

## HAPPY DYSTOPIANS

**B**Y THE MID-1970S, it appeared, the predominant usage of the terms ‘mass’ and ‘masses’ had shifted to largely quantitative meanings. Raymond Williams noted that whilst ‘in the right circles and in protected situations, the *mob* and *idiot multitude* tones’ could still be heard, usage had by and large moved away from ‘the older simplicities of contempt’ to the ‘sense of a very large number’.<sup>1</sup> Over a decade later, Andreas Huyssen argued that the era of a consciously high-cultural modernism defining itself against ‘mass culture’ was over, shifted into the past by a complex array of political and cultural practices, not the least of which was postmodernism’s appetite for the forms and genres of popular culture: ‘The uses high art makes of certain forms of mass culture . . . blur the boundaries between the two; where modernism’s great wall once kept the barbarians out and safeguarded the culture within, there is now only slippery ground which may prove fertile for some and treacherous for others.’<sup>2</sup>

Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is possible to see a resurgence of the older, non-quantitative languages of anxiety about and scorn for ‘the masses’, a return to the tone and conceptual dichotomies, if not the vocabulary, marking out again the ‘*mob* and *idiot multitude*’ from the individuality they simultaneously lack and threaten. Such a resurgence should have its heaviest contemporary investment in the field of politics, in reactions to what is posited as the undoing of thought, of fact and reflection in the perceived populisms that succeeded the financial crisis of 2007–08.<sup>3</sup> Here I want to consider not a political manifestation of the return of ‘the masses’ but a sister ‘allegory of crowd control’, one in literature where the returning figure is that of a specifically modernist mass, Dave Eggers’s novel *The Circle*, from 2013.<sup>4</sup> It has none of the narrative energy and ironic *joie de vivre* of the memoir for which Eggers first became widely known, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*

(2000). It uses a third-person narrator, deadpan, detailed, detached, to tell a story of the dismantling of privacy and consequently of individuality, autonomy and freedom, in a dystopia of the near future. The novel was immediately and widely received as a 'Brave New World for our brave new world', a warning as 'important for us now as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*' was then.<sup>5</sup> Margaret Atwood described the novel as a satire of 'the increasing corporate ownership of privacy, and about the effects such ownership may have on the nature of Western democracy' in which a 'brave new world of virtual sharing and caring breeds monsters'.<sup>6</sup>

The 'monsters' of *The Circle* do not take the form of physical crowds or assembled masses. They are disaggregated, disembodied, spread globally and asynchronously through a homogeneous digital space of friendship, community, commerce and love. Such disaggregation has indeed been the default form of the masses for over a century, departed from only at moments of social crisis when the masses do take to the streets, or seem to threaten to. Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895) was criticized by Gabriel Tarde, at the height of its sensational reception, precisely for confusing 'the vast realm of opinion or "mental" forms of assembly with that much smaller and intermittent realm of "psychic connections" produced by physical contacts'.<sup>7</sup> For Tarde, the masses as a crowd were already the 'social group of the past'. Public opinion, the specifically liberal ideological condition and consequence of the era of the popular press, creates a 'dispersion of individuals who are physically separated and whose cohesion is entirely mental', then emergent as 'the social group of the future'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), London 2014, pp. 192–3.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, London 1988, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> See Christian Borch and Britta Timm Knudsen, 'Postmodern Crowds: Reinventing Crowd Thinking', in *Distinktion*, vol. 14, no. 2, August 2013, p. 109; and Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Parties*, London and New York 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Mob Porn', in Schnapp and Matthew Tiewes, eds, *Crowds*, Stanford 2006, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Quotations respectively from Ron Charles, *Washington Post*, 1 October 2013, and David Baddiel, 'Books of the Year', *New Statesman*, 3 December 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'When Privacy Is Theft', *New York Review of Books*, 21 November 2013, pp. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Schnapp and Tiewes, *Crowds*, p. x.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Tarde, 'The Public and the Crowd' (1898), in Terry Clark, ed., *Gabriel Tarde on Communication and Social Influence: Selected Essays*, Chicago 1969, pp. 280–1.

This group became the dispersed beings of mass culture, socialized even as they were atomized, their signature and habitus the escalating ‘commodification and colonization of cultural space’ which also entailed the penetration of the masses in their new forms into the core spaces of liberalism, those of privacy. Modernism’s other was this form of the mass, that of mass culture with which it engaged in a ‘compulsive *pas de deux*’.<sup>9</sup> The first novel to emit a full-throated scream at these socialized, individualized yet massified wreckers of true sociality and true individuality was *Brave New World*. A comparison of Huxley’s 1932 novel with Eggers’s 2013 version should help us learn something about the continuities and ruptures shaping today’s new ‘masses’—and also something about the forces literature may be assembling to protect itself from their forms.

Both novels are built out of an anxiety—and a certain cynicism—about democracy. The conditions of the anxiety are presented without drama, presuming readers’ assent: science and technology, when coupled with the modern state and the stock nostrums of representative government—‘equality’, ‘progress’ and the rest—provide unprecedented ways of centralizing power, but these concentrations of power cannot (and need not) tolerate anything outside themselves. ‘Freedom’ and ‘individuality’ are necessarily sacrificed: in *Brave New World* to ‘Community, Identity, Stability’; in *The Circle* to ‘community’, ‘participation’, and ‘transparency’. This anxiety about democracy is not uncommon in dystopian fiction: it may be that the erasure of the political promise of freedom, of which democracy is one articulation, is a constitutive component of dystopia itself.<sup>10</sup> The cynicism is more dispersed in these novels, and is historically the most interesting aspect of both. For it is not generated by or invested in objective forces hostile to the project of democracy—political movements, for example, states or corporations. Rather it is occasioned by democracy’s potential beneficiaries and agents: people as a collective. It is not democracy *per se* that these texts are cynical about but the capacity of people to live up to its ideals. The freedom and individuality the novels mourn are precisely the qualities that ‘the people’ are unequal to.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> See Gregory Claeys, ‘The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell’, in Claeys, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, Cambridge 2010, p. 107; also Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, Colorado 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this essay, I use the distinction between liberal and democratic traditions of thinking ‘the people’ as articulated by Chantal Mouffe in *The Democratic Paradox*, London 2000.

