Brave New Humans and Incongruous Bodysuits: On Surveillance and its Modes in Dave Eggers' *The Every* (2021)

1. In 2021, American novelist and journalist Dave Eggers published *The Every*, the sequel of the critically-acclaimed *The Circle* (2013), itself adapted to the cinema in 2017. *The Circle* follows the rise of Mae Holland in the ranks of the eponymous corporation – the world's largest internet company – and her gradual embrace of its transparency ideology. Ten years later, she has become the CEO of the corporation, now called the Every and "the richest company the world had ever known" after it has acquired "an ecommerce behemoth named after a South American jungle" (Eggers 2021, 4-5). The sequel centres on Delaney Wells, whose first name means "dark challenger" in Irish, and who has vowed to "finish" the "malignant reign" of the corporation through sabotage (454, 20). The opening pages follow a determined but doubt-ridden Delaney as she makes her way into the tightly-sealed campus of the Every. Her infiltration masterplan, however, threatens to collapse in the face of the incongruous, namely the shiny lycra bodysuits worn by the Every employees, which leave little to the imagination as far as the latter's anatomy is concerned.

2. Delaney's reactions, manifested in the text by dialogue interruptions, and involuntary eruptions in body language and speech, testify to emotional disruption. They magnify the shock that readers of this near-future dystopia are supposed to experience on discovering what lies ahead if surveillance capitalism is allowed to march on unregulated. The incongruous is therefore used here to highlight a clash with the new norms, which are not limited to sartorial matters and which are enforced through a relentless resort to shaming.

3. The paper first locates *The Every* and its focus on norms – sartorial and others – in the tradition of utopian literature to show that it is the clash between the new standards set at the Every and those embodied by the outsider – Delaney, but also, presumably, the reader – that produces the incongruous. The second part studies the functioning of the incongruous on the levels of referentiality, textuality and narrative to lay bare the inherent tension in any attempt to make sense of the incongruous, something which readers are nevertheless encouraged to do. The final section examines the question of mode in *The Every*. Indeed, the presence of the incongruous produces comic effects, thereby thwarting the expectations of readers whose surveillance imaginary may have been shaped by bleak dystopias such as George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty Four* (1949). *The Every* thus raises the question of what the best literary mode may be to deal with surveillance in

late-capitalist societies where it seems to be whole-heartedly embraced and where it is rather invisibility that is perceived as threatening.

The Incongruous in Speculative Fiction

A Utopian Eye-Land

4. In *Ideology and Utopia* (published in German in 1926 and in English in 1936), Karl Mannheim defines the two terms of the title by their incongruity, meaning their departure from reality. The difference between the two lies in the fact that ideology aims to legitimize the status quo whereas utopia has the potential to subvert the existing order by opening up new perspectives on the present and on possible futures.[1] Mannheim is more concerned with the social functions of utopia than its form and content and does not really explore utopian literature, but the idea that incongruity is central to utopia and may play a subversive part helps shed light on *The Every*. Eggers indeed draws on the resources of utopia – in its literary, social and theoretical manifestations – to challenge the ideology of transparency which has become the "new dogma" (Han 4). The fictional world he depicts in *The Every* departs from reality in that it takes present trends to radical extremes, the better to highlight them and their potential developments, thereby producing a dual effect by which readers are encouraged to perceive the near-future fictional world as incongruous while still being able to trace their own in it.

5. Analysing what German philosopher Byung-Chul Han calls the "transparency society" and theorizing the recent evolutions in surveillance which have produced it requires revisiting existing models. When it comes to surveillance, George Orwell's Big Brother and Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as interpreted by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* – two dystopian models – remain the dominant metaphors in public discourse, in spite of their shortcomings. The state totalitarianism depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot capture the collusion of state and corporate forces at work in contemporary surveillance, while the architectural models offered by Bentham and Foucault may seem to have become outdated at a time when networked surveillance relies on digital technologies – evolutions which these authors could not anticipate. Nevertheless, these influential paradigms have not entirely lost their relevance, and remain in the background of *The Circle* and *The Every*, which both feature slogans, transparent architecture and an emphasis on constant possible surveillance and ensuing self-monitoring.

