



The Surveillant Assemblage: A Critical Reading of Dave Eggers' The Circle As Today's Dystopia Onur EKLER*

Abstract

Surveillance studies have gained momentum in today's societies. These studies have put forward various theorems on surveillance since the states and/or corporations' purposes of monitoring people are nebulous and open to discussion. However, the dystopian aspect of surveillance holds a common ground in most of these studies. No doubt, they have a fair share in their discussion since the growing fear of surveillance societies deeply instilled in the worlds of the futuristic-dystopian fiction has become a fact of our present world. That is, surveillance society has become today's dystopia. Unlike the Foucauldian panopticon, surveillance in today's society is relatively more complex and decentralized. This kind of surveillance is, what Haggerty and Ericson call, "the surveillant assemblage". Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013) is perhaps one of the best examples that portray it blatantly. As it shows us the complexities of the surveillant assemblage used by a Corporation, called as the Circle, it also portrays its role to destroy individual zone—by making them the willing agents to expose themselves to full transparency. This will eventually lead to the demise of the individual. With this purpose in mind, this research article examines Dave Eggers's *The Circle* as today's dystopia by giving utmost consideration to Haggerty and Ericson's theory of surveillant assemblage and its discontents.

Keywords: assemblage, surveillance, panopticon, dystopia, Eggers

Gözetim Asamblajı: Bugünün Distopyası Olarak Dave Eggers'in The Circle Adlı Romanı Üzerine Eleştirel Bir Okuma

Özet

Günümüz toplumlarında gözetim üzerine yapılan çalışmalar giderek ivme kazanmıştır. Devletlerin ve / veya şirketlerin insanları izleme amaçları belirsiz ve tartışmaya açık olması bakımından bu çalışmalar, gözetim üzerine çeşitli teoremler ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, gözetimin distopik yönü bu çalışmaların çoğunda ortak bir zemin oluşturmaktadır. Şüphesiz, futuristik-distopik kurguların dünyalarına derinden aşılana gözetim toplumlarına yönelik artan korku günümüz dünyasının bir gerçeği haline geldiğinden, bu hususla ilgili haklılık paylarının olduğu aşikârdır. Başka bir deyişle, gözetim toplumu bugünün distopyası haline gelmiştir. Foucault'nun panoptikon fikrinin aksine, günümüz toplumundaki gözetim nispeten daha karmaşık ve merkeziyet dışıdır. Bu tür bir gözetimi, Haggerty ve Ericson "gözetim asamblajı" olarak adlandırmaktadır. Dave Eggers'in *Çember* (2013) adlı eseri bu çeşit bir gözetimi yansıtan en güzel örneklerden biridir. Bu roman, bize Çember olarak adlandırılan bir şirketin kullandığı gözetim asamblajının karmaşıklığını gösterdiği gibi— bireylerin kendilerini tam şeffaflığa maruz bırakmaya istekli ajanlar haline getirerek—gözetim asamblajının bireysel alanı yok etmedeki rolünü çok iyi resmeder. Bu durum, en nihayetinde bireyin yok olmasına neden

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olmaktadır. Bu araştırma makalesi, Haggerty ve Ericson'ın "gözetim assemblajı" teorisine ve hoşnutsuzluklarına odaklanarak Dave Eggers'in *Çember* adlı eserini günümüzün distopyası olarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: assemblaj, gözetim, panoptikon, distopya, Eggers.

