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Re-E-Mergence and the Danger of Total Light: Introducing a New Framework for Climate Crisis Communication Through Dave Eggers' *The Circle*

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ABSTRACT

This article reads Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013) as a diagnosis of the epistemological logic that governs both the novel's regime of total transparency and dominant climate crisis communication: the Enlightenment assumption that more light, more visibility, and more data will produce more clarity. Drawing on Timothy Morton's (2013) concept of hyperobjects, Rob Nixon's (2011) slow violence, and Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) critique of instrumental reason, the article argues that this assumption is fundamentally misaligned with the nature of the crisis it claims to illuminate. Against this logic, it introduces Re-E-Mergence, an original framework grounded in Adorno's (2004) negative dialectics and Didi-Huberman's (2018) figure of the surviving fireflies, which proposes holding the tension between 'light and darkness' open rather than resolving it. Read through the lens of Re-E-Mergence, *The Circle* functions as an act of re-stor(y)ation, a speculative form that performs the epistemological shift it proposes.

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KEYWORDS: Re-E-Mergence; climate crisis communication; speculative fiction; *The Circle*, Dave Eggers; hyperobjects;

1. The Circle: Light as Ideology

In 2013, Dave Eggers published *The Circle*, a novel set at the headquarters of the world's most powerful technology company. Its empire rests on the premises that transparency is the condition for trust, visibility is the condition for accountability, and a fully documented world is a better one. The campus is a monument to

this belief, with glass buildings, open spaces, no locked doors, no hidden corners, and light everywhere, by design¹.

The novel follows Mae Holland, a young woman who joins the company as a customer experience representative and gradually rises to become its most visible public face. Her trajectory is the novel's central argument. Mae arrives genuinely enthusiastic, grateful to escape financial hardship and difficult family circumstances, and what she finds is a company that has extended its logic of transparency far beyond the workspace, believing that all human activity should be recorded, shared, and made accountable in real time. In the Circle's world, the desire to keep something private is indistinguishable from the desire to deceive. Its three foundational mottoes, "SECRETS ARE LIES," "SHARING IS CARING," and "PRIVACY IS THEFT" (Eggers 2013, 303), are the basis of its ideology, which is enacted with systematic thoroughness: the TruYou program links every online account to a single verified identity, eliminating anonymity across the internet. The small SeeChange cameras, installed by users who have been persuaded that their willingness to be watched is a form of civic virtue, livestream the world in real time from beaches, town squares, and private living rooms. The PartiRank, in turn, ranks employees on their social engagement, making the score visible to all. When Mae agrees to 'go transparent,' livestreaming her waking life to an audience of forty million, she does not experience this as surveillance, but as liberation. "I'm not performing," she tells her ex-boyfriend Mercer, "I'm just being transparent" (Eggers 2013, 289). The Circle seems to have perfected the Panopticon described by Foucault² (1975) as it no longer requires an external observer, because Mae has internalized the gaze entirely.

Eggers traces Mae's transformation by accumulating small scenes that showcase how she reacts to the Circle's social pressures and talks herself into accepting

¹ The presence on the campus of a Calatrava fountain reinforces the company's constructed image of 'illuminated' harmony, openness, and its seamless integration of nature and technology (Muschamp 1999).

² Foucault's Panopticon describes a prison structure in which a single observer can surveil all inmates without them knowing when they are being watched. The effect is not constant surveillance but the internalization of the gaze, as inmates begin to regulate their own behavior as if they were always being watched. Foucault uses this model to describe how modern institutions, including schools, hospitals, and workplaces, exercise power through visibility (Foucault 1975).

them regardless of her reservations. One example occurs when she is reprimanded for failing to RSVP to a colleague's social event and is treated by the company as if she had committed a serious breach of community norms. Another example is the subtle pressure to share more, engage more, and be more present across all of the company's platforms, as well as the gradual disappearance of a private space in which her feelings can be processed before they are turned into public performance. Hannah Arendt (1998) argued that the private realm is not a retreat from public life but its precondition, as it is only in the space where one is not required to perform that genuine thought, desire, and agency become possible. Mae loses this space incrementally and, because each loss is framed as progress, as connection, she does not notice what is disappearing. By the end of the novel, she is incapable of being 'alone' with an experience before converting it into content. She has become fully transparent, and, in the process, increasingly opaque to herself.