Total sociability is one thread binding *Brave New World* and *The Circle*, and distinguishing the category of dystopian fiction to which they belong from other texts of the genre. In E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops' (1909) or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a terrible isolation is one of the primary indices of life's degradation. To seek contact with another is itself a key form of resistance. For Huxley and Eggers, in contrast, solitude, suffering and privacy are the modes of resistance: the regimes which are repudiated are characterized by a sociability that aspires to be total. This sociability is not so much enforced as it is embraced by those whose compliance or complicity is an essential part of the regime's dystopian nature. The subjects who embrace their own subjection are—again contrary to the dominant conventions of the genre—happy subjects, happy dystopians. 'Community, Identity, Stability' is the 'World State's motto', carved into the physical landscape of the city and the first page of Huxley's novel. Eggers disperses his equivalent mottos. In keeping with the metamorphosis of power from a central state into a twenty-first-century corporation fetishizing horizontal or decentralized—'flattened'—modes of rule, the company called the Circle generates 'inspirations', injunctions that are scattered throughout the text as they are scattered throughout the paving stones and buildings in the Circle 'campus': 'All that happens must be known'; 'Secrets are Lies'; 'Sharing is Caring'; and centrally, 'Privacy is Theft'. In both novels, these and similar political slogans are not the signature of a dystopian regime in and of themselves; they are so because they are reproduced with smiles and sincerity, embodied and put into daily practice by those who submit to the theft of their individuality and freedom.

### *Bread, circuses and resistance*

The political importance and impotence of a privatized form of individuality is key in these novels. It is the form resistance takes in both. A defeated or disenchanting liberalism—but no less normative for that—is the political thread that binds them: an individualism so frail it is barely the parody of a form capable of resistance. This individualism in turn is frail precisely because it is constituted by an understanding of the masses as antagonistic to privacy—the latter being the core social and experiential component for the model of individuality at work in the texts.

Two moments of resistance and its defeat, both of which rely on an understanding of the crowd or mass as almost irresistible and always antithetical to the individualism needed to fight it, illuminate the parallels. These dramatize an actual confrontation between an individual and the crowd, and end in the former's defeat, thus demonstrating their constitutional antagonism. The atypical presence of embodied crowds in these two scenes is climactic, articulating the moment when the threat of the masses—conversely ever present in their dispersed, disembodied or mediated forms—overpowers the promise of resistance.

Fittingly, in an ideal state that both fears and scorns the past, the avatar of that past, John the Savage, commits suicide at the end of *Brave New World*. The irruption of past into present triggered by the World State's encounter with his hybrid of 'primitivism' and a Shakespeare-inflected modernity can cease, the past returned to the confines of the distant 'reservation' as surely as individuality has been banished to the island for exiles. Helmholtz Watson and Bernard Marx are two such exiles, the latter a reluctant dissident, Watson the artist as detached modernist.<sup>12</sup> The scene of John's suicide is an old lighthouse he has chosen as his 'hermitage' because of its remoteness, natural abundance and beauty. Solitude is to be his reward for escaping the World Controller's desire to continue with 'the experiment' he represented; but he soon becomes a tourist attraction, an entertaining spectacle of otherness, first to local 'Delta-Minus landworkers', then to the reporters who flock 'like turkey buzzards settling on a corpse'. One of them makes a film, *The Savage of Surrey*, which when released is 'seen, heard and felt in every first-class feely palace in Western Europe'.<sup>13</sup>

The film catapults 'the Savage' into a global public sphere, trapping him as an involuntary star. Swarms of 'trippers' assemble by his lighthouse: they arrive in helicopters like 'locusts' and alight, dozens of couples 'staring,

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<sup>12</sup> A third exile in *Brave New World* prefigures a move *The Circle* will also make: Mustapha Mond, the Resident Controller for Western Europe. Mond knows that the World State his authority embodies is just one way of living: there are alternatives. He sacrifices his interests in 'science', Shakespeare and 'truth' as a political choice confirming his individuality. That both novels use elements from within the ruling order to explain the limits of the system illustrates the extent to which class tensions have been subsumed by the politics of individuality.

<sup>13</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932), London 2014, pp. 214, 219, 224. Hereafter BNW.

laughing, clicking their cameras, throwing (as to an ape) peanuts, packets of sex-hormone chewing-gum, pan-glandular *petits beurres*—‘As in a nightmare, the dozens became scores, the scores hundreds.’ The couples—all heterosexual—are fascinated by the erotic dynamics of John’s self-flagellating rituals. They cry in unison for him to use the whip: ‘In a slow heavy rhythm, “We—Want—the Whip” . . . “We—Want—the Whip” . . . they were all crying together . . . intoxicated by the noise, the unanimity, the sense of rhythmical atonement.’<sup>14</sup> Strung tight on denial and restriction, ‘the Savage’ succumbs to the eroticized attraction of the crowd and, drugged with soma, joins in an orgy. The next morning, disgusted by the recollection of his part in the event, he hangs himself.

Just over eighty years later, a similar dynamic—between crowd and individual, complicity and resistance—is played out in *The Circle*, albeit one in which the eroticism is at a remove whilst ‘pain’ remains a ‘fascinating horror’.<sup>15</sup> Mercer, one of the novel’s two focalizing agents for a normative horizon of individuality as composed of nature, art and solitude, takes himself ‘off-grid’. His are the words which, in letters and speeches to an ex-girlfriend captured by the Circle’s seductions, articulate the novel’s understanding of the good life. Solitude, silence and suffering again combine here, this time in a context where a global tech corporation has decided to abolish all three: ‘Suffering is only suffering if it’s done in silence, in solitude. Pain experienced in public, in view of loving millions, was no longer pain. It was communion.’<sup>16</sup>

Mercer runs from this emerging totalizing world of ‘constant surveillance’, aiming to put himself beyond reach of the cameras, social networks, digital-tracking chips, compliant or coerced governments; the apparatus of knowing and sharing that constitute this world’s circuits of power and its criminalization of privacy. He had hoped to live with a minority of unseduced others ‘underground, and in the desert, in the woods’—‘like refugees or hermits’.<sup>17</sup> The Circle generates a new surveillance product, SoulSearch, whose purpose is to facilitate a type of crowd-sourced bounty-hunting: ‘fugitives’ are to be hunted down on camera and by cameras, watched by the billions who are also the producers of the spectacle being watched.

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<sup>14</sup> BNW, pp. 225, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Dave Eggers, *The Circle*, New York 2013, p. 227. Hereafter TC.

<sup>16</sup> TC, p. 441.

<sup>17</sup> TC, pp. 432–3.

