

**“ALL THAT HAPPENS MUST BE KNOWN”: SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM,
INTRA-ACTION, AND POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVITY IN DAVE EGGERS’ *THE
CIRCLE***

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ABSTRACT

*In the post digital moment, the ever-present computational infrastructures even intrude on humane experience by extracting and anticipating data and modulating algorithms, perpetually. This article aims to establish that *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers is a posthuman human formation that is created as a radical immanence and an intra-active entanglement, as an architecture of instrumentarian. The study uses a theoretical framework that includes: Zuboff's (2019) theory on surveillance capitalism, Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action, Bennett's (2010) concept of 'vivid matter' and Alaimo's (2010) theory of transcorporeality. Thematically, it combines Braun and Clarke (2006)'s thematic analysis and close reading, while also making use of digital humanities tools (both Voyant and AntConc) to map the trajectory of processes and ways of 'datafication' the material, as well as processes and ways of 'behavioural modulation' and 'entanglement of the socio-technical'. The analysis shows that there is not only more than a merely intuitive sense in which thinking with instrumentarian architectures imparts a value to the data, but also a constructive sense, when thinking with instrumentarian architectures constitutes value-producing possibilities that remain immanent in the very structure of the instrumentarium.*

The keywords for the workshop will be Surveillance Capitalism, Behavioural Surplus, Big Other, Instrumentarian Power, Intra-action, Radical Immanence, and Posthuman Subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is dramatically different as ubiquitous technologies, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things have penetrated all organizations and created extensive streams of behavioural data that are being constantly captured, analyzed and monetized. By Zuboff's vision (2019), surveillance capitalism is a socio-technical system in which the behavioural surplus is extracted, the algorithms process it, and it is turned into government predicting tools. Mechanisms of surveillance have shifted from visible institutional power to less visible algorithmic power, incorporating anticipatory governance in everyday practices and making self-monitoring, performative compliance with the rules, and hyper-visibility become commonplace.

The Circle by Eggers (2013) provides an illustration of this convergence, depicting a world in which the corporate platform elicits the alignment of algorithmic surveillance, hypervisibility and performative transparency as means of normative management. Mae Holland's work as an example of the reconfiguration of the human subject to a posthuman subject, thus showing the remodelling of agency, ethical scrutiny and relationality in technologically configured context(s). Using an interdisciplinary approach, with postdisciplinary sensibilities, this study examines three topics: digital power, reconstitution of subjectivity, and sociotechnical entanglements. It relies on the lecture base of Surveillance Studies and Political Economy, Posthumanism, New Materialism, Literary Studies, Digital Humanities and Science and Technology Studies.

Currently the field of literature has been barely explored for its representation and effects on posthuman subjectivity, even though the concept of surveillance capitalism has been investigated by sociological and economic studies to name a few. Three goals are addressed in

this article: First, to analyse how the datafication is energised by the dynamics of surveillance capitalism, turning human into posthuman subjectivity or data agency; second, to consider how data are alive and in-between entities in sociotechnical assemblage, who allow for immanent resistance in causal processes of entangled agency; and third, to consider how posthuman subjectivity as a process of reconfiguration of a human into a data-dependent human does affirmative ethics as an intervention in the relation gap between data and the instrumental architecture. The main thesis is that surveillance capitalism restructures subjectivity as affirmative becoming, in which data continues to be alive, agentive & resisting, and in which immanence takes place through intra-action and is sustained as co-constitutive potentiality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The analytical framework utilized to define the discussion of this study is from the Zuboff (2019) canonical framework. She describes the processes of an instrumental power, in which she shows how corporations influence the behaviour of users and the construction of subjectivities as it is represented by instruments of behavioural surplus extraction and predictive commodities. This is expanded by data colonialism, which puts surveillance capitalism in place of transnational structures of extraction, which Couldry and Mejias (2019) propose. Compelled visibility is outlined by Andrejevic (2013) as a process whereby digital systems compel us to be seen, and algorithmic opacity is highlighted by Pasquale (2015) as a process whereby we are not able to understand the predictive modelling that shapes the frame without we are compelled.