Against Mae's trajectory, the novel places a series of figures who resist. Her ex-boyfriend Mercer refuses smartphones and social media and eventually prefers to flee the country rather than submit to the Circle's reach. In one of his final confrontations with Mae, he tells her:

We are not meant to know everything, Mae. Did you ever think that perhaps our minds are delicately calibrated between the known and the unknown? That our souls need the mysteries of night and the clarity of day? You people are creating a world of ever-present daylight, and I think it will burn us all alive (Eggers, 2013, 430-431)

Mercer initially appears as a technophobe, but he is a diagnostician. What he identifies as the enemy is not technology as such but the epistemology it serves: the conviction that more clarity is always better; that the elimination of shadow is equivalent to the elimination of error; that total visibility will produce total truth. He dies for it, pursued off a mountain road by drone-pilots following Mae's livestream. His death is proof that the destruction of darkness is lethal, not merely uncomfortable. Then, Annie, Mae's closest friend and a high-ranking Circle employee, deteriorates progressively as a company genealogy program excavates her family's darker past, rendering her 'transparent' against her will. Her collapse into a catatonic state, brought on by burnout, is the cost of a total

visibility that makes no distinction between what one chooses to share and what is simply taken.

In sum, *The Circle* is a novel about surveillance capitalism, prescient in ways that became fully visible only a decade after its publication, and much of the existing scholarship reads it precisely in these terms (Rana 2021; Mohammed Ali 2025). It is also a diagnosis of something older and more pervasive: the conviction that light, transparency, and total visibility are not merely useful but morally necessary; that darkness is not a condition of knowledge but its enemy. This assumption did not originate in ‘Silicon Valley.’ It has a longer genealogy, and deeper consequences, than the novel alone can contain. The question is what happens when this paradigm is applied to the most complex crisis humanity has ever faced?

The argument unfolds in four steps. Section 2 traces the genealogy of this paradigm to the Enlightenment equation of light with knowledge and follows its extension into dominant climate communication. Section 3 draws on Adorno’s negative dialectics and Didi-Huberman’s fireflies to articulate the alternative, a way of holding the tension between light and darkness open rather than resolving it. Section 4 shows why the crisis itself, read as a slow-violent hyperobject, structurally resists the logic of illumination. Section 5 introduces Re-E-Mergence, the framework that translates this position into communicative practice, and the concluding section returns to *The Circle* as its speculative enactment.

2. The Limits of Overexposure: Enlightenment, Anthropocentrism, and the Logic of Total Visibility

The Circle’s ideology is an extension of a symbolic architecture that has governed Western thought since the seventeenth century, in which light is the constitutive condition for knowledge, truth is in principle visible, and understanding is achievable only by bringing things into the open, into a state of ‘clarity.’

Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1997), identify this drive toward total illumination as the foundational gesture of modernity. The Enlightenment’s compulsion to measure, categorize, and render transparent all things is an expression of the will to dominate. They state that “Enlightenment’s program

was the disenchantment of the world” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997, 3), or, in other words, that everything that cannot be absorbed into the system of rational control should be eliminated. What this produces is not the liberation it promised but a subtler form of control, one that recognizes as real only what it can render legible, and suppresses everything that exceeds its categories as irrational, obscure, or even dangerous. Their most concrete example is the culture industry, the system by which this logic colonizes the domain of experience, producing images, narratives, and emotions that aestheticize the complexity of the world into manageable, emotionally resolved, and ultimately reassuring forms. Just like the Circle, it uses light to make the unbearable bearable and the unresolved appear resolved.

Light, in Enlightenment thought, is a moral value through the equation of visibility with truth, clarity with virtue, and darkness with ignorance and danger. Darkness is not an alternative mode of knowing but the absence of it. It becomes a condition to be overcome rather than inhabited. This symbolic architecture has shaped climate communication with remarkable thoroughness. Data visualizations, satellite images of retreating glaciers, aerial footage of bleaching coral, time-lapse sequences of receding coastlines and displacement data, all operate within the same assumption that making the crisis visible will make it intelligible, and that comprehending it will finally prompt meaningful action. The blinding spotlight trained on the crisis, in other words, is the same overexposing light the Enlightenment trained on everything else.

