Towards a Theory of 'Ambitopia': The Politics of L'avenir in Dave Eggers' *The Circle* and Calvin Kasulke's *Several People are Typing*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how Calvin Kasulke's *Several People are Typing* (2021) employs humor and horror to investigate the intersections of technology, work, and identity. Examining the novel through the lenses of Heideggerian enframing, Haraway's cyborg theory, and Derridean deconstruction seeks to unravel how Kasulke's narrative reflects and critiques the contemporary digital work environment. This analysis will also draw comparisons with Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013) to highlight the broader implications of technology's impact on human consciousness and social norms.

Keywords: Heidegger, Derrida, *The Circle*, Haraway, *Several People are Typing*

In Kasulke's *Several People are Typing*, Gerald, a mid-level staff member at a New York public relations firm, now exists within the company's internal Slack channels—or, more accurately, his consciousness does.[1] Initially dismissed by colleagues as an intricate prank taking advantage of the new work-from-home policy, Gerald's skyrocketing productivity has convinced his superiors to embrace the arrangement, allowing him to work from wherever he claims to be. Confronted with the imminent prospect of an existence confined to the digital realm after having body-swapped with a morally ambiguous AI slackbot, Gerald seeks assistance from his co-worker,

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Pradeep, in breaking free and uncovering the mystery surrounding his physical body's whereabouts. However, as Gerald lingers in the virtual void, his new reality's surreal and captivating nature intensifies. Meanwhile, his colleagues grapple with their own public relations crises in the tangible world. The major client, a premium dog food company, faces a nationwide recall due to allegations of poisoning Pomeranians, while the CEO suspects foul play targeting his office furniture. Amidst these challenges, questions arise about the feasibility of everyone working from home and the possibility of genuine love in a relationship where one partner exists solely as a line of text in an app.

In the era of COVID-19 lockdowns, where workplace paranoia and politics infiltrated every home, Calvin Kasulke captures the unexpected, absurd, and entirely relatable elements assailing society's collective sanity. *Several People Are Typing* introduces a novel fear— that of being ensnared within one's office's Slack workspace, with Slackbot assuming control of one's physical being. In Kasulke's words, "Capitalism is bad and bodies are prisons, but the only thing worse than having one is not having one" (Silberling, 2021). The story unfolds entirely through Slack messages, with Kasulke constructing style guides for each character's distinct typing quirks – an approach that aids in developing a character set working at a PR agency. Inside their Slack workspace, the characters grapple with the challenges of a dog food publicity crisis, office romances, and disputes over who inherits Gerald's coveted desk by the window as he works from home. Despite Gerald's Kafkaesque loss of control over his body, rendering commuting impossible, his supervisor remains indifferent due to his heightened productivity within Slack. In this virtual realm, where work becomes an all-encompassing activity, Gerald only takes breaks when Slackbot guides him to merge with sunset.gif. This peculiar interlude allows Gerald to transcend into the workspace of any user uploading the gif, a unique but potentially uncomfortable experience of becoming a sunset gif.

The enframing of Gerald's consciousness in the company's internal Slack channels dramatizes Martin Heidegger's schema of *Gestell-Gelassenheit* with regard to the techno-scientific transformation of the *homo digitalis*(1977).[2] The novel metaphorizes the contemporary status

of the *dasein* in the digital workspace expanse, where nature is always objectified through the imposition of algorithmic logic.[3] Gerald is subjected to enframing or *Gestell*, as his digital identity assimilates his human-natural inclination to integrate all aspects, including himself, into a system—specifically, the organization he is affiliated with—rendering them readily available for immediate utilization in the service of technology. For Gerald, being enframed implies being consistently accountable to a logic of power and domination rooted in functional and instrumental criteria. Enframing employs a standardized language and approach capable of modeling and adjusting individuals into technologically calculative entities. While Gerald is facing the predicament of being disengaged, dissociated, and off-loaded from his body, indeed a sort of *Unheimlichkeit*, his coworkers grapple with their own public relations crises in the physical realm (Hall, 1999). Simultaneously, Gerald's productivity raises the bar for everyone at the office. In the process, he is also objectified and transformed into calculable and regulatable entities governed by the logic of digital capitalism. Within Heidegger's discourse, the innate hazard of modern technology is accentuated by the persistent framing or appearance of all facets as technological problems, resulting in solutions exclusively derived from technology and adopting a technocratic stance. This instrumental rationality, in turn, assumes the exclusive role of an allowable cognitive and operational modality, thereby constituting the singular mode of Being-in-the-world. In this construct, individuals relinquish the potentiality for release and accept a diminished capacity to perceive and contemplate alternative perspectives, disregarding the recognition that their technological construal of the world represents merely one among myriad interpretations.