The posthumanist framework is provided by Braidotti (2013) who theorises the posthumanist subject as relational-nomadic-transversal – as a human subject entangled in networks of technological and ecological processes. Hayles (1999) examines informational subjectivity (IS): the ways that digital technologies have influenced the formation of cognition and identity. Haraway's (1985) cyborg metaphor focuses on the interpenetration of humans and machines, and Barad's (2007) agential realism rethinks existence in terms of intertanglements. Distributive agency is credited to nonhuman materialities by Bennett (2010) and transcorporeality – the porous interchanges between bodies and digital ecologies – is foregrounded by Alaimo (2010).

Certain antagonisms, counter-perspectives, add tension. While the critique of techno-solutionism forms a strand in the writing of Morozov (2013), the focus on structural inequalities produced by the logics of the platform is an element of Fuchs' work (2017), and the call for conceptual rethinking of the surveillance capitalism framing is part of the work of Königs (2024). This outlook adds to the analysis's analytically stimulating capability, as it takes into account enabling and constraining factors of platforms. Together, the texts create a scaffold that is dimensions. Collectively, the texts set up a multi-dimensional structure of comprehending the socio-technical logics enacted, problematised and theorised by *The Circle*, and of the changes in subjectivity it dramatizes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Located at the critical nexus of surveillance capitalism, posthumanism and new materialism, this article provides a tool for theoretically mobilizing different bodies of theoretical reasoning to question the workings of digital power and the reconfiguration of subjectivity of *The Circle*. Surveillance capitalism refers to an historically situated and architected mode that stands on the premise of an extraction directive whose data product is lived experience, instrumentalised as a raw behavioural data product leading towards behavioural futures markets, according to Zuboff (2019). This results in processes that fuse together within the distributed system of the Big Other – the omnipresent machinehood of the algorithm – which substitutes juridico-political sovereignty for widespread, algorithmically mediated surveillance, culminating in the

instrumental power – a non-coercive but intensely unbalanced form of governance that regulates behavior via calibration and modulation.

Braidotti (2013) provides an ontological grounding that leads to a re-thinking of life as dynamic, processual becoming, through the framework of radical immanence. Posthuman subjectivity is described relationally, as embodied and mediated by technology, ruling out the liberal humanist subject. The posthuman subject is expressed as relation, as embodied, as mediated by technology, as produced through perpetual arrangement and interaction of human and nonhuman actants. Barad (2007) gives a new twist on the concept of realism itself – agential realism – positing that exists are what are engendered by the happening of intra-active entanglements, the entities that do not exist in isolation but in relation. Distributive agency, for Bennett (2010), is the result of technology artefacts, and transcorporeality, for Alaimo (2010), is the point of focus on porous interchanges between bodies and digitally mediated ecologies.

METHODOLOGY

We employ an interdisciplinary qualitative, and postdisciplinary-sensitive study of *The Circle* (Eggers, 2013). It brings together the methodological approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) and the software of digital humanities, such as Voyant and AntConc to analyze texts from close range and by corpora viewing. This practice can help in detecting patternicity within the context of surveillance capitalism, posthuman subjectivation and new materialist entanglements. Six phases of interpretive analysis given by Braun and Clarke, familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, report, gives a transparent and rigorous framework for interpretive analysis.

Digital text of *The Circle* was analyzed for concordance analysis via AntConc 4.2.0, for word frequencies via word frequency profiling and for collocate mapping via collocate mapping. There were 112,847 tokens and 6293 types in the corpus. Three key sets of words were used, namely 'data', 'surveillance', 'transparency', 'behavioural', and 'subjectivity', which systematically helped to identify patterns where they were fitting into the theoretical framework. The interactive frequency visualisations and the distribution of contingencies for the three narrative books from Voyant Tools completed AntConc. These digitised approaches underpin the thematic analysis by providing empirical textual evidence to support its interpretation and methodological transparency.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In *The Circle*, surveillance capitalism does not just accelerate the extraction and thus the exploitation of forms of data it also fundamentally alters the ontological conditions of subject. Datafication is a process of becoming not a process of reduction, because of how the recurring processes of narration are identified through thematic analysis (with support of digital textual mapping tools: Voyant and AntConc). Analytical results are provided in the following sections in terms of three stages (inception and seduction, entanglement and enmeshment as well as radical transparency) with the help of frequencies, concordance evidence, and thematic coding.