The anthropocentric dimension of this logic follows directly: if knowledge is a matter of bringing things ‘into the light,’ then it requires a subject capable of illuminating; a sovereign human consciousness positioned above the world it surveys, able to render it legible and therefore controllable. This is the perspective that Donna Haraway calls the “god trick” (Haraway 1988, 581): the “view from nowhere” (581) that presents itself as a ‘view from everywhere,’ claiming objectivity by pretending to have no position. Climate science, in its conventional modes of communication, frequently operates within this framework, with an expert who surveys the data, renders the crisis visible, and transmits this ‘vision’ to a public assumed to be deficient in knowledge rather than in the conditions for engagement. The structural asymmetry is the same hierarchical relationship between knower and known that the Enlightenment established, now reproduced in the domain of climate communication.

The Circle stages this anthropocentrism with satirical precision. The company's cameras do much more than just observe the world: with their pervasive reach they claim it and consequently claim to know it; likewise, the data accumulated by the PartiRank is presented as a tool to describe human sociality yet it aims to measure it, to render its shifts legible and therefore manageable and controllable. Mae, as the company's most transparent ambassador, constantly documents her life, converting her experience into data that her many followers can process, rate, and respond to. One could argue that she is not living her life at all, as she is constantly performing. In the Circle's system the "god trick" (Haraway 1988, 581) has been democratized. Everyone is now both the surveying consciousness and the surveyed object, both illuminating and illuminated, with no shadow or space in which any doubt or question might form. However, unlike the Circle, Georges Didi-Huberman (2018) understood that the problem is not too much darkness as he writes, "into the night that the fireflies have disappeared" (Didi-Huberman 2018, 12); rather, it is too much light, embodied by the 'industrial' overexposure that destroys the conditions under which fragile, intermittent, genuine illumination becomes possible.

When the night is darkest, we're capable of seizing on the faintest glimmer. [...] No, the fireflies disappeared in the blinding glare of the fierce spotlights. (Didi-Huberman 2018, 12)

What Adorno and Horkheimer's critique opens up, and what Didi-Huberman's fireflies make vivid, is that the logic of total light is structurally self-defeating, since the more complete the illumination, the less remains of the knowledge it was meant to produce. Eggers constructs the novel so that the reader sees Mae from the inside as she 'empties out.' It is precisely the close third-person narration, sliding into free indirect discourse, that produces the reader's awareness of what Mae is losing³. The more she shares, the less she inhabits what she shares. The company relentlessly accumulates data about the world and becomes exponentially more opaque about its actual operations. Total visibility, therefore, does

³ Betiel Wasihun (2018) has likewise noted the unsettling effect of this device, observing that the free indirect discourse makes the reader inhabit Mae's indoctrination as it happens.

not produce truth, just a sophisticated simulation of truth; a seamless, endlessly documented surface from which genuine understanding has been removed, yet carefully mimicked.

3. Darkness as Tension: Negative Dialectics, the Firefly, and the Necessary Shadow

Though total light is critiqued, this should not open the way toward darkness. Simply inverting the hierarchy – shadow over light, opacity over visibility – would leave the underlying logic of opposition intact, exchanging one absolute for another. What is needed is a new way of thinking, or rather re-thinking, the relationship between illumination and obscurity that does not resolve their tension but holds it open, insisting on both as necessary, neither as sufficient, and the space between them as the only site out of which genuine and generative knowledge can emerge.

Adorno's negative dialectics (2004) gives this position its philosophical precision. Against the Hegelian dialectic, which moves from contradiction through tension toward synthesis, absorbing the particular into a higher, reconciled unity, Adorno insists on the irreducibility of contradiction. He argues that any synthesis creates a false reconciliation, as it suppresses what resists categorization in the name of systematic coherence and order, producing the illusion of a resolution, while the underlying tension remains. He states that "The whole is the false" (Adorno 2005, 49) intending that a completeness, in other words, is always achieved at the cost of what it excludes. What Adorno calls 'non-identity' is the irreducible remainder that escapes every conceptual frame, "the part that can be salvaged" (2004, 149). Far from signalling a failure of thought, it represents thought's most honest acknowledgment that reality always exceeds what any system of illumination can render fully visible. Genuine thought, as Adorno puts it, lives "in the cavities between what things claim to be and what they are" (2004, 150), in the distance between concept and thing.