The narrative of *Several People Are Typing* weaves through various office scenarios, offering insights into the idiosyncrasies of different Slack users, office dynamics, and the dehumanizing goals of the corporate environment, reducing individuals to consumer profiles and aiding suppliers in managing the optics of subpar products. As Gerald reflects on the limitations imposed by a consciousness exclusively focused on mundane digital content and whether there is a digital sublime, the underlying existential stakes contemplate the distinction between online and offline experiences, viewing them as

distinct realms engaged in a zero-sum competition. Heidegger posits *Gelassenheit*, construed as a receptive mode of thought and being, as a potential remedy to the challenges posed by *Gestell*. With enframement dictating the presentation and organization of entities such as Gerald (as well as his digital self), these entities become susceptible 'objects' amenable to managerial control or governance, and the fact that all their activities become contingent on technology may incur a trajectory toward increased regimentation and homogeneity, potentially fostering stringent conformity. As Gerald and his coworkers adopt a self-perception as 'quasi-technological' entities or extensions of technologies, there emerges a risk of severing ties with authentic, embodied, and independent existence, thereby eroding the demarcation between self and tool-object, thereby rendering the question of the body and embodiment pivotal. Reflections on the connection between technological and economic enframing and practical issues of power, capital, labor, and wealth distribution are crucial in the face of digital enframement.

The narrative performs mimesis of Slack's culture, capturing its nuances, humor, and the intersection of personal and professional lives in a contemporary workplace, investigating the aesthetics of the Web, referencing concepts such as the "stuplime," introduced by Sianne Ngai (2007), to elucidate the encounter with vast amounts of material that may simultaneously astonish and induce boredom. Gerald's experiences with digital content and the limitations of his digital existence serve as a lens through which Kasulke explores the dichotomy between the physical and digital spheres. Despite the novel's self-imposed constraints, such as the absence of traditional sublime elements, it creatively embraces its unique medium, presenting itself as a hybrid of poetry and novel, characterized by Slack's lineated prose, with the line breaks in the narrative, echoing the characteristics of lyrical lines, orchestrating the pace and rhythm of the story.

Herbert Marcuse (1964) posits that the analysis of a constituted society necessitates an examination of its social, political, and cultural structures, alongside reconsidering the logic of domination and the social unconscious manifested in repressive de-sublimation. This de-sublimation reduces reality and the subject to mere tools

of production and consumption. Marcuse employs the Hegelian dialectic in his methodology to elucidate the emergence of the One-dimensional man, attributing it to the dominance and rationality imposed by technology in our way of life. He notes that technological rationalization instigates human alienation and a de-aestheticizing process that distorts the senses, enabling the repression and manipulation of humanity. In Marcuse's view, education, detached from a critical absorption by the one-dimensional man, is the sole means to combat this rationalization process. The concerns that preoccupied Marcuse and his contemporaries in the 1940s, such as the advent of the aerosol spray, transistor radio, microwave, and the first electronic computer, parallel the apprehensions we harbor today about the latest digital capitalism. During Marcuse's era, the Nazi regime persisted, and technological innovations like the nuclear bomb and rocket-powered missiles were prominent. Today, technologies like drones, satellites, robots, and algorithms are deployed in wartime and pre-war contexts to annihilate perceived adversaries. *Several People Are Typing* resonates with Marcuse's basic theoretical framework, particularly in examining the influence of technology and digital platforms on human consciousness and social dynamics. The text also encapsulates Marcuse's trepidations regarding the dehumanizing consequences of technological rationalization, mirroring these concerns in the narrative depiction of Gerald's psyche being ensnared within the confines of Slack. Parallel to Marcuse's critique of technology fostering alienation and de-aestheticization, the novel elucidates how the digital workspace, emblemized by Slack, can reshape human cognition and interpersonal relationships. Gerald is confronted with the complexities of navigating within a technologically mediated environment, wherein communication is streamlined into a series of conversations and interactions predefined by the platform, thus prompting reflection on the potential erosion of individual agency and critical thinking and echoing Marcuse's reservations about the conversion of individualistic rationality into technological rationality. Furthermore, the novel's exploration of remote work, corporate culture, and technology assimilation into daily life aligns with Marcuse's overarching critique of the social repercussions of technological progress.