6. One of the recent evolutions which has been highlighted is the increasingly participatory

1 For a discussion of Mannheim as well as Paul Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), see J.H. Leong (2013).

nature of surveillance, by which citizens/users consciously – and more or less willingly – play the part of the watched while also engaging in watching – as can be illustrated with the advent of social media (Galič, Koops, Timan 2017; Albrechtslund 2008). Surveillance has become normalized, to the point that it is, to borrow from the title of David Lyon's latest book, a "way of life". While it may not be embraced enthusiastically by all, its seemingly unstoppable march meets but little resistance, a phenomenon which Shoshana Zuboff ascribes to a state of "psychic numbing" encouraged by the "inevitability rhetoric" mobilized by surveillance capitalists (Zuboff, 11, 223). Reintroducing a sense of incongruity in this state of things is part of *The Every*'s agenda, which seeks to counter the tendency of transparency to "not harbor negativity that might radically question the political-economic system as it stands" and remain "blind to what lies outside the system", only "confirm[ing] and optimiz[ing] only what already exists" and thereby going "hand-in-hand with the postpolitical" (Han 7).

7. *The Every* presents itself as a type of speculative fiction[2] which, as a note coming before the title page informs readers, "takes place in the near future." (Eggers 2013, np.) In *The Every*, *The Circle*'s departures from the implied readers' world are much greater, which may be explained by the fact that what Eggers depicted in 2013 as a possible near future may have come true. Gesturing to a tradition that harks back to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the campus of the Every is located on an island called "Treasure Island, largely manmade, in the middle of San Francisco Bay" (5).[3] A clear dichotomy between the campus – called "Everywhere" – and "the unexamined world" – called "Nowhere" – is established (7, 230). In this "closed ecosystem" (273), which is protected by a wall and iron fencing, every aspect of life is further regimented and "improved" as the company understands the term.

8. A change of perspective is also notable, as *The Every* seems to revert to "the trope of individual dissent and mass compliance common to utopian novels and films," which *The Circle* had departed from by focusing on "a protagonist who complies through most of the text and then does not rebel at the end" (Marks 166). Delaney is the prototypical dystopian protagonist identified by Moylan, the "alienated protagonist" or "singular misfit" who enters into "outright opposition" (Moylan xiii) While she is prepared for a battle, as indicated by the use of bellicose rhetoric, her expectations are thwarted – and so are the readers'. As will be discussed in the final section, Eggers chooses to depart from the conventional modes through which surveillance has been tackled in

2 Margaret Atwood defines "speculative fiction" as "human society and its possible future forms, which are either much better than what we have now or much worse", 115.

3 The campus of the Circle is located on the California mainland, near the fictional town of San Vincenzo. The choice of an island locates *The Every* even more firmly in the utopian tradition which continues after More on through Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver Travels* (1721), H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), to take but a few examples.

literature, such as the gloom of classic dystopias or the seriousness of the technothriller. Instead, he draws on humour, irony and satire to create a defamiliarizing effect, the better to jolt readers into awareness – a strategy which is particularly apparent in the new prominence given to clothing, which was not foregrounded in *The Circle*.

Nothing to Hide

9. The whole novel is written in the third person, with Delaney as the focal character and acting like a foreign traveller being given a tour of a utopian space. During her first interview, she spots "a lean young woman in silver leggings" (13). After three interviews and an orientation, she is eventually allowed onto the main campus, with an "acclimator" called Kiki, and spots a "menagerie of Everyones in bright clothing" on an expanse of grass (69-70). Delaney, who tries to make sense of the "group of figures in lycra bodysuits", hypothesizes "some kind of modern dance being performed" or "some kind of exercise", but is mistaken (71-72). The incongruous effect is produced by the discrepancy between their outfits – identified as exercise clothes ("the outfit of an Olympic swimmer", "slalom ski outfits", "a wrestler's one-piece", 77, 78, 82) and the fact that the Everyones are simply going about their daily lives, bringing to mind paradigmatic examples offered by Jourde of incongruous clothing, with a person showing up at a town hall meeting dressed as an Academician or Salvador Dali giving a speech in a diving suit in London (Jourde 2004, 2, 35).