Applied to knowledge and communication, negative dialectics means resisting the pull toward resolution, a move from fear to hope⁴, from the dark com-

⁴ Both fear and hope have proven inadequate as primary drivers of climate engagement. Fear-

plexity of a situation to the bright clarity of a prescribed response. Staying in the 'trouble' (Haraway, 2016) is a discipline, one that keeps open the complexity that premature resolution would foreclose. In climate communication, this means refusing the culture industry's cathartic logic, which converts ecological grief and political inertia into aestheticized narratives of redemption, individual virtue, and technological solution, dissolving the anxiety of the crisis without engaging its causes⁵. Adorno's ethics of discomfort is a proposal of honesty, an invitation to remain in the dissonance long enough for something genuinely new to form.

Didi-Huberman's *Survival of the Fireflies* (2018) gives this philosophical position an image. The essay takes as its starting point Pasolini's 1975 elegy for the disappearance of fireflies from the Italian countryside, their fragile lights extinguished, he argued, by the industrial overexposure of the postwar spectacle society. For Pasolini, their disappearance was total and irreversible, the floodlights of fascism's successor, consumer capitalism, having eliminated the conditions under which 'small light' (Didi-Huberman 2018, 5) could exist. Didi-Huberman reads this lament with sympathy and disagreement. The fireflies, he argues, have not disappeared. They have survived in the margins, in the in-between places, where the floodlights cannot reach. Their light is flickering, dancing in the dark, with no aim to overpower, dominate, or blind, finding its mode of existence within the interplay of brightness and shadow rather than competing with overpowering illumination or demanding clarity the darkness cannot offer. "To understand fireflies," Didi-Huberman writes, "we must see them in the present of their survival: we must see them alive and dancing in the heart of the night, even if that night may be swept by fierce spotlights" (25).

The fireflies are a model of knowing and being that is partial, honest, situated, and sustained by their refusal to demand more clarity than the situation

based messaging generates paralysis and disengagement rather than sustained action (O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009; Norgaard 2011), while hope, when unaccompanied by structural critique, risks becoming what Ojala (2012) calls "hope based on denial," a psychological buffer that reassures without motivating change.

⁵ Naomi Klein (2014) identifies this logic as false hope, the substitution of market-friendly narratives, such as green growth, individual consumer choice, or technological solutionism, for the structural transformation the crisis demands, offering a performance of engagement in place of engagement itself.

allows; and it is precisely this model that the Circle systematically destroys. The company makes the coexistence of light and darkness ideologically impossible. “SECRETS ARE LIES” (Eggers 2013, 303) is the expression of an epistemology that cannot tolerate shadow, one that reads every act of withholding as a moral failure, every ‘flickering and intermittent’ presence (like the one of the fireflies) as a form of deception. The underground caves that survive at the novel’s margins, beneath the Circle’s campus, preserve exactly this tension. They are a space where darkness and privacy have not yet been eliminated. It is there that Kalden, revealed to be Tyler Gospodinov, one of the Circle’s original founders, takes refuge. He is a disillusioned visionary who recognizes what absolute transparency has destroyed and decides to inhabit the very same shadows the company has forbidden, moving through raw rock formations and dimly lit tunnels that stand in stark contrast to the blinding surface above. Paradoxically, it is also here that the Circle’s vast servers are stored, enormous boxes containing infinite amounts of collected data: the machinery of total visibility housed in the one place the light cannot reach. It is in these same caves that Mae builds her most intimate connection, the one space in the novel where she is not performing, not documenting, not being watched. The darkness, here and then, becomes the only place where something genuine can still occur. Mercer, Mae’s ex-boyfriend, is the novel’s most explicit diagnostician of this logic, as previously stated. His insight that minds are “delicately calibrated between the known and the unknown” (Eggers 2013, 430) names precisely what the Circle’s total light destroys.

4. The Climate Crisis as a Slow-Violent Hyperobject: Why the Floodlight Fails

The Circle’s epistemological failure and the unsuccess of dominant climate communication share the same underlying logic, and the same foundational problem: the object they are trying to illuminate refuses the illumination.

Timothy Morton (2013) calls the climate crisis a hyperobject, an entity “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (Morton 2013, 1), so vast and so entangled with every dimension of existence that it cannot be seen

whole from any single vantage point, or *Umwelt*⁶. A wildfire in Sicily or a heat dome in the Pacific Northwest (White et al. 2023; Zermo 2023) are both real manifestations of it, visible, documentable, and devastating, but they are mere fragments of something that has been accumulating across centuries of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as political and social shifts, and will unfold across centuries more. The crisis has no clear beginning, no single cause, no moment at which it can be directly confronted, understood, or resolved. Morton describes this quality as “viscous” (Morton 2013, 39). He states that a hyperobject adheres to everything it touches while managing, still, to remain beyond grasp, impossible to step outside of it and witness in its entirety. Every image of the climate crisis, therefore, is necessarily a fragment.