At a launch to demonstrate the potential of SoulSearch as an instrument of criminal justice, a ‘fugitive’, an English child-murderer, is located and filmed in flight, pursued by crowds posting their video feeds to SoulSearch’s users, all within ten minutes. The demonstration itself is centred physically in the Circle’s Californian headquarters but takes place worldwide: the launch is simultaneously livestreamed, making public the search and capture of a human being by vigilante crowds—themselves remote participants in the livestreaming. Once the English woman has been captured, the company’s professionals and the mass of their eager users decide to track down ‘not another fugitive’ but ‘a regular civilian’. Within minutes, Mercer has been nominated and then located in a remote part of Oregon. Cars and cameras are shown arriving at a house, then following Mercer’s truck as he flees them. Drones with cameras enrich the pursuit, ‘giving the audience an incredible grid of images, all of the drones well-spaced, providing a kaleidoscopic look at the truck racing up the mountain road through heavy pines’.<sup>18</sup> The drones are fitted with audio and microphones, allowing the multitude of Mercer’s remote pursuers to speak to him, a mixture of reassurances and taunts that bleed into one another as he is warned that he must ‘surrender. You’re surrounded . . . You’re surrounded . . . by friends!’ Mercer drives his truck off a bridge, his facial expression—‘something like determination, something like serenity’—broadcast simultaneously with images of the truck, now a ‘tiny object’, dropping ‘from the bridge overhead and landing, like a tin toy, on the rocks below’.<sup>19</sup>

Reviewers of Eggers’s novel were not slow to hear echoes of *Brave New World*, but these identifications largely took the form of general parallels: both authors note tendencies in their respective cultures and extrapolate from these to create plausible warnings of a totalitarianism that may arrive in unexpected guises. There is no mention in these reviews—either descriptive or critical—of what is so singular and politically provocative about the two novels: their dramatization of the assumption that totalitarianism would come in ways embraced by the populations themselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> TC, p. 457.

<sup>19</sup> TC, p. 461.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Susannah Luthi, ‘Brainwash, Condition, Repeat: Dave Eggers’s *The Circle*’, *LA Review of Books*, 27 November 2013; Betsy Morais, ‘Sharing is Caring is Sharing’, *New Yorker*, 30 October 2013.

That the crowd, the mass, the mob, crave strong rule, call it forth and constitute its raw material, is not in itself an atypical understanding of the mass of the population. It is a core component of thinking about social and political norms of order in the West—in particular, of the liberal tradition of political thought.<sup>21</sup> But dystopian fiction, a genre inaugurated at the same moment as the ‘problematization’ of the crowd in the late nineteenth century, has tended to dramatize systems of rule as reliant to some degree on naked force and hence on fear.<sup>22</sup> The question to be asked of dystopias in which force and fear are not the media of rule is: why not? After all, such fictions are political not only in content but also in form. They are about politics and do politics. Hence they have to be about people as political subjects. For Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, the ‘totalizing agenda in the dystopian form’ consists of the text’s construction of ‘a narrative of the hegemonic order and a counter-narrative of resistance’. The dystopian text typically begins ‘directly in the terrible new world’:

Even without a dislocating move to an elsewhere, the element of textual estrangement remains in effect since the focus is frequently on a character who questions the dystopian society . . . a counter-narrative develops as the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance.<sup>23</sup>

In Huxley’s and Eggers’s texts, the questioning—or ‘counter-narrative of resistance’—comes most powerfully (which is to say, not very) from those outside of or marginal to the dystopian sphere. Their objections find no interlocutors among the ‘dystopian citizens’ themselves: indeed, their calls to individuality are defeated precisely by the illegibility of those calls to the inhabitants of dystopia as such. Representations of the mass of the people as lost to the collective, their latent individuality surrendered to it, are a necessary part of such fictions, however varied the guise used to articulate them. Dystopian representations help reproduce contemporary understandings of the political capacity of people as people, to be challenged or confirmed depending on the political trajectory the

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<sup>21</sup> J. S. McClelland, ‘Liberalism’s Special Enemies: The Crowd and its Enemies’, in McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*, Abingdon 1996; also McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, London 1989.

<sup>22</sup> See Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds*, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, ‘Dystopia and Histories’, in Baccolini and Moylan, eds, *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Abingdon 2003, p. 5.

fiction takes. Given the strength and endurance of the notion of ‘masses’ or ‘the mass’ and its many synonyms, much dystopian fiction relies on the idea that the masses are responsible, at some level, for their own subjection. Nevertheless Orwell’s boot stamping on a human face is a far more typical dystopian symbol than that same face happily chanting the name of its own subjection.

### *Leisure as oppression*

Why is fear as a mode of rule absent in these two novels, structurally replaced by a happiness secured without friction? And why is resistance here resolutely individual, unable to imagine forms of collectivity which are not alien and implacably hostile to the very individuality resistance is premised on? Both texts figure resistance as necessarily individual, male and doomed, and figure ‘complicity’ as contentment, as a ‘mass’ phenomenon. This is a cycle that dooms resistance even as it pushes it into ever more private, ever more precious, solitary realms. Both novels are conservative in form, and their resort to an ironic mode of narration is not incidental here: they can imagine only a privatized resistance, a form of individuality constitutionally alien to the subjects whose domination is the dystopian regime’s strength and horror.

Fredric Jameson has described *Brave New World* as ‘very much an aristocratic critique of the media and mass culture, rather than of any totalitarianism’.<sup>24</sup> This distinction points to *Brave New World*’s use of leisure rather than labour as the real arena of exploitation or oppression, and of politics or the desire for ‘freedom’. It is an emphasis that recurs in Eggers’s novel, but for that to be visible it is necessary to historicize the use made of ‘leisure’. The distinction to be made here is political and historical. Huxley was committed to the high reaction of a self-conscious ‘intellectual’ elite against ‘mass democracy’, yet considered himself a political dilettante until his turn to pacifism in the 1930s. The discursive regime he operated within was one insufficiently invested in utopian possibilities to be capable of producing what Jameson, talking about Zamyatin’s *We*, calls a ‘true anti-Utopia’.<sup>25</sup> This should not be taken to mean that he was not interested in the political ideas that flourished

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<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London and New York 2005, p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 207.

on the right in Western Europe after the First World War. The image of Huxley in the 1920s as a blithe aesthete is a complacent one.<sup>26</sup> It evades the serious point of much of his writing in that decade, and also, possibly more importantly, the detached position he created for what he termed the 'scientific' view of politics: an observer aligned with no 'side' and consequently capable of criticizing all. The premise of this irony is that there is nothing that can be said about 'all individuals'. There are no universalisms: hence, for a style constitutionally compelled to 'debunk' the universals which, though wrong, are being institutionalized everywhere, democracy is a physiological and psychological impossibility. The minds of 'men' are like their bodies, ineradicably different; equality cannot exist. On this view, no utopian thinking is possible:

A century of growing democracy has shown that the reform of institutions and the spread of education are by no means necessarily followed by improvements in individual virtue and intelligence.<sup>27</sup>

Here, I want to concentrate on what was peculiar about Huxley's historical configuration, on his social location in the matrix of forces that were consolidating perceptions of a culture that was 'mass', and in the process, transfiguring centuries-old tropes of 'the masses'. This historical configuration will allow us to see the specificity of Huxley's dramatizations of forms of mass-consciousness, and thus to recognize the possibly strange survival of those forms in *The Circle*.

