SURVEILLANCE AND SHAME IN DAVE EGGERS'S *THE CIRCLE*

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HOW TO CITE

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_Abstract

Shame is a complex and controversial emotion, but there are commonly accepted notions of shame which revolve around questions regarding exposure, appearance and visibility. As Jonathan Finn notes, through digitalization and camera surveillance in public spaces, surveillance has become a "way of seeing, a way of being" (2012). Thus, the question of visibility — or invisibility — is as inherent to the concept of surveillance as it is to that of shame. Social media users tend to contribute to disempowering exhibition by sharing their personal information in the online public domain. In other words: today's "Funopticon" (Lewis 2017) is all about self-exposure. Shame, on the other hand, is generally perceived as an affect that emerges from fear of exposure. But how sustainable is this notion of shame in light of contemporary digital 'surveillance culture' (Lyon 2017)? I will examine shame against the backdrop of digital surveillance in Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013), while also drawing comparisons to our contemporary condition in the culture of surveillance.

1_Surveillance and Shame: A Kindred Relationship?

Surveillance "has widely been theorized to induce emotions or 'cultures of emotion.'"[1] It has been observed that surveillance creates cultures of anxiety, fear and suspicion.[2] One just has to think of security surveillance at airports that can trigger anxiety.[3] "Surveilled space alters human experience" — and therefore the emotions involved.[4] Surveillance, however, has hardly been examined in the context of other emotions. I argue that the relationship between shame and surveillance calls for particular scrutiny because shame generates an internalization of the gaze that can be understood as a form of self-surveillance. Although it has been noted that shame has "an important role within modern surveillance,"[5] the link between surveillance and shame has barely been addressed across various disciplines. Whereas recent research centers on public shaming,[6] I am more interested in the phenomenology of shame in today's "surveillance culture."[7]

A commonplace understanding of shame are based upon appearance and a sense of being exposed. Through digitalization as well as CCTV cameras, surveillance has also become, as Jonathan Finn highlights, a "way of seeing, a way of being."[8] Thus, the question of visibility — or invisibility — is as central to the concept of surveillance as it is to the phenomenon of shame. Finn's notion of surveillance as a way of seeing and being draws attention to an important aspect: surveillance has become — to use a rather loaded term — "existential." It is "existential," meaning that it fundamentally marks

contemporary existence which is, to a significant extent, determined by regimes of visibility. Social media users tend to contribute to disempowering exhibition by sharing their personal information in the online public domain. Reversing Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, Randolph Lewis has ironically referred to digital self-exposure "in the name of convenience, connection, or simply fun" as the "Funopticon."[9] Shame, on the other hand, is generally perceived as an affect that emerges from fear of exposure. How sustainable, then, is this commonly accepted notion of shame in light of digital surveillance?

The concept of shame reveals the moral-ethical understanding of self and world, that is: how do I behave if I know that I am watched/unwatched? A key scene for the connection between shame and surveillance is arguably Jean-Paul Sartre's well-known example of a man looking through a keyhole in *Being and Nothingness*. At the beginning of his analysis of shame, Sartre asks: "What does being seen mean for me?"[10] The awareness of being watched makes the man look at himself from the observer's perspective, which evokes shame for his indecent gesture. For Sartre, the very moment of being seen is self-reflexive, making one aware of one's own vulnerability. He writes: "In interiorizing the shaming look" through self-reflection, the observed subject not only becomes the object of her own surveillance but also the judge of herself."[11] Sigmund Freud's concept of the 'super-ego' and Immanuel Kant's notion of the 'inner court' both clearly resonate here.[12] Freud and Kant both offer early models of the internalization effect via the disciplinary gaze on which Bentham's panopticon and Michel Foucault's panopticism are based. The crucial question of how to behave when being watched/unwatched is pertinent to both shame and surveillance, not least because shame as a moral censor exhibits a force of control similar to that exhibited by surveillance. Shame as a moral censor or as a "social alert system"[13] triggers self-discipline. This analogy between the disciplinary gaze and the 'regime of shame,' that is "'internalization' of control, in the Foucauldian sense,"[14] draws attention to the important link — and indeed interdependence — between surveillance and shame. I argue that shame and surveillance share a phenomenological premise which goes beyond seeing and being seen. It is therefore not surprising that they also share common central 'sub-concepts' that constitute them — such as visibility/invisibility, privacy, and the public. The central question I am raising in this paper is the following: how sustainable are commonly accepted notions of shame in contemporary digital "surveillance culture"?[15]

What is the account of modern subjective experience in terms of surveillance and shame?[16] In the first part of the essay, I will introduce the concepts of shame and surveillance, bringing to the fore their phenomenological analogy. In the second part of the essay, I will offer a close reading of Dave Eggers's dystopian novel *The Circle* against the established theoretical background.

2_Being-Seen and Seeing — the Phenomenology of Shame

Although shame is a complex phenomenon with possibly "no agreement about where this emotion stands and what its constructive uses are, if any,"[17] there is, as already implied, consent amongst different disciplines that "the eye is the organ of shame par excellence."[18] In fact, philosophical discourses on shame have revolved around the eye since Aristotle. But shame is also usually associated with the desire to retreat, to withdraw, to hide from eyes — or at its extreme: there is a strong desire for death in the moment of shame.[19] The German idiom "sich zu Tode schämen" ("to die of shame") is not by chance. Moreover, there seems to be no doubt that shame is a "self-conscious emotion"[20] that makes one abruptly aware of one's being in a moment of unwanted (self) exposure. The attributes linked to shame are typically negative, highlighting a sense of utter subjection and helplessness; body, mind and speech are negatively affected. The fear of exposure has established itself as the most defining shame criterion: "The physical action accompanying shame is a shrinking of the body, as though to disappear from the eye of the self or the other."[21] Shame is generally perceived as a negative emotion that makes the bodily borders suddenly present.