Rob Nixon (2011) adds to Morton’s theory a further dimension with the concept of slow violence: “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (Nixon 2011, 2). Unlike the spectacular, immediate catastrophe that communication systems are designed to capture and transmit (whether a hurricane or an explosion), slow violence unfolds silently, through desertification, toxic accumulation, sea-level rise, the quiet collapse of cultural systems across generations. It affects disproportionately the most vulnerable populations in the most remote regions and leaves almost no trace in the visual economy of dramatic crisis communication. Its temporality is simply incompatible with the logic of the news cycle, which demands a visible moment of change, an image, a before and after.

Together, hyperobjectivity and slow violence describe a crisis whose ontological structure is irreducibly non-linear, cumulative, and entangled, and therefore, this article argues, constitutively resistant to the Enlightenment’s anthropocentric logic of illumination. There is then a structural mismatch. When Per Espen Stoknes (2015) documents his Five Ds (Distance, Doom, Dissonance, Denial, and iDentity) as the principal psychological barriers to climate engagement

⁶ The term *Umwelt*, introduced by biologist Jakob von Uexküll, refers to the unique perceptual world of a living being: how it experiences, interprets, and senses its surroundings. Each species, and at times each individual, inhabits its own *Umwelt*. As Higgins (2021) argues, becoming aware that many other *Umwelten* exist reveals just how narrow and far from universal our human perspective truly is (Scuri 2025).

(Stoknes 2015, 115-16), he is mapping, on the reading proposed here, its symptoms. He identifies the predictable outcomes that come with attempting to read a hyperobject through a framework designed for something smaller, more localized, and more resolvable. Distance describes how the crisis is perceived as spatially, culturally, and temporally remote, an effect directly produced by the abstract, graph-based register of scientific communication that locates the crisis in global averages and future projections rather than present bodies and immediate places. Doom refers to the apocalyptic fear-based imagery that generates fatalism rather than mobilization, and as O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) demonstrate, it merely manages to attract attention but produces helplessness rather than sustained meaningful action (O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009, 355). Dissonance arises when one's awareness of the crisis conflicts with the everyday behaviors that contribute to it, generating a 'self-protective rationalization' rather than change. Denial functions as the coping mechanism Kari Marie Norgaard (2011) describes as a quiet 'retreat from knowledge' in which the individual is cognitively present but emotionally distant, creating a protective bubble of ontological security against what feels unsolvable. And, lastly, iDentity shows how, in an era of post-truth⁷ (McIntyre 2018), climate information is filtered through almost 'tribal'⁸ worldviews, accepted or rejected, not on evidential grounds, but on the basis of what community one belongs to, and therefore which beliefs seem acceptable within it or not.

Stoknes treats the barriers as obstacles that better communication can overcome, and O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole retain confidence in the reparative power of imagery; if they are right, the failure is tactical rather than structural. Norgaard's ethnography, however, points out that denial is socially organized rather than informational, persisting among publics who already know the data, beyond the reach of any further increment of visibility. On the account defended here, then, the barriers are the predictable consequences of applying an epistemo-

⁷ The concept of post-truth, developed by McIntyre (2018), describes a cultural and political condition in which objective facts become less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals and personal belief. It does not denote the simple absence of truth but its deliberate subordination to narrative and identity, rendering it culturally irrelevant rather than openly denied.

⁸ McIntyre uses the term "tribalism" (McIntyre 2018, 40).

logical framework to an object it was never designed for, rather than individual failings. The more urgently the floodlight, with its overexposure, is trained on the hyperobject, the more it slips away; the more spectacular the representation of slow violence, the more it confirms the very logic of spectacle that renders slow violence imperceptible in the first place. Climate communication's failure, therefore, is not a failure of content or of delivery. At its root, it is one of form, of the underlying epistemological structure that governs how the crisis is framed, transmitted, and ultimately received.