Margaret Atwood has underlined the contrast between the 'brutal, mind-controlling totalitarian state' in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the 'softer forms of totalitarianism' dramatized in Huxley's novel, which turns on a regime of 'conformity'.<sup>28</sup> 'Softness' and 'conformity' are two of the defining tropes of masses in the inter-war years. The 'mass man' experiences his own individuality as alien to him, and frequently as a

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<sup>26</sup> In his 1946 'Foreword' to a reissue of *Brave New World*, Huxley, describing the novel's 'defects as a work of art' (they are 'considerable' but it is 'art' nevertheless), notes his younger self's indifference to the novel's airless closure: John the Savage 'ends in maniacal self-torture and despairing suicide. "And so they died miserably ever after"—much to the reassurance of the amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete who was the author of the fable' (BNW, 'Foreword', p. xlii). See 'Introduction', in David Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley*, London 1994, p. vii.

<sup>27</sup> Aldous Huxley, 'The Idea of Equality' (1927), in Robert Baker and James Sexton, eds, *Aldous Huxley: Complete Essays, Volume II: 1926–1929*, Chicago 2000, p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Introduction' to *Brave New World*, London 2007, p. vii.

burden or object of fear: conformity is the inevitable result as he surrenders or abandons the individuality he is unfit for to escape into the soft embrace of the imitative, the pleasure of being one with the many. 'Mass' is perhaps the most highly charged cultural signifier of the period. The compound 'mass man' entered recorded usage in 1928, preceded by 'mass consciousness' (1922), 'mass thinking' (1924) and 'mass emotions' (1927); and followed in 1930 by 'mass civilization', then by 'mass consumer' (1931), 'mass hatred', 'mass fear' and 'mass mind' (1932), 'mass entertainment' (1933), 'mass hysteria', 'mass minded' and 'mass made thought' (1934), 'mass art' and 'mass public' (1938). The earliest date the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives for 'mass culture' is 1934. Each of these compounds names not something new but the 'mass' relation of some older, true or original variant. In qualifying 'man' or 'thinking', 'art' or 'culture', as 'mass', the new name signifies two processes—the degeneration of the thing named into a parodic antithesis of itself, and the slippage of the term 'mass' from its long established association with actual masses. You no longer had to be part of a crowd, physically or socially, to be part of a mass, rather the crowd had contaminated once-individual pursuits, practices, agents and objects.

Clearly the crowd theory associated with Gustave Le Bon, and the later work on the fallacies of reason associated with Vilfredo Pareto, inform the semantic history of 'mass-' compounds in the inter-war years.<sup>29</sup> The conjuncture in which 'massness' becomes mobile in the 1920s and the 1930s has been well documented and explored.<sup>30</sup> What has received less attention is how the accelerating proliferation of 'mass' terms in the 1920s and 1930s was centred on modern leisure, whether as a potential realm of freedom or of enslavement. Where nineteenth-century anxieties about the capacity of the mass of the population to be reasonable beings had centred on labour and the practices that would organize it along class lines, the anxieties of the twentieth century pictured the masses as liable to be corrupted by their participation in leisure activities, a realm hitherto conceivable only as private. Those late Victorian discourses

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<sup>29</sup> See 'Introduction' and two opening essays in Bradshaw, ed., *The Hidden Huxley*. These trace Huxley's gravitation towards the work of crowd psychologists, elite theorists and eugenicists. See also Borch, *Politics of Crowds*, Chapter 6, 'Reactions to Totalitarianism'.

<sup>30</sup> Examples are Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses*, Ithaca 1984; John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, London 1992; James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, eds, *Modernity and Mass Culture*, Bloomington 1991.

which confidently posited leisure as the potential realm of freedom seem quaint when set against the waves of concern about the ‘softening’, ‘sentimentalizing’, ‘massifying’ effects of popular fiction, music and film in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Jameson notes a shift of attention in the early part of the twentieth century from industrial to informational production as the realm of alienation: ‘Rather than evoking alienated labour, we might rather speak of alienated leisure. For here we encounter that dimension of industrial production henceforth known as the media.’<sup>31</sup> The field of leisure at the turn of the twentieth century was not itself a new one for working-class and lower-middle-class people, but it was becoming newly structured or re-structured as a field of commodified pursuits, the circuits between them rendered fluid by rising levels of literacy, the new practices of publishing, and the technologies and objects of mass-reproduction which made everything increasingly accessible, from images and music to clothes, household furnishings and food, even as they became increasingly uniform.

The political economy of Huxley’s *Brave New World*—as in his non-fictional writings from the same period—is indeed focused almost entirely on matters of governance rather than production. The subjects in need of governance, those who render its scope and responsibility so much more expansive and intensive than was once thought necessary, are the masses of ordinary people, their capacity to self-govern undone by leisure, the potential autonomy of their private lives surrendered to the delights of mass culture. Children may be engineered according to the needs of production, whose forces are sketchily global and unflagging: certain embryos are conditioned to have a horror of cold, being ‘predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miners and acetate silk spinners and steel workers’.<sup>32</sup> Chemical workers are trained to tolerate lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine; rocket-plane engineers are given an improved sense of balance so that they can cope with the amount of time they will spend spinning or moving upside down. Yet *Brave New World*’s economy is not capitalist: there is only one employer, the World State; there is no market, no competition.<sup>33</sup> In one of the novel’s expository moments, the Resident World Controller for Western Europe makes

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<sup>31</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> BNW, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> There is money or some form of currency, however, the spending of which causes anxiety. The neurotic Marx remembers that he has ‘left the eau-de-Cologne tap in his bathroom wide open and running’, and is consumed with a need to get it turned off before it will ‘cost me a fortune’ (BNW, p. 87).

clear the secondary role played by production. The purpose of the World State is stability, not profit or even progress, and that is to be achieved by ensuring the efficient engineering and reproduction of desires: 'The world's stable now. People are happy; they can get what they want, and they never want what they can't get.'<sup>34</sup>

When John the Savage objects that such stability by necessity excludes the suffering from which individuality is formed, the suffering individuality which runs like a red thread through his conception of the good life, the Controller agrees:

That's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.