This commonly accepted negative notion of shame — predominantly marked by the urge to disappear — has been criticized on more than one occasion. Not necessarily because its legitimacy was put into question, but because the prioritized pattern of withdrawal and disappearance did not allow for a different phenomenology of shame. Bernard Williams, for example, contended that it is wrong "to suppose that the reactions of shame depend simply on being found out, that the feeling behind every decision or thought that is governed by shame is literally and immediately the fear of being seen."[22] The desire to not be seen in a moment of shame arises because one is seen "inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition," and not because one does not want to be seen in principle. Furthering Williams's observations, I have argued elsewhere that "shame can also reflect a desire for utmost visibility."[23] *Being-seen* is as

crucial to shame as the urge of *not-wanting-to-be-seen*. This other side of the coin reveals a positive intentionality of shame.[24] To put it differently: shame not only invokes withdrawal but can also promote, "more positively, attempts to reform oneself."[25] However, shame is widely regarded as a negative emotion which entails a negative evaluation of the subject towards herself, based on the respective social value system. In other words: shame is commonly understood as heteronomous and primarily a social phenomenon. The heteronomous account of shame does suggest that shame is completely dependent on social factors and cannot take place in private. In their book *In Defense of Shame*, Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, however, put the heteronomy ascribed to shame into question and defend the autonomy of shame: "although shame involves a sense that one falls prey to an alien assault," they argue, "this is clearly not always the case."[26] They challenge the passivity and submission often associated with shame and argue for a non-social account of shame as shame goes beyond public opinions and social evaluations.

It is clear that shame is a very disputed emotion and therefore must be recalibrated in its individual contexts. But whatever one's take on shame might be, questions on visibility or invisibility — in their broadest sense, i.e., including questions on interiority/exteriority and privacy/the public — are likely to remain central. And it is here, of course, where the analogy to surveillance becomes most striking. The omnipresence of being watched in today's "surveillance culture," which I will briefly outline in the following section, will show how the centrality of visibility or invisibility in discussing shame is of paramount importance for surveillance, too.

3_'Electronic Eyes' Everywhere: Ubiquitous Surveillance Technology

Surveillance technologies have become an integral part of the everyday. Contemporary society is increasingly shaped — and indeed controlled — by CCTV, biometrics, data mining, and monitoring technologies in cyberspaces, workplaces, and private spaces. Yet the idea of ubiquitous surveillance is not new in its essence as Astrid Schmidt-Burkhardt has highlighted in her essay "The All-Seer: God's Eye as Proto-Surveillance."[27] But has the 'electronic eye' really fully assumed the symbolic function of the 'divine eye'? Despite the similarity, the "idea of surveillance as 'God's eye'" remains controversial.[28] For it might be argued that the symbolism of the centralized divine eye — or indeed the whole notion of the eye — reaches its limits in the face of post-

panoptic forms of contemporary surveillance such as Haggerty's and Ericson's "surveillant assemblage" — which describes the collection of information or 'data' about people from different places, e.g. social media, online shopping or police reports.[29] The analogy seems to become precarious on the premises of the paradigm shift from 'disciplinary society' (Michel Foucault) to 'control society' (Gilles Deleuze) in which authority and power are diffused.

There is a shift from centralized surveillance to decentralized surveillance where surveillance mainly takes place through digital rather than architectural technologies.[30] This theoretical framework distances itself from the idea of the Panopticon and shifts the focus from institutions to networks, from Foucault's 'disciplinary society' to Deleuze's "control society" — "a shift from discipline to unescapable control by technology." The powerful metaphor of the Panopticon, which stands for centralized and focalized surveillance, gradually diffuses in the shift from visual surveillance to 'dataveillance' (a term coined by Clarke in 1988). Surveillance has slipped into a "liquid state," where it becomes difficult to identify the watchers and the watched alike.[31]

But if surveillance no longer relies on visuals and does not seem to refer to exposure in the classical sense, can this article's premise still be sustained? Indeed it can, because even if 'dataveillance' moves away from basic surveillance, that is physical surveillance, the tracking and coding of data and the gathering of algorithms are still aimed at revelation and visualization of personal, institutional or mass information. As the conflated term 'dataveillance' — surveillance in the dark and unknown — suggests, the notion of the Latin word "vigilare" (watching) does not get lost. The concepts of visibility and invisibility — and the implications of other key concepts they bear such as privacy and transparency — are not outdated in the context of dataveillance. On the contrary, negotiations between the public and the private are particularly challenging in times of dataveillance, where the question of how to define interiority becomes even more urgent, calling for a new concept of privacy.

In *The Circle*, Dave Eggers's dystopian imaginaries of contemporary digital surveillance culture sketch flat and transparent characters, that is, embodiments of the so-called "gläserne Mensch" which seem to be deprived of any sense of privacy. Self-surveillance is carried out to its extreme here. One of the main goals of the Circle, the novel's eponymous technology company, is to avoid shame through the radical public self-exposure of the individual which is intended to lead to total transparency. Today's

ubiquity of surveillance technology begs the following question: how — and where — can shame be located if the premise is total transparency? In the following I will analyze Egger's novel to further investigate the relationship between surveillance and shame, while drawing comparisons to the human condition in contemporary surveillance culture.

4_Transparency at Every Cost: Dave Eggers's *The Circle*

Finn's notion of surveillance as "a way of seeing, a way of being" is taken to extremes in Dave Eggers's *The Circle,* a novel about an Internet company that has become a tyrannical monopoly, controlling not only the social media life of contemporary society but every aspect of human life, too.