The crisis is also, in ways that dominant communication rarely acknowledges, posthuman. It exceeds the boundaries of the human in every direction⁹, entangling human and nonhuman, present and future, local and planetary in ways that no anthropocentric framework of knowing can adequately represent or even comprehend. A crisis generated by centuries of human exceptionalism, by the conviction that the natural world exists as a resource to be measured, managed, and controlled rather than a system to be inhabited and respected, cannot be adequately addressed through the same epistemological position that produced it. The 'illumination' was never neutral, and it is not innocent.

Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of 'staying with the trouble' points toward what an adequate response would look like. Rather than seeking to disentangle or resolve the complexity of multispecies existence, it means to remain present within it, accepting that we are not sovereigns surveying the world from above but participants in it, co-produced by it, entangled with its "critters" (Haraway 2016, 11) in ways that exceed any single framework of visibility, any singular *Umwelt*. For Haraway, this entanglement demands what she calls "making kin" across species, forging and recognizing unexpected bonds with the nonhuman world rather than managing it from a distance, or from "above." Her concept

⁹ Human perception is necessarily bound by its own *Umwelt*. Humans experience the world through a limited set of five senses, within a limited timeframe (decades, maximum centuries), from a single embodied position. A hyperobject, by contrast, operates across scales that are simply incommensurable with human perception, as it exists in geological time, across planetary space, and through entanglements that no single observer can occupy or view. The climate crisis is post-human precisely in its exceeding not just human control but human perceptual, epistemological reach.

of “response-ability” (Haraway 2016, 11), then, reframes ethical action as an ongoing process of attunement to these entanglements, a practice of “tentacular thinking” (Haraway 2016, 30)¹⁰ that, unlike the grasping hand of Enlightenment reason, explores and senses them, connecting rather than seizing and controlling. These are the SF string figures through which new forms of knowing become possible: speculative fabulations that create patterns and connections between humans and nonhumans, resisting closure and fostering collaborative, situated meaning-making. For a crisis that will not respect the categories of Enlightenment, a reorientation is not optional, and it is precisely this that Re-E-Mergence, as the following section argues, is designed to enact.

5. Re-E-Mergence: A New Paradigm for an Entangled Crisis

Re-E-Mergence is a framework designed to inspire new ways of thinking, feeling, and telling stories about the climate crisis. It begins with disorientation, recognizing the value of descending into what Haraway calls the “humus” of entanglements (Haraway 2016, 2), the dark, fertile ground of complexity, contradiction, and interdependence that the Enlightenment’s blinding spotlight has systematically obscured. This descent, however, is not to be seen as a fall. It is a deliberate move away from the linear, progress-driven logic of control and comprehension, and toward a posthuman understanding of knowledge as something that cannot be fully possessed, mastered, and transmitted. It supports knowledge that is constantly co-created through relationships and collaborations with the more-than-human world. From this ‘grounded,’ shadowed position, Re-E-Mergence becomes an act of reconnection and re-stor(y)ation, offering an alternative to the dominant communicative frameworks that have proven inadequate to the ‘ungraspable’ nature of the crisis humans are desperately trying to ‘illuminate.’

¹⁰ The concept draws on the biology of the tentacle as an organ that does not impose itself on the world but moves through it with caution, registering what it encounters rather than subduing it. Rooted in the Latin *tentare*, to attempt or to feel one’s way, it proposes a mode of knowing defined by proximity, sensitivity, and openness to what resists full comprehension (Haraway 2016, 31).

Where the floodlight demands resolution, Re-E-Mergence proposes inhabitation as a way of remaining within the complexity rather than trying to overcome it.

Each of the components of the name carries theoretical weight. ‘Re-’ signals a return and a revision, a sustained process of re-engagement with the narratives, epistemologies, and emotive structures through which the crisis is currently understood, in order to reconstitute them from within. It is the gesture of ‘unlearning’¹¹ before relearning, of pausing in the wake of familiar frameworks long enough to notice their limitation – who and what they exclude. In *The Circle*, this pause is precisely what the company’s ideology makes impossible: its three founding mottoes, “SECRETS ARE LIES,” “SHARING IS CARING,” “PRIVACY IS THEFT” (Eggers 2013, 303), eliminate every single fracture, gap, crevice, every minimal space of uncertainty. Re-E-Mergence, on the other hand, insists on keeping that space wide open and private. Then, the central ‘E’ stands for entanglement and energy, introducing an ontology of relation, borrowed from Haraway, in which knowledge is and must always be co-produced, always born at the intersection of the human and nonhuman, the known and the unknown, and firmly grounded in what she calls “humusities” – the condition of being irreducibly embedded in and inseparable from the more-than-human world; she states “we are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities” (Haraway 2016, 32). Knowledge, in this framework, can only emerge from within this state of multispecies entanglement, never descending from a sovereign subject; its precondition is a re-evaluation of the self.