Introduction

In a recent research conducted by Bhattacharyya et al. it is found out that some killed cells send some 'necrosignals' to the surviving cells to develop a sort of adaptive resistance against the harmful attacks (2020, p.3). Thanks to this alarming system, the surviving cells make enough time to take some preventive actions against those lethal attacks. Considering this vital function of the dead cells, one might not be wrong if one makes a comparison between the function of dystopian fiction and the 'necrosignalling' function of the dead cells. As 'necrosignalling' has a vital function for the body-defense mechanism as a last warning cry for the still-survivor cells in the body, so does dystopian fiction for the social body. By creating fictional worlds that are under possible threats that humans can face, dystopian fiction sends some alarming cries to its readers to take necessary actions before it is too late. Similar to the alarming cry of the killed cells, dystopian fiction sends some necrosignals to readers to develop an adaptive or preventive resistance against the possible human-induced or natural catastrophes. As an important researcher on dystopian studies, Sisk suggests the readers of the dystopian fiction to take those signals into consideration—rather than losing faith in the reading process—and also to find some strength to change these stifling conditions at hand (1997, p.11). The fact is that Sisk's advice seems to be due past since the future world of the dystopian fiction has become today's world. The growing fear of the mechanization and technology of the dehumanizing societal control of the future community—as one can find in Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World* or H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*—that tries to retain full authority over such values as privacy, autonomy, individuality has become today's matter. Today's technological apparatuses are so advanced that it is possible to monitor all aspects of life and to anticipate the possible acts of people even before they get into action. Obrien's famous speech on surveillance in Orwell's *1984* is noteworthy to mention. In this speech, he implies that today's world is the one where there is no darkness and open to full transparency (Orwell, 2020, p.78). It is what may be called "today's dystopia" where decentralized surveillance technologies—"the surveillant assemblage (2000, p.609)" in Haggerty and Ericson's terms—leave no room for privacy by tracking people everywhere with ease. Unlike the panopticon way of monitoring people by force for such purposes as discipline and punishment as it is evident in Orwell's *1984*, people in today's dystopia have no complaints of being monitored. They are even willing to self-monitor themselves by exposing their most private moments to public zones.

Dave Eggers's *The Circle* is one of the most dramatic examples for the readers of this kind of dystopia. Published in 2013, the novel was a howling success. Yet,

this success was shaded by some supposed allegations made by Kate Loose, a former Facebook employee. She claimed the plagiaristic aspect of Eggers's novel, drawing some parallelism to her memoir, called *The Boy Kings* (Baker, 2013). Upon those strong allegations, Eggers defends himself, claiming that he had never heard of Loose's memoir (Ha, 2013).

Putting those claims aside, it is fair to give credit to the artistic aspect of the novel in its discussion of the eponymous company's dystopic intentions. Suspending readers' judgement—at least to some point in the novel, readers are made to believe the perfection of the community which is structured to make its members and customers to have the utmost happiness and pleasure. However, the motive to please makes the company—the Circle—sound like a utopian one. The readers slip the company's mask off through the implications in the narrative that its members are unconsciously conditioned to conform to the system. In this process, its subjects are brainwashed to be the parts of the collective body, exposing themselves to full transparency. Their gradual reduction to cyborgs—this is what is clearly observable in the case of Mae Holland, the protagonist of the novel—losing their empathy, souls, families, friends, above all, their privacy which is thought to damage the system. In *the Circle*, it is what Eggers warns readers about today's world, the citizens of which turn into soulless robots. In this respect, this article aims to critically read Dave Eggers' *The Circle* by mainly focusing on a much more layered character of Haggerty and Ericson's Theory of "The Surveillant Assemblage" in building today's dystopia.

1. Haggerty and Ericson's Theory of "The Surveillant Assemblage"

Surveillance as a term etymologically stems from 'sur' (from above) and veillance (to watch) (M. Galič et al., 2017, p.10). With the rising technology and modernization, surveillance has become far more pervasive due to its strategic efficacy to retain societal control. Its practice and function have changed greatly over time, depending on the changing dynamics of the period. Earlier practices of surveillance were mainly for disciplining and punishing the subjects to make people docile and controllable in the public. This kind of surveillance has been applied to many institutions, among the most famous ones of which are prisons due to Foucault's groundbreaking theory of panopticism. Although Jeremy Bentham first phrased prison-panopticon, it is Foucault who made it worldwide known. In his study on prisons, Foucault observes the cycle of power-relations in the triangulation of panopticism: supervision, control, and correction (Foucault, 2002, 70). As Güven argues, Foucault's panopticism is a soul-training regime that aims to regulate and discipline the society (2021, p.40). Özsert similarly features the disciplining aspect of the Foucauldian panopticism on the bodies in a visible setting (2022, p.515). Foucault's realization of the power of surveillance exerted on the prisoners pushed him further to question the applicability of the panoptic surveillance across different institutions such as factories, schools, and religious places. Ledoux's utopian plan of panoptic-structural designs to discipline and control people is not what Foucault