The mass production of happiness in turn requires that leisure time be colonized, bent into shapes capable of absorbing and reproducing engineered desires for 'entertainments'. For the beginnings of the World State, the 'constriction of consumption' rather than the means of production had been foundational:

Old men in the bad old days used to renounce, retire, take to religion, spend their time reading, thinking—thinking! . . . now—such is progress—the old men work, the old men copulate, the old men have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think.<sup>35</sup>

In order to make workers 'happy' with their work, the World State had to absorb and turn to its purposes the intimate core of the private sphere, the family. The privatized family—the foundation on which everything else is built—is here re-engineered by Bokanovsky groups. Sets of human clones are 'engineered' according to specifications derived from Huxley's understanding of manual and semi-skilled labour. All 'lower-caste' workers are designed to like their 'childish simple' tasks and constitute the largest proportion of that 'optimum population': 'modelled on the iceberg—eight ninths below the water, one ninth above.' The World State has an 'invention office' stuffed with ingenious plans for saving labour, speeding it up, shortening the working day. None of these are necessary; on the contrary, they are socially

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<sup>34</sup> BNW, p. 194.

<sup>35</sup> BNW, pp. 194, 4, 47–8.

unproductive, the World State's purpose being not production but stability. But 'Epsilon-Semi-Moron', 'Delta' and 'Delta-Minus' workers would suffer if deprived of their work: 'It would be sheer cruelty to afflict them with excessive leisure.'<sup>36</sup>

The weak link in the reproduction of stability and of happiness is the 'Alpha' caste, those required to perform managerial and intellectual tasks. Alphas are allowed consciousness of themselves as individuals. They are 'separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities'. Designated the 'upper-caste' layer, Alphas are most dependent on the world of leisure to secure their continuing incorporation in the social body.<sup>37</sup> Being relatively 'unconditioned', they are prone to yearnings—for solitude, for intimacy, silence, a sense of the ineffable or a higher purpose—which cannot be subsumed in consumption or generate stability. To be capable of seeing and of recognizing freedom, to be capable of realizing an authentic self, requires solitude and silence. These conditions are the grounds of beauty, truth and art. For this caste, the daily regimes of sex, soma, golf, feelies and parties are the only key to stability.

### *Transparency trap*

Like Huxley's World State, the global tech company called the Circle is a self-parodying blend of 'utopian' impulse and yearning for power. The latter enters the text as sinister or unspoken practice and is accessed by the reader in the complaints of those who are unseduced or rebel. The utopian impulse is explicit, performative of the Circle's brand or philosophy, and organizes the consumption of the company's products and services but also the articulation of the responsibilities and privileges of its employees. Stenton, one of the 'three wise men' who run the Circle, focalizes the text on money and the company's commercial ambition. The Circle, when it is articulated in his image, aims to monopolize the market in informational and communication services by eliminating competition and any hostile political forces. A key part of this ambition is the colonization of all the forms of the state concerned with public order and welfare.

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<sup>36</sup> BNW, pp. 43, 197.

<sup>37</sup> BNW, pp. 195, 133.

Bailey, the second of the wise men, a figure of a pastoral or gently evangelical mien, is invested with the energies and vocabulary of an older humanism, the utopian premise of which is human perfectibility. Committed to family, community and to living modestly yet imaginatively, Bailey opens a space in the text for the company to be posited as a vehicle for 'progress'. The dream here fuses nineteenth-century liberal humanism and twenty-first-century technologies in a hybrid that completely undoes the fetishization of privacy as the medium of liberty. For Bailey, the company is on 'the right side of history', making possible and unavoidable a 'fully participatory democracy'. With 'full participation comes full knowledge'; politics will become transparent to itself; there will be no outside to representation:

We know what Circlers want because we ask, and because they know their answers are necessary to get a full and accurate picture of the desires of the whole Circle community. So if we observe the same model nationally, electorally, then we can get very close, I think, to one hundred per cent participation. One hundred per cent democracy.<sup>38</sup>

Full participation, full knowledge of the participants' desires, is not in itself either democratic or utopian unless that knowledge and those desires can be shaped to yearn for full participation and full knowledge. The production of just such yearning subjects is the company's non- or only semi-commercial purpose. It does not so much wish to abolish the state as to subsume its purpose: to enable and reproduce a particular model of being.

Mobilizing the older languages and values of community, participation and democracy, values key to the notion of civil society as a private sphere independent of the state and regulated only by contract or familial bonds, the company erodes the boundaries between work and not-work, dissolving the basis of the private sphere as such. The celebration of participation required of employees (coercive though not experienced as such) is ceaseless. Failure to participate—even momentarily—is met with a punitive form of concern, one oscillating between the hurt feelings of colleagues and the threatening moral rebukes issued by personnel or line managers. Here too there is to be 'no leisure from pleasure'. Pleasure or personal performance and fulfilment have morphed so

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<sup>38</sup> TC, pp. 385, 386.

that labour—for the employee—becomes an intangible, unquantifiable thing: the subject does not ‘work’ so much as ‘participate’: a subject who does not work cannot stop working. Employees ‘invest’ in their own value by being constantly ‘on’.

All this activity works for the Circle at three levels: the company has a workforce of compulsorily connected yet atomized subjects, ceaselessly communicating yet ceaselessly competing; the valuable data the latter generate as a by-product of their paid work is monetized in various ways; third, by being so active, successful, and, crucially, by being so *transparently* fulfilled, the employees perform the model of subjectivity the company promotes, a type of humanity the company needs, which knows no secrets, no solitude, shame or suffering. It is utterly transparent to itself and to others: its memories, histories, family and friendship networks, desires, diet, health, are all the currency of that new visibility which is the means of perfectibility. According to Bailey, the voice of a corporate paternalism, the Circle is enabling the historic project of gathering and making public all there is to be known. Full knowledge must also be public knowledge; all must be accessible to all.<sup>39</sup> Once everything is fully transparent, nobody will do any wrong—either because the taboos that designated certain actions or practices as wrong will wither once disinfected with publicity,<sup>40</sup> or because the psychic benefits of doing wrong would be far outweighed by the public opprobrium.