10. Further incongruous effects arise from the transgression of boundaries, for instance between objects and body parts, as when a man dressed in a "sheer bodysuit" also wears a "yellow water-carrier" whose "tube" is "dangling provocatively" (80). Body parts are anthropomorphized, as when Delaney imagines "the members suffocating in shiny stretchy fabric" (81), or when desire seems to arise from the bodies themselves rather than their owners: "[A] man and a woman, standing face-to-face, [were] each wearing form-fitting black bodysuits interrupted by no pocket or stitch. The woman was chesty, the man powerfully built, the curves of his thighs yearning for the curves of hers" (82). The fabric on some of the outfits is so thin that it is "nearly sheer" and reveals "the dark swaths where hair proliferated underneath" (183).

11. The "transparency society" is characterized by its desire to abolish delays, distance and obstacles, and a general "pornographication", in which everything is a commodity handed over to hypervisibility (Han 24). By staging employees wearing revealing outfits, *The Every* literalizes the "nothing to hide" argument of surveillance advocates. Furthermore, in their desire to lead lives which are transparent in every respect, down to the very clothes they wear, the "Everyones" seem to live in a social space which has more to do with the coenobite communities discussed by Agamben in *The Highest Poverty* than with the disciplinary institutions analysed by Foucault. Like the monks

depicted by Agamben, the Everyones live a highly regimented life (for instance, their devices tell them when to stand up, exercise or drink water), and attempt to make the two senses of *habitus* – clothes and way of life – coincide, suggesting that surveillance has become a new "form-of-life". When life becomes inseparable from the rules that govern it, there is in theory no room for the incongruous to appear, and the textual strategy in *The Every* consists in reintroducing it.

12. The tight and colourful exercise clothes are excessively fitting, in the literal sense, which makes them unfitting, in the metaphorical sense. Delaney's standards, with which readers are encouraged to identify, are not what constitutes the "Everypropriate" as defined by the corporation (185, 441). The incongruous indeed violates norms – common practice, customs, propriety (Jourde 2004, 30). The clashing between two sets of norms manifests itself in Delaney's being at a loss for words: "Another man passed wearing a wrestler's one-piece. […] His manhood was encased, it seemed, under a dome, a cup or a jockstrap, Delaney didn't know which. Codpiece?" (82). In an attempt to "form a sentence unrelated to phalluses", she ends up saying "[l]ots of succulents" (74). Language soon breaks down, with Delaney making "an involuntary sound, something between *Excuse me* and *Oh Sweet Jesus*" (74; original emphasis). The body's presence is reasserted on the fictional stage scene, with a multiplication of symptoms as she "cackle[s] idiotically," almost "choke[s]", "trie[s] to breathe", and "[feels] light-headed" (75, 80). As Jourde reminds us, the incongruous has to do with the body in its very concrete functions, including the scatological (Jourde 2004, 30). Because they are revealing, the bodysuits mean that the body takes up an unexpected importance in the text, both in the bodies presented to the protagonist's view and in the latter's reaction.

Homo Numerus

13. As the menagerie simile noted above suggested, the island has the potential to turn into a zoo which attracts visitors curious about the new species being bred there. Outsiders find "reasons to be walking by, or sitting or taking pictures of the Everyones" as if they were caged creatures (270). The Everyones constitute a type of brave new humans, who have evolved in response to a dystopian environment shaped by the company's transparency ideology. What can be observed on the zoo-like island is no less than "homo numerus", the future human species after it undergoes "numerification", presenting the culmination of "the hyperevolution that had begun at the cusp of the twentieth century" (476, 563). The terms "species" and "evolution" are recurrent in the novel, especially in the letters addressed to Delaney by her former university professor, Mmena Agarwal, one of the few dissident voices in the novel. Monopolistic companies such as the Circle and the Every pose, in her words, "an existential threat to all that was untamed and interesting about the

human species" (13),[4] and produce "technoconformity" (146).

14. The creatures that Delaney finds on the Treasure Island are, in keeping with their sheer bodysuits, thin-skinned. They seem to suffer from a form of hyper-sensitivity that manifests itself in a "vibrating-pupil syndrome", a phenomenon which "conveys something between total engagement and low-level terror", a "faintly vibrating fear—of offending, of committing some small wrong, of being misunderstood and quickly ruined" (364, 45, 272). Adapting to the new conditions leads to strategic, intense self-monitoring: "People talk slowly, cautiously. Everything you say is permanent there, so people are exceedingly careful" (187). The very high "level of contact and availability" which is "a prerequisite to participating in society" means that the utopian creatures are exhausted and develop a "jittery, needy psyche", as exemplified by Kiki, who ends up "utterly wasted, hollow" (221, 64, 504). Clearly, the bodysuits are only one phenomenon meant to bring into relief the new set of norms which regulate life at the Every, and readers' potentially dystopian future.