has in his mind (Foucault, 1975, p.173). It is the disciplinary gaze, not the structure that should be applied to every corner of life to create a society of control (p.174). Thanks to this disciplinary gaze, unwanted behaviors of individuality, disorder, chaos, confusion can be prevented at different institutions. Foucauldian panoptic gaze is a kind of inspector that is invisible but immanent. The subjects feel under the constant threat of being gazed, which makes them avoid from some individuals acts that might potentially harm the authority. Orwell's Big Brother is metaphorically regarded as the embodiment of the panoptic surveillance. His existence is dubious in the novel, but he is the face of the governing Party (Orwell, 2020, p.196). He is omnipresent and also non-existent. The repeatedly used expression "*Big Brother is watching you!* (p.3)" haunts the citizens of Oceania in a way to keep them away from the undesired individualistic energy which is potentially dangerous for the system. This kind of power is centripetal, hierarchal and dualistic. Its main goal is to sustain societal control at all costs. Although Foucauldian surveillance might have been an effective method to create a disciplinary society in such totalitarian states as Oceania, it is not functional and applicable in today's world. As Haggarty and Ericson remark, Foucault's focus on the 18th and 19th century surveillance methods have caused him to fall behind from observing the contemporary surveillance technologies (2000, p.607). With an implicit reference to Foucauldian surveillance, Lyon also states that "*Big Brother is the wrong metaphor for surveillance today* (2018, p.1)." He argues that today's revolutionary computer technologies and stunning consumerism are the determining factors that play a vital role in adopting a new kind of surveillance (p.1). Lyon highlights how today's social dynamics have changed surveillance greatly by referring to the difference between traditional and contemporary surveillance: "*Not only being watched but watching itself has become a way of life. [...]. Today's surveillance is made possible by our own clicks on websites, our texting messages and exchanging photos...*(p.2)."

Today's surveillance has removed the strict barrier between the gazer and the gazed. Unlike the hierarchal power relations of the Foucauldian surveillance, today's surveillance is horizontal, decentralized and rhizomic in Deleuze's term. What Deleuze singles out for attention in his "Postscript on Societies of Control" is that the Foucauldian disciplinary societies give way for societies of control since in today's world, as Deleuze argues, power relations are free-floating and nomadic (1992, p.4). They move beyond the spaces of closures, mainly observed by Foucault (p.4). He suggests that societies of control have mobile institutions that can adapt to changing conditions in the ceaselessly continuous network of relations in the capitalistic world (p.6). School, factory, army, family are no longer the closed circuits, or embodied spaces but deformable, transformable coded units like corporations (p.6). Likewise, there are no longer individuals but "dividuals" or digits easily detectable by computers showing one's position at any given time (p.5). Surveillance is everywhere in the societies of control by continuously