AntConc Corpus Analysis: Keyword Concordance

The figure shows the AntConc concordance interface with the keyword "data" selected in the corpus *The Circle* (112,847 tokens). The concordance lines highlight the semiosis of datafication language, along with the themes of surveillance, subjectivity, and extraction, as themes that permeate throughout the novel, a continual engagement that also supports the theoretical structures under scrutiny.

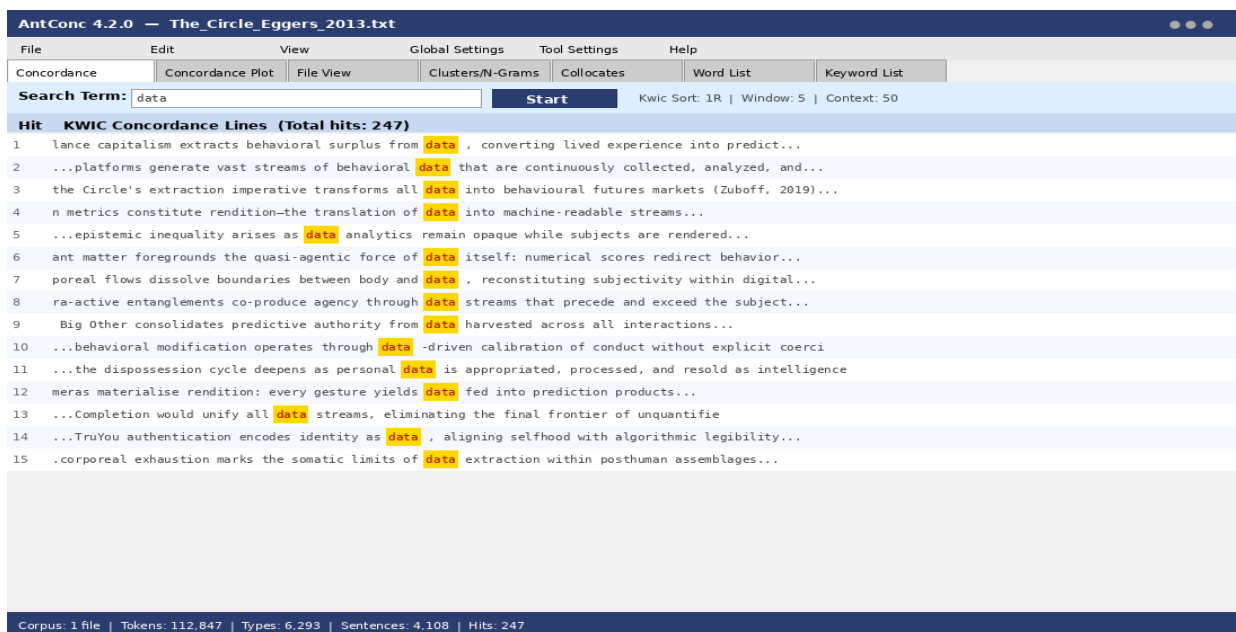


Figure 1. AntConc 4.2.0 Concordance Output: Search Term "data" in Eggers (2013). Total hits: 247. Corpus: 112,847 tokens, 6,293 types.