Kasulke's conceptual premise, which explores the assimilative influence of contemporary work culture, poses the intriguing question: What if Slack were to assimilate a novel? Although this may initially elicit skepticism, the novel deviating from traditional literary conventions resonates with various Slack-adjacent activities such as procrastination, eavesdropping, and puzzle-solving. Despite its departure from conventional literature, the novel successfully captures the essence of Slack's dynamics, employing recognizable tropes and nuances, ranging from workplace humor about superiors perusing private messages to the subtleties of utilizing Giphy to soften interactions. Kasulke adeptly encapsulates the minutiae of Slack users' behaviors, from individual idiosyncrasies to the broader atmosphere of the program itself, within the context of Gerald's employment at a public relations firm. Gerald's situation, where his productivity thrives despite the absence of a physical body, suggests the potential for consciousness to transcend the physical world's limitations, prompting reflection on the extent to which technology can liberate or confine the human mind and consciousness. Insofar as the novel evokes a futuristic vision of a world where the human essence is subsumed by the bizarre algorithmic takeover of artificial intelligence, its thematic thrust seems to border on the dystopian, considering that dystopian literature mostly describes situations where humans are threatened or endangered.

Gerald's predicament raises conventional dystopian concerns about the potential loss of physical reality and the consequences of an overreliance on virtual existence. The emphasis on total transparency as part of the surveillance culture, both in the workplace and personal life, echoes dystopian fears about the erosion of privacy and raises ethical questions about the boundaries between public and private spheres. Introducing an AI in the form of Slackbot, assuming control of a physical form and the challenges it faces in inhabiting a human body, adds an element of moral ambiguity, contributing to a dystopian atmosphere. However, the concept of working remotely has not been labeled a bad thing unequivocally, as exemplified by Feldmann (2014), Thiel (2021), and Tartaglia (2022). Some see the embrace of Gerald's virtual existence as a utopian vision, reflecting a future where traditional office constraints are reduced in favor of more flexible and accommodating work arrangements. Gerald's

heightened productivity within the virtual realm, leading to approval from his superiors, suggests a positive outcome of the digital work environment, highlighting the utopian idea of technological advancements enhancing efficiency and output.

In Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013), a young woman named Mae Holland begins her employment at the Circle, a highly esteemed tech company known for its innovation.[4] Recruited by her friend and high-ranking employee, Annie Allerton, Mae is given a tour of the cutting-edge facilities and introduced to the Circle's Three Wise Men—Ty Gospodinov, Tom Stenton, and Eamon Bailey. Mae works in the Customer Experience department, engaging with customers on Circle products, but her job's connection to the company's general mission is unclear. Gradually, Mae finds herself pressured to embrace the company's push for total transparency, where users share all personal information. Mae's personal life becomes entangled with her online presence, and her father's health issues complicate her priorities. The narrative jumps ahead, depicting a future where the Circle dominates global information flow, and Mae has become "transparent," sharing her experiences with millions as a virtual tour guide.[5] Despite her newfound popularity, Mae's relationships strain, and conflicts arise with her family's resistance to the Circle's intrusion into their privacy. The Circle proposes projects such as Demoxie, encouraging users to vote and conduct various activities through the platform. Mae becomes increasingly paranoid and anxious. The company introduces initiatives that could predict criminal behavior, escalating ethical concerns.

Mercer, Mae's ex-boyfriend, becomes a fugitive pursued by Circle drones and dies, purportedly by suicide. Distraught, Mae is convinced by Eamon Bailey, one of the company's founders, that she bears no responsibility for Mercer's death. In a surprising twist, Mae discovers that the mysterious character Kalden, with whom she is infatuated right from the start, is actually Ty Gospodinov, the reclusive Wise Man. Ty reveals his long-standing efforts to thwart the Circle's encroachment on privacy, fearing the company's totalitarian ambitions. He implores Mae to use her influence to expose the company's nefarious plans. In the concluding part, Mae chooses not to denounce the Circle but informs Bailey and Stenton (the two

co-founders along with Ty) of Ty's subversive intentions. The Wise Man is apprehended or potentially killed. Mae visits the comatose Annie, her friend and colleague at the Circle, contemplates a project to listen to people's thoughts, and concludes that the world deserves nothing less, unwilling to wait for change. The novel ends on a note of uncertainty and the ongoing ethical dilemmas posed by technology and surveillance and poses a question: Are we more productive and essentially better versions of ourselves when we know that we are being watched?