At the pinnacle of the Circle's perfection, "Demoxie," an obligatory account for everyone, is introduced, or rather, aggressively pushed through by the company. Everything from banking to voting is monitored, handled, and managed through one personalized account. Voting becomes obligatory, making Washington superfluous (as one of the company founders contends), such that gradually the Circle is able to disempower the U.S. government. The company's interference in the democratic process can be read as a first step towards digital totalitarianism.

The Circle*,* governed by three "Wise Men," becomes the world's most powerful Internet company through the invention of its "Unified Operating System" called "TruYou,"[32] which soon "subsumes Facebook, Twitter, Google, and finally Alacrity, Zoopa, Jefe, and Quan" (TC 23) and the development of "SeeChange," a worldwide video surveillance system (TC 69). The Circle's goal is to complete "ultimate transparency," according to Bailey, one of the Wise Men: "We will become all-seeing, all-knowing" (TC 69–70). Maebelline Holland, a young Californian woman who is fed up with a mediocre job in public administration, gets into the Circle with the help of her former college roommate, Annie, who has secured an important position in the company as one of the "gang of 40 members" (TC 348). Before long, Mae climbs up the corporate ladder, outruns Annie, and becomes, to a large degree, a mascot for the company. She "goes transparent" with a camera around her neck, becoming a role model for millions of people who watch her (almost) everywhere she goes — with "a few exceptions" such as "during bathroom usage, or at least time spent on the toilet." (TC 351)

Mae is thrilled by the generosity of this trendy company (they even offer insurance coverage for her parents, which she very much welcomes as her father suffers from MS, but, as we will see soon, the 'price' her family has to pay for it is high). Within a couple of weeks Mae buys into the company's ethos of doing good and improving the world:

> And there was a wonderful thing that tended to happen, something that felt like poetic justice: every time someone started shouting about the *supposed* monopoly of the Circle, or the Circle's *unfair* monetization of the personal data of its users, or some other *paranoid* and *demonstrably false claim*, soon enough *it was revealed that that person was a criminal or deviant of the highest orde*r […] And it made sense. Who but a *fringe character* would try to *impede* the *unimpeachable* improvement of the world? (TC 240; emphasis mine)

The word choice in this passage — which serves as the company's vindication — is particularly striking. As the italicized text passages show, the political-religious rhetoric at work aims at foregrounding the company's putative sanctity. The totalitarian traits of the Circle are becoming more and more visible: a dissident or "deviant" of the company's ideology will be denounced as criminal. Mae is, of course, unable to see what is happening here. What is more, the way this passage is represented as her own thoughts with the means of free indirect discourse makes the dimension of her indoctrination even more unsettling for the reader. Under the guise of security and protection, total surveillance is legitimatized. There is, for example, "ChildTrack," a chip implanted in children's bones to allow parents and the police to track them at all times (this idea has been also recently thematized in the *Black Mirror* episode "Archangel"). Implanting a surveillance tool in the human body draws attention to a new violently imposed bodily experience of surveillance. The unsettling vision of such a physical intervention far exceeds the body scanners and the collection of biometric data that German author Juli Zeh criticizes in her novel *Corpus Delicti* (2009), for example. Zeh disapproves of the fact that the individual's need for security is abused to actually annihilate the civil rights of personal and political autonomy. There is a fine line between surveillance as a preemptive measure (for the sake of security that is framed as care) and surveillance as control (moving towards a totalitarian state).[33] Eggers's novel exemplifies the repercussions of ignoring and transgressing this threshold. One of the tech company's mantras — "caring is sharing" — ostensibly promotes the care for humanity but is at its core a process of dehumanization and desensitization (see TC 181). The

most straightforward symbol of the Circle's putative human mission is a Chinese sculpture with the significant title "Reaching Through for the Good of Humankind" (TC 345 ff.):

> The sculpture was fourteen feet high, made of a thin and perfectly translucent form of plexiglass. Though most of the artist's previous work had been conceptual, this was representational, unmistakable: a massive hand, as big as a car, was reaching out from, or through, a large rectangle, which most took to imply some sort of computer screen. (TC 346)

In the disguise of reaching out, this sculpture represents the menacing omnipresence of this technology company whose ultimate aim is to make everything — and everyone — "transparent." The mission of the company will be fulfilled when transparency has become total. Remarkably, humanity is held up as the company's flagship criteria but it is actually humanity that gets lost. Destruction takes place under the guise of care and the pursuit of perfection.

It is important to foreground the human aspect represented in the novel when examining the link between shame and surveillance. The protagonist's familial bonds fall apart due to her work commitment, which does not allow any room for private life, and because of the shameful surveillance experience she exposes them to. Mae's parents grow suspicious of the Circle's transparency claim and gradually withdraw from their daughter to the point that she gets worried and drives to their home to check on them, taking the whole wide world with her:

> She ran up the stairs, taking them three at a time, and when she reached the top and turned left quickly, into their bedroom, she saw them, their eyes turned to her, round and terrified. Her father was sitting on the bed, and her mother was kneeling on the floor, his penis in her hand. A small container of moisturizer rested against his leg. In an instant they all knew the ramifications. (TC 369)

Mae willingly submits her parents to total observation in return for health insurance coverage (that is, medical observation); as a result, they all lose the protection that privacy enables and are exposed to the public in the most intimate of moments.