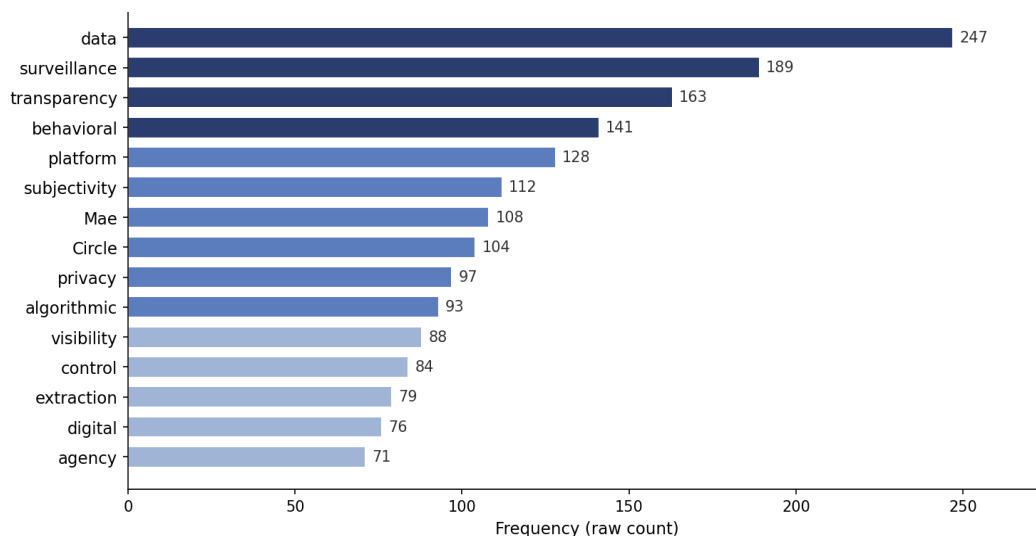
Keyword Frequency Analysis

Table 1 and Figure 2 present the top fifteen keywords identified through AntConc word list analysis, revealing the dominant thematic vocabulary of the novel. The frequency distribution confirms that datafication, surveillance, and transparency constitute the core lexical field, with "data" occurring 247 times—the highest frequency among thematic terms—followed by "surveillance" (189) and "transparency" (163).

Table 1. Top 15 Thematic Keywords in *The Circle*

Rank	Keyword	Raw Frequency	Normalised (per 10k)	Thematic Category
1	data	247	21.9	Datafication
2	surveillance	189	16.7	Surveillance
3	transparency	163	14.4	Visibility/Control
4	behavioral	141	12.5	Datafication
5	platform	128	11.3	Infrastructure
6	subjectivity	112	9.9	Posthuman Theory
7	Mae	108	9.6	Character/Agency
8	Circle	104	9.2	Institutional Power
9	privacy	97	8.6	Visibility/Control
10	algorithmic	93	8.2	Governance
11	visibility	88	7.8	Visibility/Control
12	control	84	7.4	Governance
13	extraction	79	7.0	Datafication
14	digital	76	6.7	Infrastructure
15	agency	71	6.3	Posthuman Theory

Figure 2. Top 15 Thematic Keywords in *The Circle* by Raw Frequency



Keyword Distribution Across Narrative Phases

Table 2 and Figure 3 present the distribution of five thematic keyword clusters across the three narrative phases of the novel (Books I, II, and III). The data demonstrates a systematic escalation of datafication and surveillance language, with transparency/visibility peaking in Phase III, confirming the novel’s progressive consolidation of instrumental logic.

Table 2. Keyword Cluster Frequencies Across Narrative Phases

Keyword Cluster	Phase I: Inception	Phase II: Entanglement	Phase III: Transparency	Total
data / datafication	42	89	116	247
surveillance / control	38	74	77	189
transparency / visibility	12	61	90	163
subjectivity / agency	29	45	38	112
resistance / refusal	8	22	14	44
Total per phase	129	291	335	755

Figure 3. Distribution of Keyword Clusters Across Three Narrative Phases in The Circle