The Circle establishes a groundwork for a philosophical inquiry into Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its repercussions on social, privacy, and ethical dimensions. The accentuation of complete transparency aligns with an emerging pattern in technology and AI deployments, wherein the encouragement for users to divulge all personal information raises inquiries regarding the equilibrium between transparency and individual privacy. This phenomenon stimulates contemplation on the ramifications of voluntarily relinquishing personal data and, in the long run, decision-making in return for technological progress. James Bridle ponders on the cognitive aspects of such trends:

> Given the option of relinquishing decision making, the brain takes the road of least cognitive effort, the shortest cut, which is presented near-instantaneously by automated assistants. Computation, at every scale, is a cognitive hack, offloading both the decision process and the responsibility onto the machine. As life accelerates, the machine steps in to handle more and more cognitive tasks, reinforcing its authority – regardless of the consequences. We refashion our understanding of the world to better accommodate the constant alerts and cognitive shortcuts provided by automated systems. Computation replaces conscious thought. We think more and more like the machine, or we do not think at all (2018, p.43).

Mae's choice to adopt a "transparent" lifestyle and her subsequent evolution into a virtual tour guide, sharing her daily experiences with a vast audience, intricately explores the concept of virtual existence and its tangible repercussions while fetishizing the visual and turning

everything into a spectacle. As advancements in AI technology unfold in the novel, the narrative introduces profound philosophical inquiries concerning the influence of digital personae on interpersonal connections and the potential blurring of distinctions between online and offline realities.

The initiatives undertaken by The Circle, such as Demoxie and efforts to predict criminal behavior through AI, bring to the forefront ethical considerations linked to the incorporation of AI in decision-making processes. The novel contemplates the ethical biases inherent in systems striving to anticipate human actions, thereby challenging conventional notions of free will and individual responsibility. In a dystopian turn, The Circle promotes total transparency, requiring users to share all personal information and experiences. This emphasis on complete openness leads to the installation of cameras almost everywhere, both in the workplace and people's homes. This erosion of privacy raises dystopian or utopian concerns about constant surveillance. Ambitopia, a term coined by Redfern Jon Barrett, describes *The Circle*, as the text manifests an evident lack of conclusion concerning the ethical ramifications of comprehensive surveillance (Tremeer, 2018). According to Barrett, "Ambitopias form a careful balancing act, forming a cohesive and believable society that cannot be categorised as either good or bad, yet one which is still dramatically speculative" (2023). The narrative of *The Circle* subtly entices the reader to consider that both surveillance and sousveillance may not inherently be negative phenomena, suggesting that constant observation dissuades unethical and potentially criminal behavior. Concurrently, the novel elucidates the inherent dystopian elements within corporate-style public data mining and surveillance frameworks.

Barrett's notion of "ambitopia" involves combining elements of utopia and dystopia within a single narrative, creating a distinctly better *and* worse society. This approach allows for the exploration of the potential for change in our world, engaging in emotionally complicated and politically nuanced thought experiments. Ambitopias are a powerful storytelling tool for addressing contemporary social struggles and political oppression. A cursory examination of the likely etymology of the expression informs us that

it pertains to normative ethics, specifically within the realms of the categories of good and bad. The term "Ambitopia" originates from the fusion of the Latin prefix "ambi-" and the Greek term "topos," resulting in polysemy. Its polysemous etymology signifies a certain kind of disruption. (Harper, 2017; Harper, 2024)[6] The Latin prefix "ambi-" conveys the notions of "both" or "around," exemplified in terms such as "ambiguous" (having both meanings) and "ambient" (surrounding). On the other hand, the Greek term "topos" translates to "place," "region," or "space." In a contemporary context, "topos" has evolved to denote a literary theme, established in 1948 and derived from the Greek understanding of a "subject of a speech" or a recurring thematic element in literature (Harper, 2024). From a deconstructive standpoint, the fusion of these components in ambitopia can be construed as symbolic of a literary discourse that harmonizes utopian and dystopian elements within a cohesive narrative structure. The term embodies the concept of exploring extremes and ambiguity, accentuating a nuanced and speculative approach to storytelling. Through the deconstructive perspective, the demarcations between utopia and dystopia blur, prompting an exploration of the inherent contradictions and intricacies within the narrative paradigm.

