggers is trying to tell us is just the opposite: everything *lives* within paper. We see ourselves alive in its pages. We may or may not like what we see. But see we do. Therein lies the difference and yet another paradox: for all the surveilling, all the watching, all the images and videos we're now privy to, all the feeds and profiles and avatars, we never really see each other.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* it is poetry that acts as foil to the computational intelligence of economic valuation—that for all the discussion of rhyme and meter, poetry cannot be reduced to exoteric binaries. It speaks to a part of us that Watson and his ilk can approximate, can pantomime, but never capture. Fifty years from now, when we're more machine than man, when Google has succeeded in implanting its search engine directly into our brains, when its Glass has melded with our own irises, we may wake up with the word "Shakespeare" on our lips.

The last chapter in David Lyon's book, *The Culture of Surveillance*, is titled, "Hidden Hope." In it, Lyon posits, in the tradition of Charles Taylor and Paul Giles, the formation of "surveillance imaginaries." Unlike *1984*, which ends with the neutering of Winston's revolutionary drive, and *The Circle*, which ends with Mae trying to hack Annie's mind, *The Culture of Surveillance* ends with hope, albeit "hidden." If we are to buy into Lyon's argument—that the conditions we currently find ourselves in are the product of a cultural phenomenon—than we must also conclude that that it is not a phenomenon per se and can therefore be altered, enforced, or even abandoned and replaced. If *1984* and *The Circle* force readers to imagine a

world in which we unwittingly and wittingly submit to a surveillance state, then *The Culture of Surveillance* and Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation* remind us that although the Internet and the surveillance capitalistic economy undergirding it feels, at times, as if it is extraterrestrial or extra-human, it's not. We've created it. We can destroy it. For all the magical, even gnostical attributes we assign to machine learning, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic science, they aren't things that happened to our society but rather the products of that society and its culture of surveillance. Constructing an imaginary in which that society re-inscribes dignity for all its citizens will be the key to unlock the door to a new, human future. Perhaps fiction can lead the way.

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