assembling various units together in the free-flowing market of capitalism. This is what Haggerty and Ericson term as “the surveillant assemblage” (2000, p.606). Their study is philosophically grounded on Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of assemblage. Building on this theory, they try to shed light on the contemporary surveillance methods. For Haggerty and Ericson, the surveillant assemblage, the boundaries of which are indiscernible, is multiple and mobile (p.609). They argue that this kind of surveillance is a rhizomic one. If rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari define, grows like the offshoots of weeds through ceaseless ruptures and connections at different places without having a beginning or an end (1997, p.9), Haggerty and Ericson obviously assume the interconnection between rhizome and today’s surveillance deserves more attention. There is no central agency or system which functions as the surveillant assemblage. It is the coalescence of the corporeal and incorporeal bodies. These heterogeneous entities that come together reveal a huge surveillance data regarding the target. Haggerty and Ericson compare it to an interface where tangible and intangible things (bodies, digits, visual and audial records, written documents) are brought together to obtain everything about the target (2000, p.611). They contextualize it with examples referring to the integrated network of surveillance used in the regional Police department in Central Scotland (p.611). They also exemplify the surveillant assemblage with the use of electronic bracelets for infants and the implanted microchips for pets (p.611). Thanks to the multi-functional aspect of these devices, it is possible to have a thorough surveillance of the target ranging from health monitoring, security issues, GPS-tracking to habits of consumption. Particularly in the capitalist society where people are reduced to consumers, tracking consumer’s habits is an important asset. Haggerty and Ericson feature the significance of the surplus information acquired through today’s surveillant technologies in creating consumer’s profile (p.616). M. Galič et al. similarly highlight the use of surveillance in determining consumption patterns (2017, p.22). Thus, surveillance has become easily accessible and thus becoming more valuable in the capitalist economy since data flows have become horizontal, not hierarchal any longer. Moreover, surveillance is not by force. People are aware of being constantly monitored. They even monitor themselves, by voluntarily sharing their privacy and data with other people. Lyon repeatedly suggests that people have little or no knowledge of how and to what effect the collected data is used (2018, p.81). Through people’s likes or dislikes in the social media, through their tweets, comments on various things, or through the photos they have shared online, the corporations can create personalized products and feed them through filter bubbles and make them be charmed by these enticing products, flashing every second on the web page. Doctorow’s illustration of how Facebook can get you to buy some products by sniffing your personal data is noteworthy to understand this case (2021, p.11). People perhaps think that they are free to buy, but these flashy products, designed according to the personal data collected through consumer surveillance, overwhelm their perception. As Haggerty and Ericson well

portray the surveillance society with a brilliant slogan: “*Humans are born free, and are immediately electronically monitored* (2000, p.611)”. Duncan points out a similar concern. She argues that humans are under surveillance everywhere since smart technological devices such as CCTVs, drones, data-driven devices, satellites, micro-chips occupy every corner of their lives (2019, p.54). However, these devices are widely used and welcome. The majority does not find them irritating or harassing, on the contrary, they find them very functional. Lyon mentions that let alone corporation or states, even ordinary people appeal to surveillance for benign purposes such as monitoring particularly the elders suffering from Alzheimer or dementia through tracking chips (2018, p.90). Laurent’s remarks on the shift from macro-surveillance (monitoring social groups for disciplinary purposes through coercive methods) to under-surveillance (self-monitoring for various purposes) corroborate Lyon’s argument since people are willing to use such devices for self-monitoring in today’s surveillance society (2021, p.186). For example, they use phones to record their blood pressure or daily steps. She further exemplifies the surveillance practices during the pandemic to trace people for health care (2021, 186). Schneier calls it “a very intimate form of surveillance (2015, p.1).” Schneier argues that phones, computers that people interact with can form personal data (p.1). Thanks to this, people can be monitored easily since their hobbies, interests, religious and political views, and also their shopping tendencies are open to access. Companies can even send them some advertisements related to the stores near their current locations (p.2). Schneier is right to question why people allow governments and companies to have mass surveillance over them (p.4). His answer to this question is the fear-relieving aspect of surveillance. Thanks to mass surveillance, as Schneier argues, people do not need to fear from bad guys or dark secrets since all eyes are everywhere (p.4). Similarly, Lyon argues that people get used to living under surveillance. It bothers people no more, if anything it is attractive because the “nothing-to-hide-nothing-to-fear” phrase is comforting for people (2018, p.91). It is obvious that surveillance has changed face over time. Lyon states that surveillance was associated with the fearful image of the Big Brother in the past, but now the services provided by surveillance technologies make life easier and more comfortable (p.91).