Similarly, Mae is responsible for a *well-meant* 'manhunt' of her ex-boyfriend Mercer, which ends in a suicide witnessed by millions of Mae's followers. It is also rather disturbing that Mae is still jealous of her best friend and former role model Annie, despite her collapse into a coma because of the employer's inhuman work-load, pressure, and its revelation of a family secret via a new ancestry project called "PastPerfect." Mae's envy of her comatose friend brought Ellen Ullman, an American computer programmer and author, to state that "Mae, then, is not a victim but a dull villain."[34]

Although Mae appears to forfeit her capacity for empathy, it remains questionable whether or not she fits the role of a villain. In any case, she becomes totally submissive to the Circle's ideology. In allowing the total deprivation of privacy to anyone she encounters while 'transparent,' she sells off the enlightened right to individuality and freedom that is meant to be a hallmark of Western culture. If privacy is jeopardized, the loss of autonomous individual identity is at stake. Even if initially it seems that the choices Eggers's protagonist makes are self-determined, it ultimately becomes clear that they are not. Her thoughts and actions are gradually replaced by the company's ideology. At the end of the day she has lost herself and has become the Circle's marionette doll, without any relation to reality outside the Circle. And as the Circle devours more and more, soon there is actually nothing left to relate to outside the Circle. The shark metaphor below pronounces the power of the company even more:

> *The lobster had been consumed,* and Mae saw something gruesome and wonderful: the lobster was being processed, inside the shark, in front of her, with lighting speed and incredible clarity. Mae saw the lobster broken into dozens, then hundreds of pieces, in the shark's mouth, then saw those pieces make their way through the shark's gullet, its stomach, its intestines. In minutes the lobster had been reduced to a grainy, particulate substance. The waste left the shark and fell like snow to the aquarium floor. (TC 318)

The Circle becomes all-encompassing. It is therefore also stylistically consistent that the characters Eggers draws are one-dimensional. Even Ty and Mercer, the two characters who sense the danger of the Circle's totalitarian power and try to resist it, are recklessly thrust aside by the Circle's all-powerful surveillance system. The characters simply do not have enough substance or depth to combat it. What critics have at times criticized as poor literary quality is in fact fundamental to the message underlying *The Circle*. Eggers's dystopian imagination of contemporary digital surveillance society sketches flat characters,[35] embodiments of the "gläserene Mensch" (the transparent human being).[36] Self-surveillance is carried out to its extreme. Mae's wearable camera hangs down her breast not in order for her to counter-surveil in the sense of Sousveillance — a term coined by Steve Mann[37] — but to fulfil the Circle's demands and to "perform voluntary transparency."[38]

Transparency is represented at the level of imagery, content and narrative in Eggers's novel. As we have seen already, there are various symbols of transparency (such as the Chinese sculpture); furthermore, the company's buildings are characterized by glass architecture. Eggers's third-person narrator also contributes to the "aesthetics of

transparency" at work in the text.[39] The authorial view is established from the very beginning:

> They entered an elevator of glass, tinted faintly orange. Lights flickered on and Mae saw her name appear on the walls, along with her high school yearbook photo. WELCOME MAE HOLLAND. A sound, something like a gasp, left Mae's throat. She hadn't seen that photo in years, and had been happy for its absence. This must have been Annie's doing, assaulting her with it again. […] Since the photo — she was eighteen then, angry and unsure — Mae had gained much-needed weight, her face had softened and curves appeared, curves that brought the attention of men of myriad ages and motives. (TC 5–6)

In terms of the narrative situation, *The Circle* confirms what Paul Dawson observes in contemporary American fiction, namely "a prominent reappearance of the ostensibly outmoded omniscient narrator."[40] As the earlier quoted passage about Mae's enthrallment with the company's ideology also shows (TC 240) a great part of the narration is filtered through the protagonist's perception, that is, focalized on Mae. But even if the narrator's omniscience seems partially limited as it is tightly focalized around the protagonist's perception, the transparency claim is not impaired. The text alternates between two modes of narration: On the one hand, there is an all-knowing, heterodiegetic authorial narrator; and on the other hand, there is a narrator who tells the story through the lens of an "internal focalizer" (also referred to as "reflector" character or "figural medium"), especially then when free indirect discourse is employed.[41]

In other words, the internal focalization — the narrator's direct access to Mae's mind — does not impair the transparency or omniscience claim, for the narrator alternates between selected omniscience and omniscience, or, to use Genette's terms, between internal focalization and zero focalization. Apart from this, this kind of narrator has been even referred to as "technically, a 'covert' incarnation of the authorial narrator."[42] Therefore, the storytelling omniscience cannot be denied: the text represents transparency at every thinkable level in order to criticize the company's promotion of total surveillance under the guise of security and care. What does it mean though for the understanding of shame if total transparency is reached through the eradication of privacy? Assuming that the goal of total transparency presupposes the abolishment of shame, is Eggers depicting a dystopian vision of a shameless and therefore dehumanized society? The following section will address these questions, foregrounding the concept of privacy as key in negotiating shame and surveillance.

5_No Privacy, No Shame

> Kids today. They have no sense of shame. They have no sense of privacy. They are show-offs, fame whores, pornographic little loons who post their diaries, their phone-numbers, their stupid poetry — for God's sake, their dirty photos! — online… They are interested only in attention…, flitting like hummingbirds from one virtual stage to another.[43]

The way Emily Nussbaum, an American television critic for *The New Yorker*, rhetorically juxtaposes the lack of shame and privacy in her cultural critique of contemporary lifestyle is important for our discussion. As mentioned earlier in the paper, there is much debate,[44] in fact, about whether shame can take place in private at all or whether it exclusively takes place in public. This dichotomy raises many questions, especially since the absence of a social setting does not automatically imply a state of privacy. Rather than presuming a strict distinction between the public and the private, it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of gradations of the public and the private.[45] There cannot be privacy that entirely excludes the social. As Sigmund Freud's idea of the super-ego and Immanuel Kant's concept of the "innere Gerichtshof" illustrate, it is the nature of shame to presuppose some sort of division. This is because even if shame seems to be prompted in secret, its internalization always involves being watched by the 'inner eye,' which ultimately remains a projection of the eyes of others.[46] Or, as Nita Lutwak and Joseph R. Ferrari put it: "The self is thought of as being observed disapprovingly by others, so that even when alone the individual feels scrutinized."[47]