The company’s technological innovations mean that complete knowledge and complete transparency are now possible. The obstacles in the way of realizing this vision of total surveillance arise from the political value invested in privacy. This is the shrunken privacy of the twenty-first century, rather than the more socially expansive private realm of Huxley’s class formation in the inter-war years. It continues to rest on the autonomy of the self and to be underpinned by the apparatus of private property. However, it can only be expressed in negative terms: the right to secrets, the right not to be known, the right to be left alone. Privacy here is not associated with any social spatial apparatus—the

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<sup>39</sup> This does not include the company’s corporate dealings with powerful opponents: a mixture of bribes, blackmail and buyouts.

<sup>40</sup> The resonances with Julian Assange’s vision for WikiLeaks are explicit here and echo the disdain for Assange’s messianic politics of transparency in Jonathan Franzen’s *Purity* (2015)—see especially pp. 483–92: transparency destroys privacy by destroying the need for it.

home for example—or temporal site: leisure or ‘free time’ has disappeared as its valorized medium.<sup>41</sup>

In a scene where he successfully persuades the employee Mae that secrets are ‘the enablers of antisocial, immoral and destructive behaviour’,<sup>42</sup> Bailey describes the consequent model of subjectivity as the ‘best self’ we are capable of:

My point is, what if we all behaved as if we were being watched? It would lead to a more moral way of life. Who would do something unethical or immoral or illegal if they were being watched? . . . We would finally be compelled to be our best selves. And I think people would be relieved. There would be this phenomenal global sigh of relief. Finally, finally we can be good . . . we will finally realize our potential.<sup>43</sup>

There are two objects of satire here. Just as Huxley took aim at the Wellsian aspiration to organize collective life more ‘intelligently’, Eggers takes aim at the techno-utopianism of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Since his version of this contemporary form of political thinking is corporate, however, his satire draws in the practices that constitute a distinctly neoliberal form of labour, erasing the boundary between work and leisure. If an employer requires an employee’s whole self at all times, there can be no part of that self left to be private. Maurizio Lazaretto describes both the historical specificity and the expansive scope of such neoliberal absorption of non-paid labour time when he writes about the drive of modern management techniques to recruit the subjectivity of employees: such techniques ‘are looking for “the worker’s soul” to become part of the workplace. The worker’s personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command.’<sup>44</sup>

If Eggers’s novel were just this, however—a critique of techno-utopianism and the neoliberal labour practices which it can cast as libertarian, collective or creative—it would be less significant. What

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<sup>41</sup> Though ‘nature’ in its guise as ‘the great outdoors’ remains a valorized site of self-knowing—see the return to possession of herself when Mae goes kayaking; and see too the use of Alaska to enable a fuller realization of a self in Eggers’s next novel, *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016).

<sup>42</sup> TC, p. 239.

<sup>43</sup> TC, pp. 290–2.

<sup>44</sup> Maurizio Lazaretto, ‘Immaterial Labour’, in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis 1996, p. 133.

makes it interesting for a history of dystopian fiction is its restaging of *both* the old anxiety about the masses or ‘massification’ *and* of the only imaginable resistance to that as an individualism at once structurally central and politically crippled. As with Huxley, the two presuppose each other: the definitive feature of the mass—dematerialized or not—is its overcoming of individuality. Only the alienated individual can see this, can register the shock and horror of the various forms of deindividuation. Although the radically atomized being is structurally necessary to bring the mass into view, that same individuation cannot be generalized as an effective normative horizon: the mass is composed of those who have surrendered their individuality to become immersed in the collective. Here, individuality can no longer be synonymous with humanity, for which another name must be found: ‘mass humanity’, for example, or—as in Eggers’s novel—‘the mob’.

### *Modes of resistance and defeat*

For Georg Lukács, it could be said that the tragic hero was by definition ‘a lonely figure who strives to elevate himself above the merely human and the masses’.<sup>45</sup> Though defeated, neither Huxley’s nor Eggers’s rebels are tragic. They are rather redundant heroes, intrinsically necessary to these dystopian fictions but incapable of going further than externalizing the resistance they merely stand for. Their character arcs trace the impossibility of individuality in an era of deprivatization, which is designed from without but is embraced and internalized by the masses who cannot bear what it means to be private. In each novel, individualism’s defeat takes a feminized form. The gender politics around representations of ‘the masses’ are too complex and variegated to be engaged with here, but Huxley and Eggers follow a classic gendered division in the structure of oppression. The structures that oppress, and their immanent intelligence or will, are masculine, self-contained and self-seeking, mobilizing in socially expansive forms all the properties of a ‘leader’, a political will that need not ever be physically present to be consequential, being embodied in the structures of the state or the company. Those led not by force but by joyous consent are feminized, the discursive strategies used to convey their seduction an assemblage of emotion, irrationalism, vulnerability to flattery, attraction to material and psychic comforts, and hyper-conventionality. Resistance in both texts is defeated—necessarily—

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<sup>45</sup> Jobst Welge, ‘Far from the Crowd’, in Schnapp and Tiews, eds, *Crowds*, p. 335.

but that defeat is given the form of a woman. In each text, a female character dramatizes a surrender of interiority, a form of social adaptation, all the more total for being momentarily tested in the encounter between female consenters and male resisters: a woman refuses the 'freedom' held out by a man and thereby secures his downfall.

Lenina Crowne in *Brave New World* and Mae Holland in *The Circle* serve these dual functions. The former is present chiefly as an index of the success of conditioning—even in Alphas. Likewise, Mae is set on a path that leads to the absolute surrender of her self: an autonomous human being at the start of the novel, she has by its conclusion become a mere repository for and ventriloquist of corporately sanctioned, heartfelt 'feelings'. Both characters perform a certain amount of textual labour as they dramatize the efficacy of the techniques of deindividuation and deprivatization. Particularly notable is what happens to conversation when it involves women. Adorno saw in the speech of Huxley's characters (he singled out female speech for this) an index of a 'degeneration of talk' wrought by 'objective tendencies':

The ladies of *Brave New World*—in this case extrapolation is hardly required—converse only as consumers. In principle their conversation concerns nothing but what is in any case to be found in the catalogues of the ubiquitous industries, information about available commodities. Objectively superfluous, it is the empty shell of dialogue, the intention of which was once to find out what was hitherto unknown. Stripped of this idea, dialogue is ripe for extinction.<sup>46</sup>

Dialogue that pursues the discovery of the unknown is of course still extant in the text. The key scene organizing the exposition of the World State's laws, including the various historical 'experiments' made to test them, is composed largely of dialogue between the World Controller for Western Europe and the three rebels. The Controller, himself a reader of the illicit Shakespeare and nostalgic for 'pure science',<sup>47</sup> speaks with the rebels on a basis of discursive equality: all recognize that knowledge, truth, individuality and freedom are sacrificed for 'community life', happiness and stability. They share the text's premise: that these things cannot co-exist.