15. Readers taking in the fictional world they are presented with may try and make sense of the incongruous. Surely, given *The Every*'s insistence on the bodysuits, they must mean something? And yet, to go back to Jourde's analysis, the incongruous is also characterized by its "ostensible insignificance" (Jourde 1999, 1, 22), its gratuitousness, the absence of necessity. The next part of the paper examines the tension between the text's seeming encouragement to make sense of the incongruous outfits, as symbols, as signs and as a narrative spring, and the superfluousness which is the mark of the incongruous.

Making Sense of the Incongruous

Shimmering Semiotics

16. Sartorial matters are regulated in all utopian texts (both eutopias and dystopias). Uniform dress codes appear for instance in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). In the latter, the uniforms worn by women "designate their respective places in a rigidly hierarchical structure" (blue for Commander's wives, white for their daughters, red for the Handmaids, brown for the Aunts and green for the Marthas) while men "wear different versions of military attire to signal the martial elements Gilead promotes, and traditional 'male' values" (Marks 90). Conversely, the "zippicamiknicks" that women wear in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), with the single zipper down the front that makes it easy to shuck them away, are in keeping with mandatory promiscuity.[5] Bringing these considerations to bear on *The Every*, can any sense be made of the

4 See also 455, 534. The language of evolution and natural selection is also used by the company's leadership: see 343, 521.

5 They may actually have inspired one of Kiki's outfits: "a catsuit with a camouflage pattern of green and punk sequins

incongruous bodysuits within a sematic system (based on colours for example), as symbols (of social position) and/or as part of an ideological structure?

17. Bodysuits sometimes do seem to take on a symbolic quality in *The Every*. The demise of one of the company's founders thus prompts Mae Holland to walk around the campus in a mournful "black bodysuit" (156). She later offers "guidance" in a speech from her "glass office box", "dressed in a white bodysuit sprinkled with faint purple sunbursts" like the leader of a cult. Whiteness may be read as meaning purity and the sunbursts illumination, a proper outfit to deliver the company's gospel of transparency. When Delaney's accomplice Wes dons "a form-fitting lycra wrapper with pastel swooshes of color, a sort of marzipan camouflage", the move hints at his betrayal of Delaney (444). By the end of the novel, his appearance on screen, "wearing an immaculate bodysuit, black and stitched to emphasize his wiry muscles" and "look[ing] like a sleek assassin", indicates that he has definitely defected to the other side (512-513). The fact that the audience that Mae addresses in the final pages wears the lycra uniform is evidence of their conformity: "a few thousand people in lycra using the same phones, the same tablets, their hearts and health measured by the same devices fastened tightly to their wrists" (576).

18. However, trying to impose meaning on the incongruous runs counter to its logic. The outfits keep getting more and more flamboyant, and indeed gratuitously so, as the novel unfolds. While the fact that Wes should wear a bodysuit is telling in itself, no visual sense can be made of his "marzipan camouflage" (itself an incongruous phrase). Comic effects are also produced by "heterogeneous associations" (Jourde 2004, 30, my translation) which are described in excessively detailed ways. Heterogeneous encounters materialize for instance in "a gun-metal gray catsuit with multiple zippers and pockets, under which various devices and antennae sprouted and bulged", where the feline meets the entomological (171). Boundaries between species are also crossed when Kiki wears "a form-fitting red top with a feathered pattern" while her leggings are "made to look like a mermaid's lower half", complete with a "dorsal fin" on her waterpack, "which bounce[s] menacingly as she galloped down the steps" (180). Kiki becomes a hybrid creature, "half-fish, half-bird", and further incongruousness is produced in the language: how could a bird and/or fish "gallop"? Such a description combines the incongruous effects in terms of referentiality (which have to do with the situations presented in the fiction) and in terms of textuality (which have to do with the phrasing) (Voisin-Fougère 152).