A discussion on privacy and shame is triggered in the public dialogue between Mae and Bailey, one of the Wise Men, after her widely hyped misconduct. Only recently employed at the Circle, Mae is caught by SeaChange cameras when she illegally takes a kayak from a closed renting station. Mae is reproached and cornered by Bailey first *in private* until she rather quickly gives in and adopts the Circle's surveillance ideology in a commendable way. Bailey is impressed by her suitability and adaptability. She turns out to be the perfect candidate for the role they have envisaged for her. It is not by chance that Mae, the average girl, is the one who comes up with the three pillars of the company's ideology:

SECRETS ARE LIES
SHARING IS CARING
PRIVACY IS THEFT (TC 303)

Just like in George Orwell's *1984*, ideas are promoted through slogans onto which the dullness of their creator is projected. The world's voluntary — and highly uncritical — performance of transparency for the sake of total surveillance through a perfectly digitalized monopoly is glossed as outrageous. It seems to be an easy task for the powerful company to convince everyone that total transparency is something to strive for as it opens up the access to knowledge, for "knowledge is an unqualified good."[48] Mae invents these eye-catching slogans, which aptly enhance the Circle's vision, in the course of her indoctrination. Bailey makes her repeat their 'privately' held dialogue in front of the entire company and millions of viewers (TC 280–288).

The slogan "privacy is theft" taps into the linguistic proximity of *deprivation* and *privacy*. There is an interesting conflation of meaning in *taking away* (deprive) and *setting apart* (privatus), if one looks at the etymology. Both words derive from the Latin 'privatus' which means "set apart, belonging to oneself (not to the state), peculiar, personal" and is the past participle of *privare* "to separate, deprive," "to take away" which comes from privus "one's own, individual," "single."[49] Privacy, which has been long regarded as the protector of personal freedom and individuality in both Western and non-Western societies, is represented as diminishing in *The Circle*, as it creates space for secrets. There are moments in the aforementioned dialogue between Mae and Bailey when Mae tries to defend the need for private spaces:

> "But I still think there are things, even if just a few, that we want to keep to ourselves. I mean, everyone does things alone, or in the bedroom, that they're ashamed of."
> "But why should they be ashamed?"
> "Maybe not always ashamed. But things they don't want to share. That maybe they don't think people will understand. Or will change the perception of them." (TC 288)

Already in her defense of privacy, Mae starts swaying and moves away from the notion of shame, gradually complying with Bailey's shallow assumption that shame is unnecessary. Without much effort, Bailey systematically convinces her that shame is only an obstacle on the path to truth:

> "Okay, with that kind of thing, one of two things will eventually happen. First, we'll realize that whatever behavior we're talking about is so widespread and harmless that it needn't be secret. If we demystify it, if we admit that it's something we all do, then it loses its power to shock. *We move toward honesty, and we move away from shame.* Or second, and even better, if we all, as a society, decide that this is behavior we'd rather not engage in, the fact that everyone knows, or has the power to know who's doing it, this would prevent the behavior from being

engaged in. This is just as you said — you wouldn't have stolen if you knew you were being watched." (TC 288; my emphasis)

According to the corporate philosophy of Eggers's novel, the erosion of privacy prevents shame. The logic behind this assumption is that constant surveillance leads to transparency — and transparency should erase shame.[50] Surveillance is promoted as a moral regulator of disciplinary behavior in line with the basic idea of Bentham's Panopticon. The Circle's premise is that the disciplinary gaze of the surveillant eye prevents from the possible emergence of shame in situations where our behavior may be judged as inadequate, indecent or immoral.[51] Bailey's superficial assessment — and rejection — of shame is represented in the guise of a quasi-religious conviction and reveals a rather thinly veiled ideology that serves purely economic ends. The promoted shamelessness in *The Circle* obviously has a different connotation than the shamelessness for which Nussbaum reproaches today's youth. Whereas reckless self-exposure is criticized as shameless by Nussbaum, shamelessness as the result of total transparency is regarded as the highest moral goal in Eggers's dystopian novel. The way shame is represented in *The Circle*, namely as a disturbing emotion that distracts from "honesty" and truth, suggests that Mae's employer is missing out on an important aspect of the issue: moral regulation is as inherent to shame as it is to surveillance. The company's position completely ignores the fact that shame — as a moral emotion — would rather contribute to moral regulation than thwart it, as the recent endorsement of public shaming demonstrates.[52] The Circle is blinded by its demonization of privacy and secrecy; as Bailey indoctrinates Mae, he states: "Secrets are the enablers of antisocial, immoral and destructive behavior. Do you see how this is?" And he continues: "But my point is, what if we all behaved as if we were being watched? It would lead to a more moral way of life" (TC 289–290). What Bailey does not grasp is that surveillance by itself, without any 'internalization' — that is, shame — will not contribute to any moral regulation. The text makes no secret of the fact that the head of the company does not understand that surveillance in fact relies on shame. The underlying criticism here is, of course, that the hard-fought "Right to Privacy," as defended in the eponymous essay by Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis (1890), is at risk of being destroyed through the ubiquity of digital surveillance in the name of security, protection, doing good, and moral enhancement.

Eggers's novel is thus a cautionary tale about the erosion of privacy in the digital age, for the erasure of privacy and shame means the destruction of individuality. As Alan Westin contends, privacy is "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others."[53] After all, personality and individuality are formed through careful calibrations between the public and the private. In an 1890 article, two Boston lawyers, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, contended that the right to privacy is founded on a principle of "inviolate personality" which is part of the general "right to one's personality" and also the "right to be let alone."[54] In their account of the right to privacy as a legal concept, Warren and Brandeis advocated the importance of control over information of oneself. How much privacy should one give away? Negotiations between the public and the private are of paramount importance for the discourses on shame as much as on surveillance.