Finally, ‘Mergence,’ despite its position at the end of the word, is far from indicating a point of arrival/completion, or an ‘ultimate goal.’ The act of ‘Mergence’ describes a continuous process of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling thoughts, ideas, views; through it nothing can ever be definitively and permanently resolved, and everything is continually reconstituted in relation to what has come before, what is and what remains to be explored. Also, the hy-

¹¹ Unlearning is understood here as “a multi-level and challenging process” that “requires a substantive break with previous modes of understanding, doing, and being” (Rushmer and Davies 2004, ii10; McLeod et al. 2020). Within Re-E-Mergence, it becomes a form of critique that seeks to disentangle from, and actively push back against, anthropocentric and capitalist imaginaries that reduce the nonhuman world to a commodified, extractable resource.

phens between the three elements are to be read as deliberate pauses, invitations to slow down, to notice the fractures in familiar frameworks and to resist the compulsion to move immediately toward resolving them.

Haraway therefore supplies the relational ontology on which the framework rests, yet she does not address the symbolic regime of light and darkness through which Western culture organizes knowledge, and it is on this axis that Re-E-Mergence operates, grafting her ethics of entanglement onto Adorno's negative dialectics and Didi-Huberman's defense of the 'small light.' Darkness, in this framework, no longer signifies ignorance or catastrophe, just as light no longer stands for knowledge and clarity. Obscurity is considered a space of potential, a womb-like zone in which new possibilities can take root; a space in which, as Adorno and Didi-Huberman have shown, new modes of knowing, being, and ultimately imagining can emerge. This is what Didi-Huberman's fireflies embody, and it is what the underground caves of *The Circle* preserve in a way that is more paradoxical than it first appears. The campus of the Circle presents itself as a Paradise-like realm of openness and shared knowledge, with a surface gleaming with innovation and transparency. This, however, has always been merely an artifice. The true machinery of the company, in fact, lives underground, where the servers that store all collected data, the evidence of every nefarious activity, the real operations of the system, are hidden – precisely where the light does not reach. Consequently, the Circle's library, on the surface, becomes a useless front, a 'performance' of knowledge. The caves are where true understanding resides, unlit, unsurveilled, and inaccessible to the logic of total transparency.

Re-E-Mergence begins as an attitude and a practice of descending beneath an inherited self-conception and re-emerging with a revised sense of what it means to exist within a world in crisis. Communication comes after this revision, and the framework asks three things of it.

The first is to acknowledge that the crisis cannot be fully 'illuminated.' A hyperobject cannot be shown whole, slow violence has no single image, and entangled causes exceed any single communicative frame. Communication must therefore declare its own position and mark the limits of what it knows, choosing honest partiality over false clarity and sustained presence over redemptive narratives. This is the temperament of Rebecca Solnit's "hope in the dark" (Solnit 2016, 4), a hope that remains engaged through uncertainty because the future

has not yet been determined. It is also the choice made in Iceland in 2019, when Okjökull, the first glacier lost to climate change, received a funeral. The plaque placed in its stead marks an absence rather than visualizing a process, addresses a reader a century away, and concedes that “only [they] know if we did it”¹² (Agence France-Presse 2019).

The second is to hold contradiction without resolving it. Narratives of this kind keep grief and commitment co-present, and they end without discharging the tension they have built, refusing a redemptive arc or a closing list of solutions. In the novel, Mae’s disappearance into total transparency shows why. Eliminating the gap between performance and reality produces a deeper opacity, and it is in that gap that critical awareness lives. Joe Duggan’s ongoing project *Is This How You Feel?*¹³ keeps the gap open in practice, collecting handwritten letters in which climate scientists describe what their own data makes them feel, between grief and stubborn commitment.

The third is to communicate from within the crisis rather than about it. The communicator speaks as a participant whose knowledge is co-produced, situated, and partial, in a voice that admits its own limits. *The Bureau of Linguistical Reality*¹⁴ speaks in such a voice, coining new words for climate emotions its contributors experience but cannot yet name, producing its vocabulary from within the entanglements it describes. The underground caves of *The Circle* are the novel’s image of the same position, where something genuine can still occur because the floodlight has never reached them.