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<sup>46</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber, Cambridge, MA 1997, pp. 101–2.

<sup>47</sup> BNW, p. 200.

The 'ladies' on the other hand are given the task of figuring that happiness and stability in their speech. Crowne recoils from anything that threatens her learnt 'incomprehension' of individuality's yearning for privacy. When Bernard Marx attempts to break her fear of privacy by taking her for a night-time flight over the English Channel, she is 'appalled by the rushing emptiness of the night, by the black foam-flecked water heaving beneath them, by the pale face of the moon, so haggard and distracted among the hastening clouds'.<sup>48</sup>

She fills the annihilating space and silence with the hypnopaedic sentiments that both constitute the fear of her own individuality and guarantee a way out of it:

Everyone works for everyone else. We can't do without anyone.  
Even Epsilons . . .  
I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody's  
happy nowadays.

These learnt sentiments are not mere convention: they organize the whole of her subjectivity: "I don't understand anything," she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact.<sup>49</sup>

Mae's communication in *The Circle* becomes progressively emptier as she is absorbed into the Company—or rather absorbs the Company into her interior life. Speech is not the medium of this absorption, however; the sites of online 'social' activity are pressed into service instead. When Mae 'volunteers' to go 'transparent', she does so as part of a public scene of abject and ritualized surrender. Confessing her failure to publicize or to communicate parts of her life, she moves from humiliation to pride as her confession and discovery of the truth that 'secrecy is part of, well, an aberrant behaviour system' lend a veneer of sincerity and authenticity to the company's pre-packaged slogans:

SECRETS ARE LIES

SHARING IS CARING

PRIVACY IS THEFT

Though the subject of not very subtle manipulation, Mae experiences these 'revelations' as her own, as the hard-won knowledge of her

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<sup>48</sup> BNW, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> BNW, pp. 78–9.

experience. On stage she ‘turned to look at the three lines together. She blinked back tears, seeing it all there. Had she really thought of all that herself?’ Flushed with pride and what now passes for self-knowledge, Mae becomes a cipher for the company: going ‘transparent’ involves her wearing a camera that broadcasts live footage and audio of her every move and enables her followers (or ‘watchers’) to comment on and influence what she is doing. She is a communicative device always on, ‘feeling daily the affection of millions flow through her’.<sup>50</sup> Her inability to balk, to hesitate or to resist in any way this corporate hijacking of her self is part of, and arguably completes, the desubjectification of communication the Company is both built on and reproduces. Eggers skewers both the banality and the ease with which such communication is emptied of its potential. Adorno’s words seem to prefigure Eggers’s fears:

People completely collectivized and incessantly communicating might as well abandon all communication at once and acknowledge themselves to be the mute monads they have been surreptitiously since the beginnings of bourgeois society. They are swallowed up in archaic childlike dependency.<sup>51</sup>

Mae experiences as incomprehensible the words of those who are outside the network of incessant communication. Mercer’s objections—before he dies—are a ‘madness’ she worries is ‘infectious’. Her response to his first letter, which he has written having seen her parents subjected to a bullying, exhausting level of attention from Mae’s ‘watchers’—the type of concern that demands instant and wordy reciprocity—is impatient dismissal. Mercer uses this first letter to warn of a world in which Circlers ‘live willingly, joyfully, under constant surveillance, watching each other always, commenting on each other, voting and liking and disliking each other, smiling and frowning, and otherwise doing nothing much else’. The response to this warning is mediated by Mae’s watchers, by ‘the comments pouring through [the device on] her wrist’ which judge Mercer to be ‘young and dumb’, ‘a zero’. She does not finish reading the letter, dismissing it as ‘full of the same directionless blather’ as the paragraph warning her of the world she inhabits. After Mercer’s death, the company re-categorizes him as ‘a very disturbed anti-social young man’. His being hunted down by the company is translated retrospectively into the language of ‘care’ and ‘concern’: the ‘community’ tried and failed ‘to bring him into the embrace of humanity’, to bring him back into the fold of a ‘world moving toward communion and unity’.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> TC, pp. 303, 311.

<sup>51</sup> Adorno, *Prisms*, p. 102.

<sup>52</sup> TC, pp. 359, 367, 368, 462–5.

The other site of resistance in the text—Kalden, the third of the ‘wise men’ and the initial founder of the Circle, a mysterious boy genius or tech-geek, resolutely private—is also defeated by Mae. Kalden sees clearly, rationally, the dangers in the company’s expansion, in its colonization of the most private of spaces and practices. He is the boss who appeals to the employee to stop sacrificing herself to the company, the multi-millionaire who wishes to burn his millions so that humanity can live freely, privately. This is not mediated ironically. In the novel’s penultimate chapter, Kalden makes explicit the novel’s buried premise: give people too much of what they think they want and the result is ‘mob rule’. He appeals to Mae (off camera) to help him sabotage the company’s plans:

Mae, once the Circle’s complete, that’s it. And you helped complete it. This democracy thing or Demoxie, whatever it is, good God. Under the guise of having every voice heard, you create mob rule, a filterless society where secrets are crimes.<sup>53</sup>

His words cannot penetrate what Mae has become. Rather than read to her ‘watchers’ the manifesto he has created, ‘The Rights of Humans in a Digital Age’, she informs on him. He is silenced, internally exiled to the bowels of the company’s campus, his individuality secured by his attempt to assert it, and as impotent as it is rare and precious.

### *Why privacy?*

*Brave New World* and *The Circle* share a horror at the dissolution of the borders of private life as a result of shifting relations between work and leisure. This disappearance either constitutes or is based on an expansion of the state, or of the corporation’s domination over all forms of life. Both texts acknowledge wryly that private life by itself can provide nothing in the way of material necessity: socialized forms of leisure may signal the abolition of privacy but they rest on socialized forms of employment. Full stomachs, secure jobs, healthcare and housing are here aligned with the colonization of leisure or ‘free time’. Private life by itself is in other words the scene of forms of deprivation, of need and suffering, of inequalities and of humiliation. Nevertheless, it is posited as the scene equally of freedom. That this is an appallingly empty freedom, a skeletal even though proud autonomy, is not shied away from. Huxley

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<sup>53</sup> TC, p. 483.

explicitly, Eggers implicitly bring into the dramatization of dangerous pleasures the misery that provides their premise.