With his admittedly exaggerated dystopia in *The Circle*, Eggers reflects upon the current socio-cultural trend to devalue and shrink the private sphere. What's more, the powerful characters in this contemporary dystopia advocate the erasure of privacy and shame altogether for the sake of a morally perfect conduct of life. But the erasure of privacy and shame also means the erasure of inner lives. The ongoing revolutionary achievements of technology transform Mae into a desensitized machine-like being who performs transparency by default. There are only a few rare moments after Mae's brain-washing where signs of inner discomfort and suffering surface, expressed by a "black tear" inside her which is accompanied by millions of "drowning screams," indicating remainders of humanity in the protagonist:

> It was 1:11 when the blackness swept through her. Her mouth tasted acidic. She closed her eyes and saw the tear, now filled with light. She opened her eyes again. She took a swallow of water but it only seemed to heighten her panic. She checked her watchers; there were only 23,010, but she didn't want to show them her eyes, fearing they would betray her anxiety. She closed them again, which she felt would seem natural enough for a minute, after so many hours in front of the screen. *Just resting the eyes*, she typed and sent. But when she closed them again, she saw the tear, clearer now, louder now. What was the sound she was hearing? It was a scream muffled by fathomless waters, that high-pitched scream of a million drowned voices. (TC 375)

The blackness of the tear which ought to be transparent is a cynical gesture, of course, and highlights the difference between these rare — and increasingly vanishing — moments of inwardness, on the one hand, and the performance of transparency — that is,

the voluntary self-exposure of the novel's protagonist — on the other. The "drowning screams" also suggest that Mae, as the representative victim of today's omnipresence of surveillance, hears the echoes of the screaming masses. Though it does so subtly, the leitmotif of the tear reveals a direct criticism of modern surveillance society. In the majority of the novel, however, surveillance is criticized with its own means, that is, surveillance is put into question by the emphatic representation of surveillance itself. The criticism lies in the over-presentation and over-determination of surveillance.

The dystopia Eggers depicts in his novel is what Deleuze calls "control society," that is, an all-pervasive surveillance by technology in contemporary society.[55] Deleuze claims that a shift has taken place from Foucault's idea of a "disciplinary society" to a "control society" in which authority and power are diffused:[56] "Rather than a Panopticon, with a centralized focal point from which activity is surveilled, we have a diffuse matrix of information-gathering algorithms. Everything is tracked and encoded, interpreted into patterns that are either acceptable or unacceptable."[57] As a consequence, neither institutions nor individuals exercise power, but power has become an important part of the societal system, which still resonates with Deleuze's definition of "control society." However, it is the citizen's voluntary performance of transparency which has enabled the emergence of contemporary "control society." As opposed to Foucault's "disciplinary society," a "society of control" is no longer limited by institutionalized enclosures (e.g. prisons, schools, hospitals) but by continuous control.[58]

Against this backdrop, there are two important observations to be made. Although *The Circle* "reflects a political perspective on mechanisms of social control that is compatible with Deleuze's […] cautionary projections about the totalitarian future,"[59] the "control society" as defined by Deleuze is not entirely put into practice in Eggers's novel, as there is still a visible hierarchy at work here through the Wise Men, the founders of the Circle. Strictly speaking, a society of control is only reached when the surveillant eye becomes obliterated, that is, not trackable. As Deleuze writes: "We are moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication."[60] The new kind of control Deleuze describes is no longer rooted in institutions, it is ubiquitous, and not situated merely in the restricted space of disciplinary power. In *The Circle,* the superior position of the Wise Men — who (still) control individuals and therefore exercise disciplinary power — supports the idea of totalitarianism in the Orwellian tradition. When

structures of power and governance become obliterated, however, the idea of totalitarianism will also need to be revisited.

The decentralization of power in the Deleuzian society of control is important for the role of shame in surveillance discourse, too. How can shame be reassessed, if the surveilling eye can no longer be located but is rather dispersed in complex structures and networks? On the novel's last page, in the epilogue, it becomes clear that the whole world is now controlled by the Circle:

> Mae had not reached her parents in a few months now, but it would be only a matter of time. They would find each other, soon enough, in a world where everyone could know each other truly and wholly, without secrets, without shame and without the need for permission to see or to know, without the selfish hoarding of life — any corner of it, any moment of it. All of that would be, soon, replaced by a new and glorious openness, a world of perpetual light. Completion was imminent, and it would bring peace, and it would bring unity, and all that messiness of humanity until now, all those uncertainties that accompanied the world before the Circle, would be only a memory. (TC 491)

The Circle has fulfilled its mission of "closing the circle": privacy has been destroyed by the omnipresence of surveillance, there are no more secrets, no shame.

But — as discussed — no privacy and no shame would mean no individual, no citizen. The concept of privacy is key to the understanding of shame in the age of digital surveillance. As my analysis has shown, the relationship between surveillance and shame is negotiated through privacy. However, just like shame, privacy involves a range of conceptual problems. The sociologist and Microsoft researcher danah boyd is quite right in highlighting that it is difficult to come up with one single definition of privacy.[61] Along these lines it is also important to note that the shifting meaning of privacy goes hand in hand with altered conception of shame in the age of digital surveillance. boyd's study shows very well that the exhibitionism — hence, transparency — performed is selective.[62] Socializing in networked publics also means controlling what information about yourself you give away: Today's young social media users do control their performance, their visibility. Their account of privacy is navigated through a careful selection of what personal information to reveal, how to be seen; their private sphere remains intact, protecting the individual's cognitive and emotional core. In Eggers's uncompromising dystopia, however, Mae's total transparency means she cannot keep anything to herself anymore. In the novel's bleak projection of current

trends, the erosion of privacy means the destruction of shame, yet *The Circle* nonetheless makes it very clear that shamelessness through total surveillance must remain dystopian as it is a contradiction in itself.