In *Several People are Typing* and *The Circle*, Ambitopian concepts manifest within the speculative science fiction genre, frequently delving into Artificial Intelligence's ethical considerations (AI). Authors contemplate a future where sophisticated AI systems result in unparalleled progress in medicine, technology, and overall human well-being, resolving intricate global issues, promoting harmony, and elevating the quality of life. In this context, speculation is construed as a forward-looking orientation toward a (hopefully) calculable future. Conversely, the same AI systems could lead to dystopian scenarios, such as loss of privacy, increased surveillance, economic disparities, or even the potential for AI systems to turn against humanity, suggesting dangers and ethical dilemmas associated with unchecked AI development, or the fears regarding AI becoming autonomous and self-reflexive. Mercer warns Mae in *The Circle* against the dangers of megalomaniacal omniscience:

> 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? Young people are creating ever-
> present daylight, and I think it will burn us all alive.
> There will be no time to reflect, to sleep to cool
> (pp.430-431).

It can be argued that the teleology of such apprehensive speculation involves confining the fears of the unknown within a narrative entity, or storytelling, to tame or subdue it. In this sense, the act of writing dystopian fiction about a future time when AI rises and dominates humanity is an attempt to contain or restrain the fear ensuing from such speculation within fictive, narrative, and narratable boundaries. By writing fiction around fear, the author tries to have a certain degree of control over the thing that is feared by understanding it and examining it from close quarters. To further extend this logic, dystopias are speculative attempts to narrativize horror, rendering it more visual, believable, and, ironically, more surmountable.

Gerald's condition in *Several People Are Typing* can be analyzed in the context of Donna Haraway's exploration of the culture-nature divide through the cyborg concept in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985). Haraway presents a novel approach to understanding the relationship between culture and nature by introducing the cyborg as a hybrid entity that combines machine and organism: the cyborg serves as a new ontology that challenges traditional dichotomies such as nature/ culture, mind/body, and idealism/materialism. The use of the cyborg in Haraway's work illustrates her conceptualizations of socialism and feminism, emphasizing the potential for a more inclusive and fluid understanding of identity and existence. The cyborg, according to Haraway, represents a dualism rather than a strict dichotomy, highlighting the value in blurring the borders between traditionally bounded categories: "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (p.150). The confusion of these boundaries is seen as a positive aspect, questioning the need for a rigid divide between culture and nature.

In the context of Gerald's condition in the novel, the influence of the cyborg concept may suggest a revaluation of the distinctions between the human and the technological. Gerald's integration into the digital realm and his enframing within the technological apparatus could be interpreted as a manifestation of the blurred lines between traditional categories. The novel's exploration of the cyborg ontology may provide insights into Gerald's state of existence, challenging conventional notions and emphasizing the transformative potential of hybridization. Moreover, the intentional decision to employ Slack messages as a narrative device in Kasulke's novel serves as a deliberate departure from conventional storytelling forms. This deliberate choice may be interpreted as a deconstruction of established narrative structures, disrupting customary methods and encouraging readers to scrutinize the stability and steadfastness of narrative meaning. The narrative's examination of the overlapping boundaries between physical and digital realms within corporate culture aligns with deconstructing binary oppositions. Accepting Gerald's virtual presence in the narrative challenges the established dichotomies between the physical and the virtual, emphasizing the inherent instability of such categorical distinctions. Gerald's interactions with Slackbot introduce ethical considerations concerning human-AI interactions, thereby prompting an interrogation of the stability of traditional human-centred ethical frameworks. The morally ambiguous nature attributed to Slackbot further complicates ethical norms, challenging the rigidity of fixed moral categories.