Resistance is cast in these two texts as a refusal to be seduced. The relation of the oppressive totality to its subjects is one of seduction, not antagonism. Those who resist do so because they occupy or wish to access states—primarily but not only interior states—the totalizing structure is hostile to. Both texts restrict knowledge of these states (or of their desirability) to a few individuated subjects who, thwarted in their desires or made heroically unhappy by them, rebel. Their rebellion takes superficially different forms—selfish (Marx, Watson, Mercer) or altruistic (John the Savage, Kalden)—neither of which can reach beyond privacy as a goal. *Brave New World* exiles the selfish and eliminates the altruistic—he who would change the world to win the world. *The Circle* eliminates the selfish and internally exiles the altruistic. In each case, however, whatever its form, resistance itself is politically futile—the masses do not want what it stands for—though necessary in structural terms for the text to articulate its dystopian vision, and for the reader to be addressed as someone who knows *this dystopia is dystopian*.

The ontology of the private self is thin, monstrosly so, given the face of the challenges each text throws down to it. In *Brave New World*, this form of subjectivity has a purpose. Privacy's dearth is offset by its productions: art and science, beauty and truth; it saves 'Culture' from mass culture. The non-mass self may be unhappy, alone, subject to disease and death, or emotional upheavals and desires which may be barely articulable, let alone fulfillable; but these are the conditions of art's possibility. *The Circle* offers no corresponding conception. Where it departs from the trail of its forerunner, and signals most sharply its own historicity, is in having no role for Culture, rather breaking or appearing to break the antagonistic symmetry between mass culture and the high-modernist story of a Culture that was its own good. Huxley puts the tattered volume of Shakespeare found by a twelve-year-old John to good use to mark out and canonize the art of the past as a realm of truth and beauty, which does not merely speak to the fallen present but inspires it to imagine other more human—because more private—forms of life. Shakespeare and the shadows his work cast, including in the will-to-poetry of Helmholtz Watson, are not intended to be politically effective: on the contrary, they are mocked along with monogamy and the family for being both site and symptom of unhappiness, alienation

and frustration. Situating them along the pole of self and 'nature' allows *Brave New World* to do two things, however: it more effectively (because more richly) ontologizes the subject as private, and culture as necessarily private too. The two are reciprocally tied if the self-as-private is to be anything more than grotesquely self-defeating, and if art is to be the antithesis of 'happiness', a place where not 'the maintenance of well-being' but 'some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge is possible'.<sup>54</sup> In *Brave New World*, the figure of the writer is the 'surviving warrant of cultural value', the experiences of isolation and defeat less important than their existence as an index to the denatured or manufactured practices of mass culture, and to the people who desire these.<sup>55</sup>

Eggers seems to give up on art or Culture, handing their formal presence almost wholly over to the Circle. The culture of the past—and all its humanist valences as Culture—is now bought and paid for, locked into digital archives, Bailey's Great Library, the Arnoldian project of 'the best self' now a matter of corporate total truth and transparency, the Enlightenment or the Renaissance a style of campus building. Eggers, that is, utilizes the tropes of 'mass culture' in his creation of a structural dichotomy between the private or individual self and a degraded social totality, but deprives the former of its alignment with Culture proper. What survives of that Culture is Mercer's occupation, the arena of his prized 'creativity'. Mercer is a figure of rugged small-town American individuality, an almost necessarily male figure since this is a providing and pedagogic model of individuality. The owner of a small business, he is also—and more so—a man of independence and of creativity. He makes chandeliers out of antlers for sale, ironically the very model of a 'creative entrepreneur'—a free agent who lives his life blind to any border between labour and leisure—typically hymned by the neoliberalism the novel elsewhere takes as its object of critique. This is the model of subjectivity beloved of two generations of neoliberal policy for the 'creative industries' and the abolition of permanent jobs in favour of 'freelance hours': while satirizing that neoliberal model, Eggers relies on

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<sup>54</sup> BNW, p. 155.

<sup>55</sup> Francis Mulhern, *Figures of Catastrophe: The Condition of Culture Novel*, London and New York 2016, p. 106. It should be noted that where there is writing, there is also reading. John the Savage does not need to be taught to read Shakespeare: the organic relation between literary writing and 'life' engenders a fluency or literacy all of its own.

it as the alternative and possible solution to corporate deprivatization.<sup>56</sup> This narrative turn is either a subterfuge or a sign of self-entrapment.

Can you have mass culture without Culture? It remains to be seen. For in addition to the text's use of a muscular creativity, potentially independent no matter how defeated, there remains also the vastly more potent creativity of Eggers himself and of the type of literary enterprise with which he is associated. His novel inevitably inhabits the discursive nexus opened up by himself as a writer and expanded in the apparatus of publishing and philanthropic concerns he has spearheaded or funded. This is the prism through which *The Circle* was reviewed—and which, arguably, motivated the reviews, for the novel itself is bad: predictable, patronizing and almost wilfully devoid of the stylistic inventiveness that had seemed to be Eggers's signature. There is no space here to explore the particular habitus associated with McSweeney's, the publishing complex that Eggers has built over the past twenty years, or with the latter's approach to questions of literary value or Culture.<sup>57</sup> What is interesting here is the material absence of Culture from the novel, as if it had become something unspeakable even though still structurally necessary. It could be that two generations of postmodernism have made the hierarchies embedded in the 'great divide' too unpalatable, because too openly homologous with the violence of other inequalities. Mass culture has not withered away, but the primary language for naming it, Culture, has become less efficacious. A belief in Culture still exists, indeed is institutionally embedded in circuits similar to those of the 1930s—though with a massively expanded role for universities—but it lacks a language, a medium of self-articulation, that is politically acceptable in those who practise it.

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<sup>56</sup> Mercer's letters to Mae are akin textually or functionally to the parts of a manifesto: pp. 367–8 and pp. 432–3. See Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, Stanford 2014, and Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative*, Cambridge 2016.

<sup>57</sup> In Amy Hungerford's recent study, we can trace the emergence of something akin to a cultural formation in which Culture takes on, openly, something of the 'whole-way-of-life' Raymond Williams traced in the relations of the Bloomsbury group as a class fraction: 'McSweeney's and the School of Life', in *Making Literature Now*, Stanford 2016; see Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London 1980.