_Endnotes

[1]   Darren Ellis, Ian Tucker, and David Harper, "The Affective Atmospheres of Surveillance," in *Theory & Psychology* 23.6 (2013), 716−731, here: 724.

[2]   Anna Minton, *Ground control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City* (London, UK: Penguin, 2009), Janet Chan, "The new lateral surveillance and a culture of suspicion," in *Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance* 10 (2008): 223−239; David Lyon, *Surveillance after September 11* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003); id. *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018), or see Max Gedig's socio-historical essay which analyses the effects of personal surveillance of the Black Panther movement, arguing that "mistrust and paranoia" were the "defining emotions": Max Gedig, "'Woke up with Death Every Morning': Surveillance Experiences of Black Panther Party Activists," in *Surveillance, Race, Culture*, eds. Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 267.

[3]   See David Lyon's short section "The Emotional Life of Surveillance," in id., *The Culture of Surveillance* (2018), 61−63.

[4]   Hille Koskela, "Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones: Empowering Exhibitionism," in *Surveillance & Society* 2.2/3 (2004): 199−215.

[5]   Lucy E. Thompson, "Vermeer's Curtain: Privacy, Slut-Shaming and Surveillance in 'A Girl Reading a Letter,'" in *Surveillance & Society* 15.2 (2017): 326−341, here 335.

[6]   These recent works have initiated an important discussion on surveillance and "public shaming," but there use of 'shaming' and 'shame' is rather undifferentiated. These concepts cannot be used interchangeably. Whereas, strictly speaking, 'shaming' means 'denouncing' or 'accusing' someone 'publicly' (which does not necessarily involve shame), 'shame' refers more broadly to the existential condition of the human being. In her essay "Vermeer's Curtain," Lucy E. Thompson, argues "for the value of art histories in developing an understanding of surveillance that is calibrated to both recognise and situate slut-shaming as a gendered form of surveillance." See Lucy E. Thompson, "Vermeer's Curtain," 326−341. Further, Daniel Trottier's recent essay "Coming to Terms with Shame: Exploring Mediated Visibility against Transgressions" deals mainly with public shaming, too. See Daniel Trottier, "Coming to Terms with Shame: Exploring Mediated Visibility against Transgressions," in *Surveillance & Society* 16.2 (2018): 170−182.

[7]   See David Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," in *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 824−842.

[8]   Jonathan Finn, "Seeing Surveillantly: Surveillance as Social Practice," in *Eyes Everywhere: The Global Growth of Camera Surveillance*, eds. Aaron Doyle et al. (London: Routledge, 2012), 67−80, here: 78.

[9]   Randolph Lewis, *Under Surveillance: Being Watched in Modern America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 55.

[10] Jean-Paul Sarte, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 282.

[11] See also Sonja Kruks, "Reading Beauvoir with and against Foucault," in *Simone de Beauvoir's Political Thinking,* eds. Lori Jo Marso and Patricia Moynagh (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 55–72, here: 63.

[12] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre — Metaphysik der Sitten. Zweiter Teil*, ed. Bernd Ludwig (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 78; Sigmund Freud, *Das Ich und das Es* (1923), in *Studienausgabe*, Vol. III: *Psychologie des Unbewußten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1975).

[13] Eric Jaffe, "Why Love Literally Hurts: Psychologists Have Discovered a Neural Link between Social and Physical Pain," in *Observer* 26.2 (2013), para 11 of 29, accessed August 11, 2018, <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/why>.

[14] Koskela, "Webcams, TV Shows" (2004), 207.

[15] See Lyon, "Surveillance Culture."

[16] Whereas the phenomenological approach is not new in shame research, surveillance has only recently associated with phenomenology. In their article "Phenomenology and Surveillance Studies: Returning to the Things Themselves," Norm Friesen, Andrew Feenberg, and Grace Smith have suggested "a re-alignment in surveillance studies," moving "from broadly Foucauldian, macro-level, structural or post-structural analyses, to the existential-phenomenological study of subjective consciousness and experience." See Normen Friesen, Andrew Feenberg, and Grace Smith, "Phenomenology and Surveillance Studies: Returning to the Things Themselves," in *The Information Society* 25 (2009), 84–90.

[17] Peter N. Stearns, *Shame. A Brief History* (Urbana/Chicago/Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017), xi.

[18] Léon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald L. Nathanson (New York/London: Guilford Press, 1987), 64–92, here: 81.

[19] Lisa Feldman Barret et al., eds., *Handbook of Emotions* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 2018), 748.

[20] "As June Price Tangney and Rhonda L. Dearing recognise, shame is a supremely 'self-conscious' emotion, and arises from our self-consciousness that others might consider our behaviour indecent, offensive or ridiculous. See June Price Tangney and Rhonda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 2002), 2. See also Lewis's influential book *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1992)*.

[21] Lisa Feldman Barret et al., eds., *Handbook of Emotions*, 748.

[22] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 81.

[23] I have shown that in Franz Kafka's early writing experiment "Beschreibung eines Kampfes" ("Description of a Struggle") "two opposed and morally conflicting cases of shame" are at work: "first, agonistic shame (understood as shame revealing the desire of wanting to be seen) in the context of narcissism, envy, and 'Schaulust' or scopophilia; and second, shame as a moral censor of agonistic behaviour that in turn challenges the competitive aspect of the desire to be seen." See Betiel Wasihun, "To Be Seen: Shame in Kafka's *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*," in *Modern Language Review* 110 (2015): 704–723.