19. By the end of the novel, readers, in true incongruous fashion, may be puzzled by the persistence of sartorial details and wonder, for example, about the necessity of the description of the bodysuit worn by one of Delaney's colleagues, which displays "vents", i.e. "two inner-thigh

bisected by a single zipper, which extended from her left ankle to her right shoulder" (73).

windows for testicular cleavage" (429). The reference to the "flashes of strained flesh" and the discovery of the "rear vents" do seem gratuitous, as if the dystopian textual machine could churn out a potentially infinite number of such manifestations (431). Can such superfluousness be subsumed by the role that bodysuits play on a diegetic level?

Bright Bulbous Body Parts

20. The incongruous bodysuits provide the basis for a narrative spring, enabling the company to ensnare challengers. The fact that they could prove her downfall is intuited by Delaney, who is aware of the fact that she is on camera all the time and therefore tries to control her ocular movements. Stenton, one of the three "Wise Men" who founded the Circle, faces a similar predicament when he is given a tour of the Every's organic garden. In the latter, vegetables – "the incongruous object *par excellence*" (Jourde 1999, 251; my translation, original emphasis) – can reasonably be expected, but not "young Everyones in lycra […] digging, reaching, bending over, and demonstrating" (276). Stenton, who has been away and is unaware of the new dress code, himself still wearing "his uniform of khakis and a gray-striped button down", struggles not to stare: "For every vegetable, there were a half-dozen bulbous body parts he was straining not to see" (276). The trap has been set by Gabriel Chu, one of the company's new masterminds, who is "devouring Stenton's struggle with visible pleasure" from a distance (276). Stenton, who was assimilated to a shark in *The Circle* and now looks like a "kitten caught in a stampede", has been superseded by a new type of predator (276).

21. Delaney's and Stenton's experiences are rehearsals for the elimination of the Every's most serious challenger, Tom Goleta, a presidential candidate who poses "an existential threat to the Every" (125). A Senator with a long-standing background in antitrust laws, he is "the ultimate Every foe", refuses to broadcast his activities to his constituents and upholds values of democracy and privacy (125, 352). He has been invited to give a speech at the Every, a move which, as Delaney notes, seems suspiciously "uncharacteristic" and "unwise" (356). He is first taken to the organic garden but it is in the gym (the "Cathedral of Wellness") that "all of his political dreams di[e]". He is not able to "keep his eyes off the curves, the muscled edges, the gleaming bulges and buttocks" (359). The final alliteration, which echoes the "bulbous body parts" above and announces the "sea of bulbous and brightly displayed body parts" further down, is of course highly ironic. Parodying the company's drive to reduce all human experience to numbers, the text provides facts and figures: he spent eight minutes at the gym, surrounded by forty-seven men and women ("mostly men; the internet counted") and eye-tracking software calculated "112 unique visits of Goleta's irises to body parts of thirty-two unique members of the Every staff" (359). Aware of the trap but incapable of stopping his "oglings", Goleta leaves hurriedly after his involuntary eye movements –

"wandering", "darting", "landing", and "groping" –, have been dutifully counted and his coughing, sweating and stuttering recorded in messages, videos, and photos, all combined in an edited on-line video which will never be taken down (360).

22. While readers have been – somewhat heavy-handedly – prepared for this public execution, Goleta was caught off guard. Outside characters such as Delaney, Stenton or Goleta constitute embedded figures of the reader, whose norms are anachronistic and clash with the new standards of shame – about what constitutes appropriate clothing and inappropriate looking. Not only does Goleta disappear from the presidential race three weeks later, but the episode speeds up the spread of eye-tracking technology and leads to a new crime, "*eyeshame*", which operates outside the law: "It was not strictly speaking a crime, of course; no laws prevented anyone from looking where they shouldn't. But shame ensued, and shame was deserved, and shame was the internet's currency and lever for change" (362; original emphasis). Public shaming is here used as a tool for the multinational to tighten its grip. Nothing seems to stand in the way of the deployment of the new order, which raises the question of the novel's aims, and the reason why it enlists the incongruous in pursuing them.