Most people tend to favor a more transparent society, the subjects of which are accountable for every act they have despite the classes they belong to. The principle of transparency might help to break the line between the watchers and the ones being watched. In utopian sense, people can avoid from committing crimes for fear of being caught under constant surveillance. However, too much exposure to transparency can turn it into a dystopian state. It is susceptible to corruption as it is evident in Snowden’s case. His disclosures of how corporations and governments manipulate the notion of transparency accompanied by mass surveillance have dropped like a bombshell. Eggers talks about the Snowden case in an interview in 2013 and shows his suspicion over surveillance: “*Think back to all the messages*

you have ever sent. All the phone calls and searches you've made. Could any of them be misinterpreted? [...] This is the most pernicious and soul-shattering aspect of where we are right now. No one knows for sure what is being collected, recorded, analysed and stored – or how all this will be used in the future¹ (Eggers, 2013)."

Some people have begun to realize that surveillance today is a sweet poison. Their privacy is under siege everywhere. Their personal data is shared freely online or sold to companies to create consumer surveillance about them. This shows how destructive transparency may be in the wrong hands. Maria Los tries to show her readers the terrifying face of surveillance when she has realized her "data double" online. She is quite surprised at having a great pile of personal information assembled only with one click (2006, p.78). It may not be wrong to generalize her case since her shocking experience in her confrontation with her virtual body reduced to a great pile of data exactly shows what makes today's dystopia different from the dystopic totalitarian state depicted in Orwell's *1984*. Unlike the suppressive apparatuses of the dictatorial regimes that aim to control the social body by destroying the individual acts of the citizens, the citizens themselves have voluntarily built today's dystopia out of ignorance by fully exposing them to full transparency. This brings us back to the aforementioned discussion of Deleuzian societies of control. Surveillance is beyond the closed territories. It is deterritorialized. As Bogard claims, this tragic fact evidently shows the power of the surveillant assemblages (2006, p.97). The benign services of surveillance shade its dark side. It is too late when people realize that it is a vital threat to their privacy. With this background on the theoretical underpinnings of the surveillant assemblage, the following section will turn toward the critical analysis of Dave Eggers' *The Circle*, one of the most salient examples of today's dystopia since the surveillant assemblage is all in display here.

2. The Surveillant Assemblage and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* as Today's Dystopia

The Circle (2013), most acclaimed novel by Dave Eggers, draws attention to the dark side of the surveillant assemblage. As Atwood mentions in her review on *The Circle*, Eggers's book like a mirror is held up to today's people in order to show them the perils of a complete transparency aimed by the corporations through the latest surveillance technologies². Eggers's *The Circle* is not a dystopia in the traditional sense. There is no tyranny or oppression that aim to suppress the individual acts. Today's dystopia is, as Baskin states in his review, a totally transparent world where people are quite willing to sacrifice even their most private

¹ D. Eggers, 'US writers must take a stand on NSA surveillance', The Guardian, 19 December 2013, at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/19/dave-eggers-uswriters-take-stand-nsa-surveillance/>

² https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/eggers-circle-when-privacy-is-theft/?lp_txn_id=1479243

moments³. Eggers's *The Circle* depicts such a seemingly utopian world, the slogans of which are “*Secrets are Lies*”, “*Sharing is Caring*” and “*Privacy is Theft*” (Eggers, 2013, p.303). However, Lyon argues that unlike Orwell's frightful slogans in *1984*, Eggers intentionally uses such seemingly benign slogans to make some subtle implications for a dystopian world (2006, p.176). These slogans implying on full transparency in the society may sound fair and virtuous, but there is a growing fear and suspicion over the prospect of losing one's privacy in the long run. In this respect, Eggers's *The Circle* does not aim to warn readers about the future. It pictures today's dystopia where the unconscious invasion of people's privacy is all in display by the corporations' latest surveillance technologies. In an interview when he was asked to comment on the overall impact of the novel on people, he says; “I think we're already engaged in a constant and meaningful examination of how the available technology is affecting us⁴” (Eggers, 2013). In the novel, Eggers tries to draw attention to how people have been unconsciously fooled and conditioned by the comforts and luxuries of the surveillance culture to the extent that they can easily give up their most private moments. He says; “in an exchange for “freedom,” in an exchange for “free things,” we allow ourselves to be spied on” (Bex et al., 2015, p.554). In other words, Eggers critically sheds light on the demise of privacy in the digitalized communities where all eyes are everywhere.