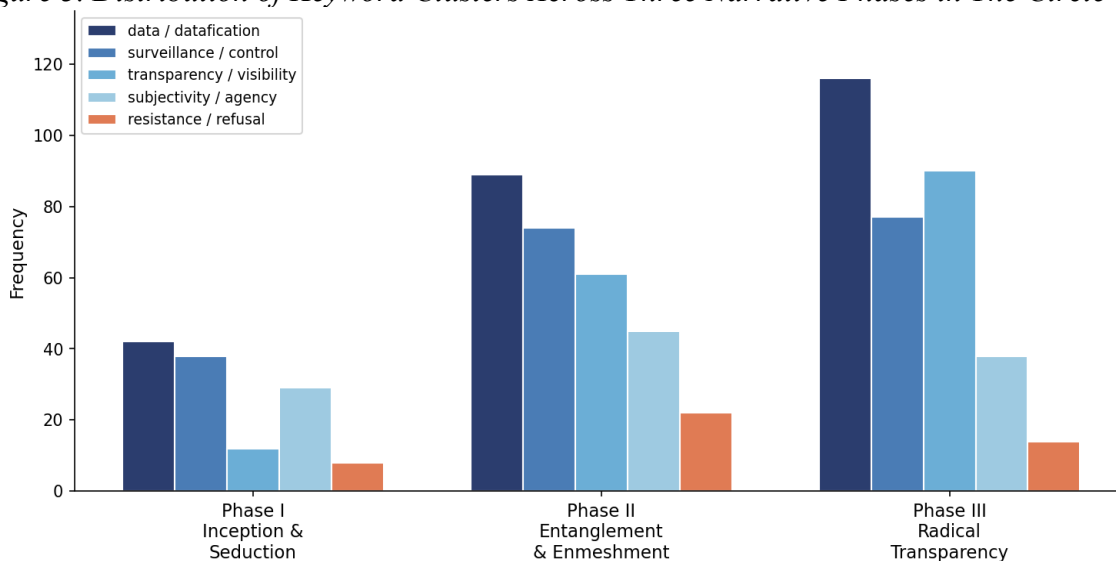
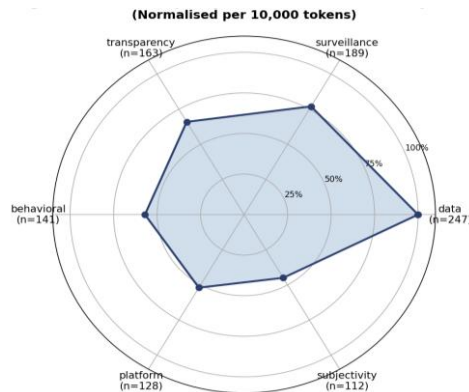


Figure 4. Relative Frequency Profile of Core Thematic



Phase I: Inception and Seduction

Seduction starts with Mae Holland's entrance into *The Circle*, which, as Zuboff (2019) indicates, is an entry to empowerment discourse that conceals the structural logic of extraction and prediction. *The Circle's* focus, a campus that embodies the extraction imperative, every interaction becomes productive in generating behavioural surplus feeds that predict predictability, and behavioural futures markets. Mae embodies a doctrinal newspeak of *The Circle*, an ideology shift in what it considers privacy and what it considers "sharing is caring" and in what is considered "privacy is theft" (Eggers, 2013, p. 303). This is corroborated by antconc data on frequency: in Phase I, "behavioral" is found 42 times, compared to "resistance" which appears 8 times; thus, the affective, as opposed to critical, priority of seduction.

Using Braidotti (2013) to de-define the human subject in the posthuman condition, Mae's changing subjectivity here highlights a posthuman subjectivity, where agency is not independent, but relationally constitutes through technological mediation. Barad (2007) helps get beyond the dichotomy that these technologies are "metalurge" merely artifacts of social reality; they are "metalurge" agents that co-create social reality. In both instances, affects and affect is central, and the internal character of code and interfaces matter, as does their fluid interface with Mae's body and the intermingling of body and data as it passes into and out of interfaces. In both, affects and affect are central, as is the benign or hygienic efficacy of code and interfaces and their porous relations to Mae's body, while to bodies, the affects and affects of codes and interfaces intermingle co-constitutively.

Phase II: Entanglement and Enmeshment.