Literature, Surveillance and Modes of Subversion

23. The attention that *The Circle* attracted had a lot to do with its ability to capture in fiction the latest developments in surveillance, not in the sense that literature mirrors reality, but in the sense that practices and imaginaries are mutually constitutive. To quote David Lyon: "Reading *The Circle* offers the chance to decide for ourselves how far to go with transparency, given that, in a sense, today's users too are already, inevitably part of the digital world portrayed there" (Lyon 148). In *The Every*, the resort to the incongruous, which is much more prominent than in *The Circle*, helps defamiliarize the familiar, often invisible presence of surveillance capitalism and contributes to an overall textual strategy in which, although resistance is repeatedly smothered on the diegetic level, the novel's bleak ending is undermined by the resort to irony, parody and satire – as already seen in the Goleta episode above. The presence of the incongruous thus constitutes an invitation to consider the modes and the moods through which utopian literature may best "alert and activate its readers", beyond the bleak despair that permeates Orwell's masterpiece (Marks np.).

Resistance is Futile?

24. If the society represented in *The Every* offers a distorted reflection of our own, the diagnosis made is one of apathy. The point of Delaney's infiltration is to "feed bad ideas into the system",

which will be so intrusive and dehumanizing that they are bound to cause an upheaval and the downfall of the company (165). For instance, the introduction of AuthentiFriend, an app which measures friendship,[6] is expected to create a conflagration: "[I]f they roll it out on a large scale, people will be outraged. They'll leave in droves. They'll smash their screens, run to the hills. There'll be a global pause, a reckoning, a re-calibration" (167). Of course, things do not go as planned and each devilish suggestion proves a resounding success, both in the company and in civil society. Delaney's creativity actually unwittingly rescues the corporation from stagnation and Mae Holland, who has not "brought a significant new idea to the company in all her years there", from a leadership crisis (18). The novel is structured by the repetition of the same pattern. A new app is suggested in the hope that it will push the company "over the cliff"; it is enhanced by the company and embraced by the public; the revelations cause social damage but once the culling is over, the species moves on, "accommodat[ing]" the change and "kneeling before new masters" (39-40).

25. On the diegetic level, any form of resistance is presented as futile. Both *The Circle* and *The Every* offer bleak perspectives, ending on the triumph of Mae, the companies she stands for and their ideology. All challengers disappear one way or another, either absorbed or destroyed. In *The Circle*, notably, Mae's ex-boyfriend Mercer, who decides to live off the grid, is eventually hunted down, found and driven to suicide. In *The Every*, none of the three routes of resistance – reform (Goleta), protest (Agarwal), and sabotage (Wes and Delaney) – work. Even Professor Agarwal, who used to offer "tech-resistant classes […] known as Agarwal's Analogs" (64), is eventually seduced by the "new masters". Delaney herself has doubts about the point of "fighting a way of life preferred by her fellow humans", the spread of which seems unstoppable (64). Such apathy is explained by general acceptance of "the rightness of measuring each other numerically", the belief that "numbers are inherently fair, while humans are inherently not fair" and that "the only thing worse than being measured is *not* being measured" (54; original emphasis), which is another aspect of the ideology of transparency, in which there is no room for subjectivity and trust (Han vi-vii).

26. What then is the point of writing a novel – or two, for that matter – on the topic? Could *The Every* be called incongruous in the sense of superfluous or gratuitous? *The Every*, which displays more self-conscious reflexivity than *The Circle*, actually presents novel writing as ineffective. When Delaney discusses strategy with Wes, her suggestion that "[m]aybe we can destroy it from the outside" is met by sarcasm: "We can! […] I'll send a strongly worded letter. And you can stand beyond the gates with a picket. Maybe one of us writes a novel" (27). Still, both *The Circle* and *The Every* are animated by a desire to shake readers into awareness. From that point of view, they seem to pursue the same agenda as works of non-fiction such as Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance*

6 The rating is based on live on-screen communication. While the conversation is transcribed and analysed by algorithms, facial recognition analyses emotions, and the two measurements are collated with "vitals, heart-rate, blood pressure and glucose levels", which are monitored through the "oval", a sort of smart watch (52).

Capitalism, "argu[ing] a similar case by different means" (Marks np.).