Eggers's *The Circle* is beyond the Foucauldian panopticism contrary to some critical evaluations of the novel. As Beckman suggests, it negotiates “tensions between power and control” (2020, p.528). Däwes, another critic on Eggers's *The Circle*, corroborates this argument claiming that it is “a timely example of participatory dataveillance” (2020, p.107). Although Eggers's treatment of the post-panoptic surveillance sounds utopic in the novel, it has, as Herman also points out, some negative implications on its frightful power that lurk deep inside its seemingly utopian face. Eggers wants readers to slip the utopian masks off by drawing their attention to the tragic experiences of Mae Holland, the protagonist of the novel, who has just got a position in an online tech-corporation called Circle. Circle as the title of the company implies perfection in all aspects. Through the surveillance technologies, the company aims to idealize a seemingly just society based on such principles as transparency, accountability. Transparency is multi-dimensional and all encompassing in the novel. It is obvious to see it even in the structural design of the company made of full glass. The building's stunning transparency has made Mae feel amazed and shocked. Although she is amazed by the heavenly appearance of the company, she feels overwhelmed by its omnipotent presence. She feels in that way particularly when she gets on an elevator of glass that can make id-

³ <https://thepointmag.com/criticism/the-circle/>

⁴ Claire Gutierrez. “Behind the Cover Story: Dave Eggers on Imagining the Future World of Over-Sharing,” *The New York Times*, September 28th, 2013.

recognition (Eggers, 2013, p.5). Her seriously concerned mood—though she makes fun of it—foreshadows the ominous whirlpool of surveillance she is drawn to.

The Circle is founded as a unified operating system by the so-called the Three Wise Men: Ty, Stenton, and Bailey. It functions as an integrated network that assembles multiple online networks under its umbrella by using some latest surveillance technological devices. One of them is the TruYou account, thanks to which people can do multiple things with one click: *“There were no more passwords, no multiple identities. Your devices knew who you were, and your one identity—the TruYou, unbendable and unmaskable—was the person paying, signing up, responding, viewing and reviewing, seeing and being seen. [...] One button for the rest of your life online (2013, p.21).”* Although TruYou account seems to offer some comforts and security for people, as Jarvis argues, it reduces people to traceable and easily predictable “surveillance assets” (2019, p.277). The companies can easily make the behavioral analysis of their potential customers by collecting surplus personalized data about them. As Zuboff fairly states; *“surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of human experience” (2019, p.6)*. Another important surveillance device is SeeChange, introduced by Bailey in the great hall, located in the Enlightenment. It is a small, wearable camera in lollipop size that gives people constant access to everywhere at an instant. Bailey introduces it with some humanitarian purposes, claiming that it will stop any attack on democracy because of transparency and accountability, facilitated by SeeChange cameras (Eggers, 2013, p.67). *“All that happens must be known (p.67)”* is a slogan that sheds light on the Circle’s seemingly utopian but perilous vision. To show the benefits of the SeeChange, he exemplifies the case of his mother. However, this example ironically foreshadows the terrifying aspect of the surveillance particularly when his mum’s inappropriate moments appear on cam (p.68). Bailey is a blind man blinded by the blinding light of the transparency. He says; *“we will become all-seeing and all-knowing” (p.70)*. He never wants to face the stark reality regarding the invasion of privacy. Another instance of his passionate adherence to transparency is seen when Annie gives her reasons about the impossibility of deleting Francis’s recording of his sexual moments with Mae in the Circle cloud: *“You know I can’t. We don’t delete here, Mae. Bailey would freak. He’d weep. It hurts him personally when anyone even considers the deleting of any information. It’s like killing babies, he says. You know that (p.204).”*