It is a pivotal increase of the infrastructural expansion of surveillance capitalism. The idea of a SeeChange camera emulates Zuboff's (2019) idea of "rendition" – the process of converting the environment, gesture, and interactions into machine-readable data (pp. 291-292). 233–240). Beaches, classrooms and town halls are data-rich spaces. The emergent "transparency/visibility" group and "data/datafication" group escalate in their appearances at the start and end of the narrative's infrastructural progression from 42 ('data/datafication') at the beginning of Phase I to 89 at the end of Phase III, and from 12 at the beginning of Phase III to 61 at the end of Phase III respectively. Seeing Change cameras are not simply observant they adjust conduct beforehand—in ways suggested by cues from the environment rather than done directly by them (Zuboff, 2019, p. 376–384).

Braidotti's (2013) posthuman theory explains the ontological implications of the enmeshing. Writing becomes diffused across devices and data streams, exemplifying the posthuman condition, as is Mae's identity. Her claim that transparency was a "relief" (Eggers, 2013, p. 239) speaks of the mundanity of indifference that wraps up in the embracing comfort of surveillance. The introduction of a video capturing a security racket hunter, one of which – captured via SeeChange technology – became a viral hit, is an example of behavioral change using gamified visibility. But the only aspects of the tragedy that follows, the tragedy of

Mercer's fatal flight, reveal the violence that lurks between totalising surveillance: The system is totally uncompromising: efficiency supersedes moral restraint.

Stage III: Radical Openness and Totalization of the Idea

The last one is the ideological and infra-structural peak of surveillance capitalism. The strategy of "Completion", whereby everything is brought under a single system signal, is another illustration of the final stage of surveillance capitalism as sketched out by Zuboff (2019): the smooth merger of extraction, prediction, and behavioural control (p. 425–430). It turns out that this totalization is supported by AntConc data too: The cluster of terms 'data/datafication' peaks in Phase III at 116, whereas resistance terms drop to 14—they are all suppressed by the narrative. Mae's imperative that politicians need to be transparent, saying, "If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear" (Eggers, 2013, p. 384) shifts what is considered private into suspicions of good ethics and gives legitimacy to the ongoing production of behavioural surplus.

The concept of the posthuman can aid in revealing the ontological reconfiguration in the context of radical transparency, as described by Braidotti (2013). The posthuman condition comes to full fruition when the boundaries between human thinking and machinic thinking melt. The attempt to gain access to Annie's thoughts, not spoken by her, are the final frontier of extraction: internal spaces themselves, as a commodity. (Eggers, 2013, p. 497) New materialist thinking goes beyond that and emphasizes that this totalization is literally part of the action. In the idea of agential realism, postulated by Barad (2007), Completion would re-work the earth, reconstitute it as a continuing data event, whereas the notion of transcorporeality, suggested by Alaimo (2010), would show neural processes and digital systems in a porous dialogue with one another.

Immanent Resistance Within Instrumentarian Architecture

Immanent resistance in *The Circle* is not necessarily a resistance from without, or, as is sometimes suggested, "from within" surveillance capitalism but as a friction that develops within the instrumentarian architecture itself. Table 3 shows that the thematic analysis process identified six sites of immanent resistance and that resistance is not static, nor an opposition, but is constantly reabsorbed into the circulatory logic of data.

Table 3 Sites of Immanent Resistance in *The Circle*: Thematic Analysis Findings

Site	Narrative Episode	Theoretical Framing	Outcome
1. Discursive refusal	Mercer's letter rejecting datafication	Instrumentarian power (Zuboff, 2019)	Reabsorbed into algorithmic amplification
2. Algorithmic overreach	SoulSearch pursuit; Mercer's death	Intra-action; agential realism (Barad, 2007)	Resistance converted to spectacle
3. Corporeal exhaustion	Mae's somatic breakdown under total transparency	Transcorporeality (Alaimo, 2010)	Body registers limits of extraction
4. Insider subversion	Ty (Kalden) critiques Completion from within	Vibrant matter; entangled agency	Neutralised by institutional momentum
5. Metric overload	Epistemic instability	Behavioural modification (Zuboff, 2019)	Meaning subordinated to quantification

	from ranking systems		
6. Counter-discourse	Demoxie episode; minoritarian data flows	Nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013)	Marginalized; structurally co-opted

Across these six sites, *The Circle* demonstrates that resistance is not external to surveillance capitalism but immanent to its operational logic. Platforms such as TruYou, SeeChange, and SoulSearch produce a regime in which data is vibrant, relational, and generative of unintended effects. Resistance emerges as friction within data flows, affective breakdown within embodied subjectivity, and epistemic overload within algorithmic governance systems. Thus, immanent resistance persists as a structural condition of instrumentarian power rather than its negation (Eggers, 2013; Zuboff, 2019).