27. *The Circle* has been identified as a "cautionary tale", "a novel of ideas" (Marks np.) or a "morality play for the social media era" (Lyon 161). Both *The Circle* and *The Every* have been criticized for presenting flat characters who function as mouthpieces, and for being overly didactic.[7] But, as Betiel Wasihun points out, what the Germans call the "gläserene Mensch" (the transparent human being) is precisely what a digital surveillance society begets. (Wasihun np.) Similarly, Atwood warns that *The Circle* does not feature "thoroughly rounded characters with many-layered inwardness" but nevertheless constitutes a "challenging" form of entertainment which "demands that the reader think its positions through in the same way that the characters must" (Atwood np). For her, it is "is in part a novel of ideas", exploring "[i]deas about the social construction and deconstruction of privacy, and about the increasing corporate ownership of privacy, and about the effects such ownership may have on the nature of Western democracy" (Atwood np). Such generic considerations may be extended to *The Every*, in which the enhanced resort to the incongruous may be the consequence of an even greater sense of urgency.

28. Despite its overall bleakness, the novel is punctuated by acts and spaces of micro-resistance. Employees whose work is monitored by AI, which compares and ranks their pace, coordinate their movements so that no one appears to be working slower or faster than the other and the AI is "gamed" (102). Before his betrayal, Wes speaks sentences in reverse order because "AI [gets] confused when words were out of sequence", and wears hats to defeat facial recognition (195, 338). There are even "spots on campus for candor" (270). Beyond the gates of the campus, San Franscisco has a "trog zone" where refuseniks gather and live as a community, although a far from ideal one. Liberia (a country whose name means "free place") has become a haven for free speech. It is the "last trog nation" and still has newspapers (so too, readers are told, do Austria, Germany, and the Cuban diaspora). Liberia's print media is actually "thriving, and in English" (344). Such pockets of resistance constitute a counterpoint to the narrative of the inevitable spread of surveillance capitalism, a counterpoint which is reinforced by the resort to irony, parody and satire, modes of subversion with which the incongruous has strong connections.

Modes of Subversion

29. While surveillance tend to be associated with a "fairly narrow range of affective and aesthetic registers", namely "sternness, seriousness, panoptic omniscience, repressiveness, vigilance" (Nicolazzo 7), Eggers draws on others to undermine the bleak dynamic of his novel. A key intertext in the utopian tradition with which *The Every* engages – and which itself displays its share of incongruous situations and language – may well be Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, especially

7 On *The Circle*, see for instance B. Dawes 111-113.

book IV, in which the protagonist embraces "the Contemplation and Practice of every Virtue" and a life sheltered from any "Example or Incitement to Vice" (qtd Tadié 43), willingly submitting to his new masters, the wise horses called the Houyhnhnms. *Gulliver's Travels* is based on the same premises as Bernard E. Harcourt's *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age* (2015), which is that we can be ensnared by means of our desires, passions and interests just as well as by the boot stamping on the human face (Tadié 44). In *Gulliver's Travels* – and in *The Every*, as will be seen below – "satire offers, if only symbolically, means of examining, interrogating and overthrowing dominant forces and modes of control" (Tadié 45). Furthermore, while readers may seem to enjoy a position of superiority, "the joke is also on [them]" since, like Gulliver, they surrender themselves, "in the name of rationality", to the ideologists of the Every, who offer a contemporary version of Swift's wise horses (Tadié 44).

30. Although, at the diegetic level, all attempts to resist the new surveillant order in *The Every* fail, the pattern is undermined on a metafictional level by the use of irony, parody and satire. For instance, Delaney's statement that "reduc[ing] a human being to a number" is "something [she] know[s] [they] would never stand for at the Every" is of course not meant to be taken at face value (55). Likewise, Kiki's attempt to explain the difference between "PartiRank" (a system used to rank employees in *The Circle* based on their participation in the company's social media, which was dropped because it was found "a bit too competitive and stress-inducing"), and "Everything in Order" (in which individual folders hold "all the performance measurements, participation points, smiles, ComAnons, shams, step counts, sleep hours, frowns, etcetera" which are then merged to "create an aggregated number and list employees in ascending order") is clearly an exercise in sophistry: "You can see the difference between that and PartiRank, which was a lot more hierarchical" (79).

31. Parody lays bare the hypocrisy of corporate language. Thus, layoffs are called "deëmployment moment[s]", a term which, like other similar coinages, has a supposedly soothing "Nordic aura" (79, 291). Each new intrusive app and device is christened in a similar way, leading to the production of numerous "unfortunate Every-isms that diminished the dignity of the species and shamed whomever had to type it" (408). The company even has a name – "EveryThrow" – for the network of saboteurs which may or may not be trying to blow it up from the inside (481).