Mae is initially bothered by too much transparency and over-connectedness in the collective body of the Circle. To escape from all these things, she goes kayaking and finds some peace alone at sea. She does not want to know or be known at first. As the narrator says; *“she didn’t think too much about any of it. It was enough to be aware of the million permutations possible around her, and take comfort in knowing she would not, and really could not, know much at all (p.270)”*.

Yet, later in the novel, in her talk to Bailey upon her unauthorized use of the kayaks, monitored by the seechange cameras thereabouts, she is overwhelmed by Bailey's Socratic questioning on why transparency is good for the prevention of crimes. She has begun to get more involved in the Circle activities and to enjoy all the benefits offered to her and her family. By wearing SeeChange camera around her neck, She has sacrificed her privacy for the sake of popularity in the Circle. She willingly participates into the vortex of surveillance. She has changed greatly from a victimized subject to a volunteered guardian of the perilous surveillance of the Circle. She ignores the warnings of Mercer, her ex-boyfriend, and Ty, one of three wise men disguised as Kalden against the dangers of the complete transparency caused by the surveillant assemblage that the Circle has used. At one time, Mercer talks to Mae about the terrifying surveillance that monitors people everywhere: "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 (p.131)." Mercer calls it "dorky" (p.132). He is aware of the dire consequences of the complete transparency on people's private spheres. In a letter he sent to Mae in another part of the novel, he states that she and her company try to create "a world of ever-present daylight", which will eventually destroy the human nature (p.430-431). Mercer implies that the Circle plays God.

Mae, not wanting to see such concerns, blames Mercer for becoming asocial. Mercer fairly defends his position, accusing the digital environment with some artificial social needs that turn humans to addictive consumers (p.134). Moreover, Mercer draws her attention to the use of surveillance as a tool for blackmailing. He pushes her to question how some politicians or bloggers who speak against the monopoly of the Circle have been trapped in "some terrible sex-porn-witchcraft controversy" (p.259). Because of his aggressive position towards a transparent world idealized by the Circle, Mae feels deeply sick of Mercer, calling him paranoid (p.260). To Mercer, Mae is blinded by such utopian services of the Circle as TruYou, SeeChange, the health-monitoring program, the use of microchips for the prevention of child-abduction, the LuvLuv project for the perfect matching, the weapon-sensor program, Soul-search, the PastPerfect program for helping people learn about their past. To seclude himself from the corrosive effects of the Circle's surveillance, he escapes into the deeps of the forest in order not to be part of, what Ateş calls, the matrix of simulacra that imprisons humans into virtual reality (2023, p.128). As Dinç argues, in today's dystopia, man's ignoring of the the fact of interdependence between man and nature is terrifying (2023, p.154). Mercer is conscious of the organic connection between man and nature. That is why he disappears leaving a letter to Mae. His fair argument in the letter is worthwhile to note. He says; "surveillance shouldn't be the tradeoff for any goddamn service we get" (Eggers, 2013, p.367). In his letter, he also expresses how her parents are exhausted by too much transparency and how happy he feels to turn some cameras

off at home. As he says: “If you saw your parents, and your mom gave you this note, then you saw the effect all your stuff has had on them. [...]. I helped them cover some of the cameras. I even bought the fabric. I was happy to do it. They don’t want to be smiled upon, or frowned upon, or zinged. They want to be alone. And not watched (p.367).”