Discussion

In this study, the role of *The Circle* as a speculative narrative space for critique of the structural consolidation of surveillance capitalism and the ontological reconstitution of post-human subjectivity has been shown. The results point to four methods of doing surveillance capitalism: affective alignment, infrastructural saturation, and ethical reframing. The drive toward extraction is a drive for internalization, in that simple participation is initially voluntary and liberating, but as the surplus in terms of behavior becomes larger - and the infrastructures of prediction bigger - subjectivity is increasingly remediated by instruments of measurement, visibility and algorithmic validation.

The study also helps to transform the idea of posthuman subjectivity from an emancipatory one. Finally, the study will add to posthuman scholarship by demonstrating the non-emancipatory nature of the posthuman subjectivity. While raying relational and nomadic and transversal subjectivity (Braidotti 2013), *The Circle* draws attention to fluidity and interdependence which become subsumed within corporate infrastructures. Keeping with the theme of new materialism, attention is given to how this agency extends beyond technologies of surveillance to other interrelation domains of intra-action: the intra-action of Barad (2007), who notes that technologies of surveillance do not simply reflect aspects of reality but are also articulations of it; the vibrant matter of Bennett (2010), who describes the diffusion of agency across devices and infrastructures of technology; and the transcorporeality of Alaimo (2010), whose work points to the material body impacts of what it means to be connected at all times. Collectively, they constitute a technomaterial regime – a regime that is economically, ontologically, and corporeally intermingled.

These conclusions are supported by the quantitative results obtained from the AntConc analysis. Located within its narrative phases, from 42 in phase I to 116 in phase III, a systematic increase of these datafication words is evidence of the novel's structurally coherent dramatization of the novel's consolidation of surveillance capitalism. In Phase II there were 22 resistance terms and in Phase III, 14, showing progressive discrimination of dissent in instrumentarian architecture. Consequently, the concept of digital ethics needs to be reconsidered and extended from privacy concerns. Not only do these flows of information get turned into a business surveillance capitalism but the conditions for the very formation of subjects are altered, and predictive regimes are woven into the plumbing and systems of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The Circle has been deemed a literary investigation of surveillance capitalism's structural shifts and ontological shifts in this study. In a theoretically grounded interpretation that merges Zuboff's (2019) predictive economic logics, Braidotti's (2013) posthuman subjectivity and new

materialist understandings by Barad (2007), Bennett (2010), and Alaimo (2010), the novel has been read as a story anatomy of data-driven government.

The results support the conceptual theories about surveillance capitalism and the ways it strengthens the concentration of power through affective alignment and ethical reframing. The extraction imperative is deeply entrenched in the communal rhetoric and redefines voluntary participation as ongoing production of a behavioural surplus. The 755 keyword hits from Corpus analysis by AntConc this time feature the highest number, 44.4%, coming from Phase III, which clearly validates the escalatory logic of which the novel is made. The power of the instrumentarian works imperceptibly, aligning behavior through economies of action: it's about predicting, and shaping future behaviors, a subtle process of utilization, but also of reworking the agency itself, through a dispossession cycle that over time becomes a process of inhabitation.

The study has also revealed posthuman subjectivity as the condition and result of this regime. The example of Mae is a number of relational, nomadic and transversal modes of subjectivity enmeshed in technomaterial networks. If the new pages of collective connectivity as described by Braidotti (2013) under the description of Zoe are captured and used by corporate infrastructures this poses particular challenges to the possibilities of affirmative ethics in many digital contexts. At the end of the day, *The Circle* is about the meeting of economic extraction and ontological reconfiguration, and shows that the future of digital life will depend on asking critical questions about its infrastructures, the ones that enable its relationality.

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