What distinguishes Re-E-Mergence from its sources can now be stated in full. Haraway offers an ethics of multispecies living, Solnit a way of remaining engaged in uncertainty; both remain at the level of disposition. Re-E-Mergence turns that disposition into a ‘negative’ (in Adorno’s sense) poetics of climate crisis communication, proceeding by the determinate refusals the three principles

¹² “Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as glacier. In the next 200 years all our main glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it.” (Agence France-Presse 2019)

¹³ See website <https://www.isthishowyoufeel.com/ithyf5.html>.

¹⁴ See website <https://bureauoflinguisticalreality.com/mission-statement/>.

have just traced, of the synoptic view, of resolved contradiction, and of the voice positioned above the crisis it describes.

Ultimately, Re-E-Mergence never promises a resolution, but it proposes to have a different relationship with the crisis altogether. It offers a way in and through it, rather than a way out. Works of speculative fiction such as *The Circle* are not merely a vehicle for climate themes but one of the natural forms of the epistemological reorientation the framework proposes, and it is to this that the concluding section turns.

6. Re-E-Merging from The Circle

This article has read *The Circle* as a novel about epistemology, about what happens to knowledge, to relation, and to the self when the logic of total illumination is taken to its conclusion. Mae's trajectory is the tale of a world that has made the tension between 'light' and 'darkness' structurally impossible, and of what is lost when that tension disappears. This loss registers in the body before it registers in the mind. Mae herself feels it, intermittently, as a physical rupture: "this black rip, this loud tear, within her," through which she hears "the screams of millions of invisible souls" (Eggers 2013, 195-196). This tear is her subconscious resistance, the last residue of an interiority that the company is rapidly annihilating. By the end of the novel, she has found a way to sew the 'tear' closed, proving her commitment to the Circle, quieting her uncertainties with data, followers, and the 'comfort' of total visibility. The reader feels the loss of this tear even as Mae learns to silence it. Across the course of the novel, we are progressively drawn to the same shadows that the company has eliminated from her world, striving for the gap between what she shows and what she is, which closes over the course of the narrative. In the end, we are the only ones left to notice it. The novel then preserves what its content manages to destroy.

This is precisely what makes *The Circle* so useful for understanding the climate crisis. The epistemological logic it dramatizes, the conviction that more visibility, more transparency, more light will produce more truth and more justice, is not confined to the world of the novel, as it governs the dominant frameworks of climate communication through the assumption that better data, more urgent

imagery, and clearer messaging will overcome denial, paralysis, and disengagement. As the preceding analysis has shown, this assumption misunderstands the nature of the object it is trying to clarify. The climate crisis' essence is resistant to the very logic of overexposure that the Circle embodies.

Re-E-Mergence aims to tackle this structural mismatch, holding the tension between light and darkness as the only honest and generative position from which the crisis can be approached. Uncomfortable and offering no resolution, no redemption, nor relief, this tension carries the capacity to remain rooted within the complexity of the present, to communicate from within the limits of what can be known, to hold contradiction open long enough for something genuinely new to appear, to spark like a firefly in the night.

Speculative fiction is the form in which this reorientation finds its most natural expression. Eggers' novel enacts Re-E-Mergence in the very act of narrating Mae's disappearance through a close third-person voice that grants the reader access to an interiority Mae herself is losing. This internal focalization lets us inhabit her self-persuasion as she performs it, and the resulting dramatic irony refuses the comfort of a protagonist who sees clearly what we see.

The novel generates the cognitive estrangement that Darko Suvin (2016) identified as speculative fiction's defining formal property, a disruption of the familiar that allows the logic of Enlightenment to be seen as a construction, open to being challenged. This is what Re-E-Mergence means by re-stor(y)ation: the restoration and re-storying of the present through narratives that hold the tension open rather than resolve it. Re-E-Mergence invites a willingness to remain in Haraway's 'trouble,' to confront and venture into the complexity of existence, trusting that what survives in the margins, in the underground, in the dim and intermittent light, is not 'nothing.' As Didi-Huberman reminds us, the rare moments of possibility are those in which humans become fireflies, "luminescent beings, dancing, erratic, elusive, and resistant," flickering "before our amazed eyes" (Didi-Huberman 2018, 191). The risk is only to re-e-merge into the same world with new eyes.

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