32. Comic effects are produced, sometimes with below-the-belt humour which, as we have seen with the lycra bodysuits, the incongruous is not averse to. For instance, when Delaney pitches the app she has designed to measure friendship during social interactions, and calls Wes to show how it works, the latter dutifully appears on screen but seems "a bit too amused". She soon understands that Wes is participating in the meeting while "sitting on the can", which casts a comic light on his

otherwise trivial answer ("I can!") when she asks whether he can hear them (50). No one is spared by comic effects, not even Professor Agarwal, who is described nailing her "list of tech-resistant classes", "Luther-like" (64).

33. The exchanges between manufacturers and users, in which the former fool their more-than-willing victims, are the object of satire. When smart speakers are launched in private homes and a few concerns about privacy are raised, manufacturers first deny that private conversations are heard, then say that they are not recorded, then that they are not listened to by humans, then that the conversations are anonymized, which of course is not true either. The passage ends on a typical anticlimax: "In fact, no one got worked up at all. Lawmakers were mute, regulators invisible, and sales skyrocketed" (407). Such negotiations entail a resetting of the parameters of what is socially acceptable: "And so when the Every swallowed the jungle and created a next-level smart speaker, privacy was not promised or expected" (408). While readers may laugh at the blatant hypocrisy on one side and gullibility on the other, they soon understand that the joke is indeed on them too and end up "disturb[ed] and provoke[ed]", which is "satire's most profound aim […] rather than to simply offer lessons" (Tadié 44).

34. If we want to try and make sense of the incongruous in *The Every*, it needs to be studied in its relation to irony, parody and satire as part of an overall strategy of critique. However, the incongruous is also characterized by excess and gratuitousness – an "ostensible insignificance" (Jourde 2004, 22). Although it may be rooted in parody or satire, the incongruous is prone to leave readers in a state of perplexity. One may wonder how long the textual machine could have gone on, how many more dazzling outfits, privacy-killing apps or neologisms it could have produced, how many times the "eyeshaming" scenario or the abdication of users before their new masters could have been repeated. But maybe this perplexed state is precisely where Eggers intends to leave readers, as they ponder surveillance capitalism – that other seemingly inexhaustible machine.

Conclusion

35. Surveillance has been a long-standing concern of utopian literature, starting with More's *Utopia*, where citizens observe one another and secrecy is suspicious (Marks 42). The rise of literary dystopia after the second World War was in part a response to the experience of twentieth-century police-surveillance states (Moylan 138-139). In *The Every*, Eggers draws on the existing resources of utopian literature and social theory in order to capture and question the latest shapes taken by surveillance in Western liberal democracies. Utopia, in its departure from reality, is

inherently characterized by incongruity, like ideology. Unlike the latter, however, its purpose is not to buttress a status quo, and Eggers draws on its critical potential to expose the ideology of transparency. The secession gesture which, as Jameson points out, lies at the foundation of utopias, is even more radical than in *The Circle*, as the campus is no longer located on the mainland but on an island, employees move there permanently and develop a new "form-of-life" in which their life is inseparable from the rules that govern it. Despite the emphasis on technological devices, Eggers shows us that what is emerging is a new form of morality, in which what constitutes appropriate clothing and inappropriate looking is redefined. By offering a satirical fable, he is claiming the position of the novelist as moralist for contemporary times.

36. The datafication of society makes it necessary to rethink earlier models such as Foucault's disciplinary societies and Deleuze's "societies of control" (Beckam 527). Such transitional moments are ridden with tensions, in which incongruous effects are latent. Literature has the capacity to bring them out and thereby create a heuristic defamiliarizing effect while challenging received ideas. One of the points to which the incongruous, as it is used in *The Every*, draws attention is for instance the persistence of the visual in the age of dataveillance. In the world of data collection, aggregation and mining, the eye remains "the organ of shame par excellence" and the "concepts of visibility and invisibility — and the implications of other key concepts they bear such as privacy and transparency — are not outdated" (Wasihun np.). Of this, the incongruous, in all its embodied excess and comic impropriety, acts as a timely reminder in *The Every*.

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