Digitized Selves, Identity, and Surveillance in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*

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Abstract

The current paper, "The Candy House" by Jennifer Egan, is an important postmodern novel that questions the issues of memory, identity, and surveillance in digital reality. In contemporary literary criticism, the triangular relationship between memory, identity, and surveillance in The Candy House receives inadequate attention, likely due to the common interpretation of these three themes separately. This paper fills the gap in understanding how memory is commodified and its effect on identity formation under digital surveillance within a postmodern narrative framework. This paper discusses how Egan presents his fragmented structure, polyphonic voices and metafictional strategies to demonstrate how the commodification of memory and fragmentation of identity are presented in the novel through algorithmic culture. The gathering of textual evidence was performed out of the novel itself, and the review of the academic context was conducted to place the results. The discussion brings out the way the novel is both an archive and a machine of literature and reveals the concealed expenses of voluntary surveillance and hypervisibility. The novelty of the study is explained by the integrative approach in which the narrative form is viewed as the active criticism of the digital conditions but not its passive reflection. The paper ends with a conclusion and a recommendation to the ongoing literary studies to include the ability of formal experimentation to complicate and challenge digital epistemologies, recommending the application of interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of modern fiction in an era of datafication.

Keywords— postmodern narrative; digital memory; identity ; surveillance; metafiction

I. INTRODUCTION

Jennifer Egan has become a pivotal voice in the evolving literary landscape of the twenty-first century, her work exploring the complex relationship between memory, identity, and technology. An author from the United States of America who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2011 for his novel "*A Visit from the Goon Squad*." Egan is renowned due to her new narrative patterns, multi-voiced narration, and her ability to incorporate intricate psychological and technological issues into unified literary patterns (Horton, 2021). Her novel, *The Candy House,* can be regarded as a refined sibling work of her previous novel. However, it is equally a postmodern narrative (or a tale) on its own, as it deals with the issue of what occurs when consciousness is digitized. It is the modality of controlling the world of surveillance capitalism that the sale of human experience has become.

The Candy House is set in a near future where a technology firm known as Mandala has developed a next-generation technology that enables its users to export, share, and access their memories through a collective digital consciousness (Abbar, 2023). It raises

cultural, ethical, and ontological consequences of technological overload through the help of the chain of interrelated characters. Memory, identity, and surveillance, which are the most prevalent themes in the novel, match the current problems of the removal of data, the loss of privacy, and the algorithmic manipulation of the internal world of a person. By invoking these themes, Egan crafts a provocative narrative that prompts readers to consider the cost of radical connectivity and the illusion of freedom in a hyper-digitised world (Kelly, 2021; Power, 2023; Farhan, 2025).

This study is significant because it addresses a critical and timely question: How does literature respond to the epistemological and existential dilemmas posed by digital technologies? Although surveillance and memory have both received their fair share of criticism in dystopian fiction and psychological novels, respectively, *The Candy House* offers a unique confluence of these themes within a postmodern framework. Moreover, although A Visit from the Goon Squad has been thoroughly examined within the academic community, *The Candy House* is a relatively recent text that is yet to be explored in the academic domain, specifically in the aspect of its employment of the identity-construction under the aura of digital transparency and surveillance.

The central problem that this study seeks to address is the limited academic research on how *The Candy House* dramatizes the commodification of memory, specifically how personal recollections are made open, marketable, and digitizable, and how this process contributes to the formation of identity in a digitally monitored society. Although postmodern narrative strategies and digital surveillance have already been studied as two distinct areas of research interest, a significant gap remains in literary criticism regarding their intersection with memory and identity Such an absence of integrative analysis conceals a more nuanced understanding of how Egan's novel comments on the contemporary cultural panic in the digital age over datafication, algorithmic subjectivity, and the loss of personal interiority in everyday life. The paper analyzes the postmodern criticism of the digital age in *The Candy House*, with special emphasis on how the surveillance operations embedded in the techno-social systems alter memory and identity. The study fills the existing debate on the use of literature to undermine the cultural logic of late capitalism and digital control. Accordingly, the study poses the following research question: *How does Jennifer Egan's The Candy House use*

postmodern narrative techniques to critique the interrelation between digitized memory, identity construction, and surveillance in the digital era?

The theoretical framework of this study is the postmodern literary theory and critical surveillance studies. Theoretical explanations of the criticism of transparency culture and commodified consciousness in the novel include the works of Michel Foucault (Panopticism), Jean Baudrillard (Simulacra and Simulation), and Shoshana Zuboff (Surveillance Capitalism). These frameworks are further elaborated in the following sections, which provide a platform on which the detailed textual examination can be performed.