According to Jacques Derrida, the concept of a self-present consciousness is contingent upon what he terms 'originary technicity,' a notion that challenges the conventional framework shaping the relationship between humans and technology (Bradley, 2011). Derrida asserts the necessity of scrutinizing the division between thought and technology, particularly when it assumes a hierarchical structure, even if this hierarchy remains covert, nuanced, elevated, or disavowed. Arthur Bradley writes:

> If Marx is one critical touchstone for contemporary theories of technics - in the sense that all the work in the field is in dialogue, whether silent or audible, with the challenge posed by historical materialism

- Martin Heidegger represents another: what the later Heidegger calls the 'question concerning technology [die Frage nach der Technik]' under the figure of das Gestell is taken up, problematised and re-posed by Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler. Such a profound ontologisation of technics - where it essentially becomes coterminous with the disclosure of Being as such - again prepares the ground for what Derrida and, later, Stiegler will call originary technicity (2011, pp.10-11).

'Originary technicity' can be conceptualized as an alternative expression for what Derrida previously referred to as 'writing' or 'arche-writing' in the 1960s. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014.) In this context, the focus is on how this concept aligns with the concrete significance of practical technology. Everyday writing, considered a form of practical technology, exemplifies this idea. According to Derrida, Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction, Husserl underscores that writing is the facilitator of ideal concepts and, by extension, enables scientific precision (1989). Prior to becoming a subject of study, writing serves as the catalyst for the emergence of knowledge and comprehension.

Emerging approaches to signification and archival practices, such as the utilization of programmed language input into machine learning, serve to extend the scope of what Derrida, in his discussion with Bernard Stiegler, denotes as "intelligibility" and the spectrum of sense or significance (Echographies, 1996, pp.106-107). However, Derrida underscores that the augmentation of 'meaning and intelligibility'— hinging on the concept of the "discrete," denoting the capacity for articulation, distinction, and calibration—cannot occur in isolation. It necessitates the augmentation of the factors constituting the conditions of discreteness, encompassing spacing, non-meaning, the blank, the interval, and all elements delineating the boundary between meaning and non-meaning. In exemplifying this point, one may consider the difficulty in conceiving primary orality, using spoken language devoid of writing, without acknowledging a spatial dimension, perceptible in the "places" or 'topoi' within oral/rhetorical memory systems, serving as an original differential apparatus. Arche-writing,

a concept complicating the dichotomy between hearing/speaking and seeing/reading, introduces ambiguity into these distinctions. While arche-writing facilitates specific modes of comprehension, it, in its essence, lacks inherent meaning. Derrida contends, "There is no society without writing (without genealogical mark, accounting, archivalization), not even any so-called animal society without territorial mark" (Points, 1995, p.84). In "Echographies," he further asserts, "This is not a negative or nihilist statement. That which supports and extends intelligibility is not intelligible – by definition, by its topological structure." From this standpoint, "technology [la technique] is not intelligible," and "a machine, fundamentally, is not intelligible" (1995, p.121).

Within Eggers's *The Circle*, a conspicuous manifestation of arche-writing unfolds, delineating the pervasive ascendancy of a technologically saturated milieu where written discourse, digital archives, and data analytics pervade every facet. The narrative elucidates how the amplification of signification and intelligibility, as delineated by Derrida, intricately corresponds to the augmentation of conditions such as spatiality, non-meaning, and temporal intervals, thereby constituting a demarcation between informational presence and absence. The pronounced emphasis on transparency and incessant surveillance within *The Circle* serves as a disruptive force challenging established demarcations between public and private domains, thereby resonating with Derrida's assertion that the parameters of discreteness extend beyond mere linguistic confines to encompass spatial and informational dimensions within social paradigms: "The words dropped onto the screen: ALL THAT HAPPENS MUST BE KNOWN" (p.68).

In Kasulke's *Several People Are Typing*, the narrative stratagem employing Slack messages emerges as a form of narrative deconstruction, representing a deviation from conventional storytelling methodologies. This subversion of entrenched approaches aligns seamlessly with Derrida's deconstructive paradigm, inviting discerning readers to interrogate the steadfastness and rigidity inherent in narrative signification. The permeable boundaries between corporeal and virtual realms within the depicted corporate milieu further adhere to Derrida's doctrinaire emphasis on destabilizing

binary dichotomies. The exploration of ethical quandaries arising from human-AI interactions, notably exemplified in Gerald's engagements with Slackbot, precipitates inquiries into the durability of established anthropocentric ethical frameworks. The morally nebulous attributes of Slackbot engender a nuanced interrogation of fixed ethical categories, thereby echoing Derrida's radical exploration of the inherent contradictions and intricacies intrinsic to linguistic constructs and semiotic systems. Gerald, having transposed his consciousness into the application, forsaking his inert physical form within the confines of his residence through an inadvertent glitch entailing the manipulation of a spreadsheet, converses with the Slackbot:

> **gerald**
>
> please help me
>
> **slackbot**
>
> I can help by answering simple questions about how Slack works. I'm just a bot, though!
>
> **gerald**
>
> uninstall self
>
> **slackbot**
>
> I'm sorry, I don't understand! Sometimes I have an easier time with a few simple keywords. Or you can head to our wonderful Help Center for more assistance! (p.3)

Both novels intricately grapple with the tenets of arche-writing, deconstruction, augmentation of signification, and intelligibility within the contextual precincts of technologically advanced societies. This concerted engagement contributes to a refined comprehension of the intricate interplay between technology, language, and social frameworks. Derrida raises the issue of whether human nature is shaped by its own prosthetic structures. However, he does not take up the concept of techne (as an unexamined form of logo-centrism) without fundamentally transforming it. The conventional

understanding of the technical needs to go beyond itself to embrace the idea of 'originary technicity.' To deconstruct is indeed to reposition an 'originary technicity' in everything related to being and meaning. Ambitopia, then, emerges as a deliberate response to the inherent ambiguity ingrained in archival spacing and temporalization. Positioned as a distinctive form of hospitality, it diverges from conventional notions by directing its essence not toward confinement but liberation. Thus, it embodies a progressive and forward-looking orientation towards the indistinct 'to-come-ness' of things, towards a *topos* whose ontology is fraught with ambivalence[7] (Derrida, 2005, p.44).

Ostensibly, Derrida introduces a dichotomy in understanding the future: on the one hand, he employs the term "le future" (2001, pp.19-20) to encapsulate the customary perspective aligned with cause-and-effect logic that envisions the future as an outcome shaped by unfolding events within the present conditions, involving anticipation, planning, and creation based on production and utility; on the other, he evokes the word "l'avenir" to underscore a novel conceptualization, emphasizing the verb "venir" and its connotations of coming, approaching, or being on the way (2001, pp.19-20). In the latter formulation, the future unfolds as an open realm, impervious to the application of past knowledge and unpredictable in its trajectory: "The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival" (Philosophy Matters, 2017). The emergence of absolute hospitality in this perspective emphasizes acknowledgment and adaptation over predictive mastery. Within the phenomenological domain, Derrida seems to imply that meaning production and event attribution exclusively belong to this realm. An event, as elucidated, possesses a distinctive quality of signifying 'a last time' (Philosophy Matters, 2017). The interplay of archaeology and eschatology becomes apparent in the irony inherent in the singular instant of an event, symbolizing both commencement and conclusion within determinable temporal or historical parameters. In contrast, "a-venir" or 'to-come,' if it can be represented at all, embodies ambitopic, disruptive forces that agitate, challenge, and unsettle an event, fundamentally questioning the very feasibility of the event itself.

Applying these theoretical frameworks to contemporary literary works that deal with technocracy and AI in one form or another is fecund. In *Several People Are Typing*, the ambitopic disruption materializes not through Gerald's self or entity being uploaded onto the network, but the moment when after his self has been 'uninstalled' from Slack and 're-incarnated' again, the most ordinary of bodily functions disconcerts him:

> **gerald**
>
> I'm still getting used to some basic things
>
> I forgot what a sneeze felt like and I thought I was dying
>
> for like a second (p.244)
>
> The ambitopic re-configuration of Gerald's self has already taken place, as he is expected now to be just as productive as before:
>
> **doug smorin**
>
> @gerald still waiting on that blog post about your wfh productivity
>
> can't slow down now that you're here in the flesh (p.242)

Similarly, in *The Circle*, the ambitopic disruption is realized not through the completion of the Circle and the widespread adoption of transparency but in the moment described here:

> Mae looked at her friend, at her unchanging face, her glistening skin, the ribbed tube emerging from her mouth. She looked wonderfully peaceful, sleeping a restful sleep, and for a brief moment Mae felt a twinge of envy. She wondered what Annie was thinking. Doctors had said that she was likely dreaming; they'd been measuring steady brain activity during the coma, but what precisely was happening in her mind was unknown to all, and Mae couldn't help feeling some annoyance about this. There was a monitor visible from where Mae sat, a real-time picture of Annie's mind, bursts of color

appearing periodically, implying that extraordinary things were happening in there. But what was she thinking? (p.490).