To show Mercer how powerful the surveillance network of the Circle is, Mae uses the Soul-search program through which they can locate anyone anywhere in the world. It is a rhizomic surveillance that can have eyes everywhere. Mae marks Mercer a target to spot by sharing his photo online. For Mae and Many other Circlers, it is just a game, but for Mercer a matter of life and death. The pursuit game led him to his death. His death exactly shows the destructive power of the Circle’s surveillance technology particularly on those who do not submit their will to authority. What is more striking is her desensitized mood towards the things happening around. The death of her ex-boy friend, Annie’s mental breakdown, her parents’ sick of transparent life because of the Circle’s stifling surveillance give no discomfort to her. For her, what ~~it~~ really matters is likes, dislikes, comments, smiling, frowning.

Kalden, like Mercer, is another character who is really aware of the dangers of the complete transparency and tries to warn Mae against it. Even though he (Ty disguised as Kalden) is one of the power holders that aim to symbolically complete the circle or to create a perfect transparent society where everyone can be tracked everywhere, Kalden has a foresight of the upcoming dangers on privacy and wants to stop it before it is too late. Despite his position, he fears from the system he has helped to create. Because of Mae’s influence on her followers, Kalden thinks of Mae as the possible savior. However, Mae accuses him of being a spy working for another company: “Why do you care? If you don’t like it, why don’t you leave? I know you’re some spy for some other company. Or Williamson. Some loony anarchist politician” (p.401). Mae unaware of what the completion of the Circle actually means still adheres to it by heart. As Jarvis argues, by controlling the elections through demoxie, and introducing its own currency, the Circle will complete the circle and dominate every sphere of life by making total surveillance possible (2019, p.278). Eggers uses a striking metaphor to show the blindness of the Circlers including Mae. He compares the Circle to a shark circling around the tank eating on its preys till nothing is left. Gouck associates the shark metaphor with the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg in *the Great Gatsby*, arguing that they are both blind but all seeing (2018, p.58). This metaphor exactly shows the destructive aspect of total surveillance on every part of society whether high or low.

Conclusion

Eggers’ *The Circle* presents us today’s dystopia. People’s fervent adherence to social media, their too much obsession with likes, dislikes, smiles, frowns, their willing participation into the transparent world by sharing their private moments

and also their consumerism are exactly what we have witnessed today. Even though there is not a totalized surveillance system yet that would dominate all spheres of life, some companies may try to create e-consumer-profiles as the Circle does, by collecting the surplus data from different social media channels. As Zuboff argues, the surplus data possibly acquired from the Facebook profiles, which people willingly feed through self-surveillance, can be used to shape the individual behaviors (2019, p.5).

People like Mae in today's world want to be seen and are listless to the perils of surveillance. They willingly create their data-doubles easily traceable, controllable and shapeable in the capitalist world. They all want to play God, all-present and all-powerful. This tragic situation in which people are involved is well summarized by an ex-priest when he shares a drink with Mae and Francis at a bar: *"Now all humans will have the eyes of God. You know this passage? 'All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of God.' [...] 'Now we're all God. Every one of us will soon be able to see, and cast judgment upon, every other. We'll see what He sees. We'll articulate His judgment. We'll channel His wrath and deliver His forgiveness. On a constant and global level (Eggers, 2013, p.395)."*

However utopian it sounds, *The Circle* is in fact dystopic as Lyon states (2018, p.188). Eggers makes an irony of this utopian vision by implying that this system will turn each a willing prisoner in the eye of another. Mercer implies that people's desire to play God is a foolish act. As he says in his questioning: *"Did you ever think that perhaps our minds are delicately calibrated between the known and the unknown? That our souls need the mysteries of night and the clarity of day? You people are creating a world of ever-present daylight, and I think it will burn us all alive (Eggers, 2013, p.430)."*

Mercer's concern should be read as a warning for today's people since the transparent world, which they have happily built over time, will consume them as the shark hunts its preys in the tank in *The Circle*.

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Çatışma beyanı: Makalenin yazarı, bu çalışma ile ilgili taraf olabilecek herhangi bir kişi ya da finansal ilişkileri bulunmadığını dolayısıyla herhangi bir çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.