In a word, this introduction has proven the topicality of the work of Jennifer Egan within the framework of modern literary discussions, proposed the overall themes of *The Candy House,* explained the academic value of the research, outlined the major gap in the study, and stated the theoretical and analytical perspective to follow. This query is aimed at showing how the postmodern vision offered by Egan exposes the dehumanizing effects of a society where memory has become a profane part, the identity a computational algorithm, and where surveillance is not seen and present everywhere.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews critical literature on three interconnected concepts: memory, fragmented digital identity, and surveillance, particularly within contemporary fiction and as reflected in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*. The aim is to identify the gaps addressed by this study by integrating these themes into a postmodern narrative framework.

2.1 Memory in Contemporary Fiction

The intersections between memory and narrative have been well-documented in modern and postmodern literature. Recently, scholars have become especially concerned with how fiction is reformulating memory as a dynamic process of creation and construction that is often (if, perhaps, not always) facilitated by digital technologies. As Abbar (2023) emphasizes, *The Candy House* can be translated into the experience of postmodern hyperreality and, with it, into the loss of authenticity as opposed to the simulated perception produced by Egan in her written work. In a similar study on dystopian writing, such as The Memory Police, Merrill (2024) highlights the role of memory loss as a

metaphor for state surveillance and the overall repression of the system. These results are in line with Kelly (2021), who discusses the novel by Egan, along with Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun, calling their analysis to a halt when artificial intelligence destabilizes the narrative of memory as well as restores it within the novel by introducing it as a product created by algorithms, instead of a lived experience. In addition, the fictional memory is becoming a solid product. In the novel *The Candy House*, Al (2021) presents the imaginary social network Mandala as an allegory of the neoliberal effort to commodify personal memory in the form of data. According to Ozbilen (2024), memory in contemporary fiction is increasingly no longer a symbol of retrieval, but a digitized performance, and the very architecture of platforms determines how it is perceived. In her comparison of The Candy House and The Every, she observes that memory is produced by writers through the development of metadata and algorithm retrieval in order to blur the line between remembering and reproducing.

This discussion is in line with the research by Power (2023) that describes how Egan critiques the metadata culture through metafiction and reveals the nexus of memory, identity, and the economy. These works have been quite instructive, but very little has been accomplished on the reality of the narrative form i.e. the postmodern playing with time i.e. fragmenting the form and distorting time, which is in the same way not stable, as it describes.

2.2 Fragmented Digital Identity

Another general theme explored by Egan is digital identity. Focusing on the theories of surveillance, Wang and Tucker (2016) create a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between digital identity and surveillance systems and suggest that individuals live in a variety of identities, conditioned by the algorithmic monitoring technologies. In another research, Wang and Tucker (2021) point out that digital identity is no longer an object of performance, but can now be predicted, classified, and replicated by algorithms. When taking a closer look at such characters as Bix or Miranda, their understanding of algorithmic subjectivity may come in handy since their identities are always in the process of being shaped in reaction to the surveillance feedback loops. They demonstrate how the inner person and the datafied personas enforced by other people may not match each other on the one hand and on the other hand. In more recent works, research on biometric technologies, e.g. that conducted by Albalawi (2023) and Farhan (2025), has

demonstrated the way in which facial recognition software and data modelled profiling create new versions of identity which are often reductive. Still, the article by Zuboff (2023) further develops the mentioned theory of surveillance capitalism, mentioning that digital platforms accumulate behavioural excess, creating a predictive source of data in the form of personal identity. In this regard, identity is a performative and algorithmic one, which is non-linked to inner coherence or narrative continuity. Even though these are thought-provoking perceptions, most of the literature examines identity as a sociological aspect as opposed to a literary one. D'Ambrosio (2019) admits, though, the extent to which Egan managed to use polyphonic narration to narrate about the loss of identity. Similarly, Granic and Sholten (2020) remark that *The Candy House* features a clash between authentic and performance selves, therefore suggesting that curated digital selves are among the central concerns of the novel.

2.3 Surveillance, Technology, and Narrative

Surveillance has long been a staple of literary and cultural analysis, especially since Foucault's (1977) concept of panopticism revolutionized the understanding of Power as embedded within systems of observation. Surveillance in the modern world of literature is no longer confined to institutional settings; instead, it occurs in the everyday life of the individual, and they may not even be aware that it is happening. In her argument, Ellis (2020) postulates that the concept of narrative has emerged as a participatory form of power in the contemporary period since the increased integration of surveillance into narratives is becoming increasingly prominent in the modern world. *The Candy House* exhibits this fact through the fragmented plot, which is a result of the overload of information. Abbar (2023) states that *The Candy House* creates such a culture of consensual surveillance where the users willingly relinquish their privacy in accordance with the law, and opens the possibility of online access and connectivity. Meran (2024) expands on this by concentrating on the psychological price of displaying the self all the time, claiming that Egan brings about a great feeling of emotional and existential exhaustion of being always in the limelight. Moreover, as Power (2023) states, the metafictional method employed in Egan helps define surveillance culture as the target of criticism, with its non-linear time structure and unconventional number of characters taking on the role of an illustrator, concerning the disordered minds of people who are feebly monitored. The use of these

narrative techniques suggests postmodern conventions, and in doing so, the novel not only raises the question of the existence of surveillance as an element in everyday life but also as a fundamental aspect of its physical makeup and narrative representation.