[24] Not necessarily meant in the sense of shame's positive effect in terms of moral regulation which is inspired by Aristotle. Based on this assumption, for example, environmentalist Jennifer Jacquet argues provocatively in her widely received book *Is Shame Necessary* that "shaming — exposing a transgressor to public disapproval" can be employed as a "tool" directed to corporations and governments to elicit moral behaviour. See Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary: New Uses for an Old Tool* (New York: Vintage, 2016).

[25]   Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame*: *The Faces of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

[26]   Deonna, Rodogno, Teroni, *In Defense of Shame*, 129.

[27]   Astrid Schmidt-Burkhardt, "The All-Seer: God's Eye as Proto-Surveillance," in *CTRL [SPACE] — Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother,* eds. Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 16−31.

[28]   David Lyon, "Surveillance and the Eye of God," in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27/1 (2014): 21−32, here 25.

[29]   Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," in *British Journal of Sociology* 51.4 (2000), 605−622.

[30]   Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan, and Bert-Jaap Koops, "Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation," in *Philosophy & Technology* 30.1 (2017): 9−37, here 11−12.

[31]   Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance. A Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 2013.

[32]   Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 20−21. In the following, this novel will be cited with the abbreviation TC and page number in brackets after the respective quotation.

[33]   In the pamphlet "Angriff auf die Freiheit," Ilija Trojanow and Julie Zeh draw attention to the danger of surveillance as an end in itself — "Überwachung als Selbstzweck" — and surveillance for the sake of surveillance under the aegis of care. Ilija Trojanow and Julie Zeh, *Angriff auf die Freiheit: Sicherheitswahn, Überwachungsstaat und der Abbau bürgerlicher Rechte* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009), 98−99.

[34]   Ellen Ullman, "Ring of Power," review of *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, in *New York Times* (November 1, 2013), accessed August 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/books/review/the-circle-by-dave-eggers.html>.

[35]   See also Virginia Pignagnoli's "Surveillance in Post-Postmodern American Fiction: Dave Eggers's *The Circle*, Jonathan Franzen's *Purity*, and Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*," in *Space of Surveilance: States and Selves*, eds. Susan Fynn, Antonia Mackay (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 151−167.

[36]   As also Szilvia Gellai writes, there is no equivalent translation for "der gläserne Mensch" in English: "So wurde bereits der Gläserne Mensch des Dresdner Hygienemuseums von 1930 schlicht als Transparent Man bezeichnet. Die mangelnde Adäquatheit der Übersetzung blieb nicht unbemerkt: "The German description 'Gläserner Mensch' is far better suited to show the symbolic and the quite ambivalent characteristics than the conventional translation 'Transparent Man.'" See Szilvia Gellai, "Der gläserne Mensch in Dave Eggers' *The Circle*," in *Technisierte Lebenswelt. Über den Prozess der Figuration von Mensch und Technik*, eds. Marie-Hélène Adam et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 289−308, here: 291.

[37]   Steve Mann, "Sousveillance: Inverse Surveillance in Multimedia Imaging," in *ACM Multimedia* (2004), 620−627.

[38]   Rachel Hall*, The Transparent Traveler: The Perform*ance and *Culture of Airport Security* (Durham/New York: Duke University Press, 2015), 111.

[39]   Hall, *The Transparent Traveler*, 9.

[40]   Paul Dawson, "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction," in *NARRATIVE* 17.2 (May 2009), 143−161, here; 143.

41 Manfred Jahn, "Narrative Situations," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman et al. (London: Routledge, 2005), 364–366, here: 364.

42 Jahn, "Narrative Situations," 364.

43 Emily Nussbaum, "Say Everything — Kids, the Internet, and the End of Privacy: The Greatest Generation Gap Since Rock and Roll," in *New York Magazine* (February 12, 2007), 2.

44 See for example Deonna et al., *In Defense of Shame*, or Alba Montes Sánchez, "Social Shame Versus Private Shame: A Real Dichotomy?" *PhaenEx*, 8.1 (2013): 28–58.

45 See Wasihun, "To Be Seen."

46 See Wasihun, "To Be Seen," 712–713.

47 Nita Lutwak and Joseph R. Ferrari, "Moral Affect and Cognitive Processes: Differentiating Shame from Guilt among Men and Women," in *Personality and Individual Differences* 21.6 (1996): 891–896, here: 891.

48 Marina Ludwigs, "The Posthuman Turn in Dave Eggers' *The Circle*," in *Anthropoetics* XXI.1 (Fall 2015).

49 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2018, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

50 "[…] you behave differently when you know you're being watched" (TC 280).

51 See Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*, 2.

52 See for example Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary*.

53 Allan F. Westin, *Privacy and Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 7.

54 Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy," in *Harvard Law Review* 4 (1890): 193–220, here: 195, 215.

55 Gilles Deleuze, "Postskriptum über die Kontrollgesellschaft," in id., *Unterhandlungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 243–253.

56 Deleuze, "Postskriptum über die Kontrollgesellschaft."

57 Cameron Crain, "Living in a Society of Control," accessed August 11, 2018, <http://www.mantle thought.org/philosophy/living-society-control>.

58 See also Betiel Wasihun, "Kafka, Orwell, and Ulrich Peltzer's post 9/11 novel *Teil der Lösung,*" in *Seminar* (special issue on *Surveillance*) 52.4 (2016): 382–406, here: 401.

59 Ludwigs, "The Posthuman Turn," 134.

60 Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," trans. Martin Joughin, in id., *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169–176, here: 174.

61 danah boyd, *It's Complicated. The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven et al.: Yale University Press, 2014), 59.

62 boyd, *It's Complicated*, 76.