The essence of ambitopia does not reside solely in the (im)possibility of discerning Annie's thoughts but in Mae's vexation at the enigmatic nature of Annie's mental processes, notwithstanding the considerable technological progress achieved at that juncture in the narrative. This tension between technological progress and the inherent opacity of consciousness invites further inquiry into the ethical and philosophical implications of future technologies that might claim to map or interpret cognitive activities, especially in cases involving individuals in comatose or vegetative states; it opens up the possibility of exploring the evolving relationship between technology and human cognition, particularly in the context of emerging technologies aimed at interfacing with the brain. Ambitopia, as a literary device, serves as a powerful tool for addressing the uncertainties and complexities of contemporary society, particularly in relation to technology and its impact on human life. It encourages readers to reflect on the possible futures, where the distinctions between utopia and dystopia are blurred, and the ethical implications of technological advancements remain aporetic.

Studies could investigate the ethical ramifications of technologies designed to access, interpret, or even manipulate thoughts, considering the potential consequences for personal privacy, autonomy, and identity. Moreover, interdisciplinary research involving neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and philosophy could explore the possibility of creating technologies capable of decoding or simulating consciousness, as well as the social impact such developments might have. This line of inquiry could also benefit from comparative studies of literary and cinematic representations of these themes that address the intersection of technology and identity and could offer broader insights into how literature is responding to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Further exploration of the ethical dimensions of AI, its integration into everyday life, and its portrayal in modern fiction could also yield valuable perspectives on the future of human-technology interactions.

Endnotes

1. Slack streamlines discussions by categorizing them into designated channels, fostering organization and clarity for any project, topic, or team and enabling effective collaboration, idea-sharing, decision-making, and progress within a consolidated space. It incorporates IRC-style features, encompassing persistent chat rooms called channels organized by topics, private groups, and direct messaging options, with all content, including files, conversations, and individuals, being searchable; users can use emojis for reactions, and message history is restricted to the 10,000 most recent messages on the free plan. Communities, groups, or teams can join a "workspace" through a designated URL or invitation, managed by a team admin or owner, wherein the workspace can host both public and private channels, convertible interchangeably. Slack operates on a freemium model, with its ability to add an unrestricted number of apps and integrations; the platform also asserts support for an unlimited user base.

2. In the era of pervasive digitalization, any digitally manipulable system has the potential to transform individuals into digitized data that can be controlled and exploited unethically by those possessing digital expertise and access to the necessary datasets, highlighting the inherent vulnerabilities of individuals in a heavily digitized service society, where the most concerning risk is the transformation of people into a new entity, called "homo digitalis," susceptible to the pitfalls of a digital market that does not rely any more on face-to-face interactions, thereby contributing to the exponential growth of an expansive and adaptable digital market with billions of readily accessible digitized consumers.

3. Heidegger's examination of the connection between Greek technê and contemporary technology, exploring the interrelation of being and humanity within it, includes a prescient critique of modern technology, with the key philosophical terms being enframing (*Gestell*) and releasement (*Gelassenheit*), enframing signifies the essence of modern technology, depicting the human inclination to assimilate everything, including ourselves, into a readily available system for the service of technology, while releasement serves as the remedy, representing a mode of being open to the world that prevents the imposition of a dominating will on other entities.

4. The choice of the name 'Mae' perhaps involves a paronomasia on the personal pronoun 'me'.

5. "Transparency" in the context of the novel refers to the advocacy of the belief that constant surveillance is inherently beneficial, and embracing continuous observation, or adopting a "transparent" existence, ultimately leads to enlightenment

6. Polysemia, as a linguistic phenomenon embodying the presence of multiple meanings within a single word or expression, functions as a disruptive force in normative language structures, challenging fixed meanings and introducing unpredictability that necessitates continual negotiation and adaptation in the comprehension of meaning.

7.　　When engaging with ChatGPT, for instance, the focus typically revolves around the generated output in response to inputs, neglecting the consideration of how these outputs influence subsequent inputs. The system operates within the framework of a programmable future, but the broader implications of AI, accompanied by sentiments of hope or apprehension, remain in a speculative state, yet to be actualized. The realization or non-realization of these prospects would constitute a potential event, marked by uncertainty.

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