2.4 Jennifer Egan in Critical Discourse

The work by Jennifer Egan has received acclaim due to its formal experimentation and ambition in theme. Nonetheless, a great deal of academic discussion has been made about her previous novel A Visit from the Goon Squad. Even though that text is known to have pioneered an alternative use of non-linear narrative and its anticipatory attitude to social media and digital memory, it has not been studied extensively. In The New Yorker (2022) interview, Egan highlighted how crucial she is concerning the philosophical aspects of the technology of sharing memories and the loss of privacy. D'Ambrosio (2019) discusses the nature of structural complexity in the novel, polyphony as a metaphor of the use of literature in relation to surveillance and self-division. Granic and Sholten (2020) find the concept of the blurred truth and performance between digital culture, which runs throughout the rest of Egan's works. Even though journalistic sources have identified Egan as innovative, there is a lack of scholarly attention to her. A more recent article by Pierce (2024) places *The Candy House* in a posthumanist path by suggesting that its narrative form does the work of losing narrative authority in predictive authorship. Nevertheless, despite such awareness, gaps of work exist, the works that are interdisciplinary in nature, as they combine the analysis of postmodern texts, the work of surveillance studies and the theory of digital identity. Such disjuncture is particularly evident because there is no close reading directed to the manner in which Egan makes her form serve her themes.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This section gives an overview of the theoretical basis that is used to analyze *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan. This section will place the novel in the major contemporary theories, such as the Postmodern Literary Theory, the Surveillance Theory, and the Digital Identity and Memory. It shows how the Egan story interacts, contests and restructures some of the critical paradigms. This study illustrates how the text addresses broader cultural concerns about technology, privacy, and identity in the digital era through a multidisciplinary framework. All theoretical views are discussed one by one to make the theoretical meaning of the thematic and structural complexity of the novel.

2.5.1 Postmodern Literary Theory

Postmodernism is a critical approach that can be used to analyse the aesthetic and thematic elements of *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan. Postmodernism, which developed in the second half of the twentieth century, attacks the premises of linear narratives, constant identities, and objective truths. According to Fredric Jameson, postmodern literature is the cultural logic of late capitalism that is characterized by fragmentation, pastiche, and the loss of continuity with the past (Ajvazi, 2021). Read (2025) enhances the discourse with his theory of simulacra and hyperreality, positing that representations detach from their real referents and evolve into simulations of reality.

This is expressed in the story of Egan by the non-linear narrative, change in the narrative point of view, and the metafictional effects. These are non-sequential linearities of narrative, the ability to substitute first-person narrators, and the decentering of narrative, which are characteristics of postmodernism as not only an aesthetic style, but also as a witness to the scepticism of a specific mode of defining memory and identity, in a digital environment of oversaturation. It is through postmodernism that we can therefore conceptualize the style of narrative in Egan as symptomatic of some broader epistemological issue in the digital era.

2.5.2 Surveillance Theory

The development of digital technologies has resulted in the appearance of new types of surveillance as well, which are not based on physical aspects but on psychological, emotional, and even mnemonic aspects. In this respect, the idea of Panopticism elaborated by Michel Foucault (2020) is particularly relevant because it emphasizes the fact that the mechanism of discipline that people tend to apply to themselves in the case of constant control is especially relevant to the situation. Now, considering the age of the digital, surveillance that was once prerogative to prisons or other institutional venues has turned out to be a part of our social existence, systems, and machines, as a smooth continuation of our daily life.

Building on the work by Foucault, Zuboff (2023) provides the concept of Surveillance Capitalism as a form of economic Power that gathers, anticipates, and controls human behaviour, making its personal information available as a commodity. The same

principle is reflected in the fictional technology Mandala by Egan; individuals post their memories freely, and in exchange, their memories are accessed by other people, thereby basically trading intimacy and self-control in order to be accepted and be relevant.

The Candy House surveillance is ambient, voluntary, but omnipresent and invasive to the psyche. The concept of transparent selves is similar to the theory of social sorting developed by David Lyon, according to which data is incorporated to categorize, judge, and eventually regulate people. Surveillance, in turn, is not an exogenous phenomenon in the world of Egan, but a state that alters the consciousness, identity and relations of humans.

2.5.3 Digital Identity and Memory

A significant reorganization of identity accompanies the digitization of memory. Memory is no longer an internal and individualistic store, but has become external, accessible through search and sharing. The concept introduced by Manuel Castells (2020) is beneficial in this context, which revolves around the Network Society, where social and personal identities are developed not in stagnant structures but within information networks. Katherine Hicks (2022) also writes about the consequences of posthumanism, arguing that there is a growing sense that body and cognition are becoming increasingly technologically mediated, resulting in a self that becomes fluid and fragmented.

In *The Candy House*, identity turned out to be an interactive interface that was constantly revised, revealed, and algorithmically categorized. The social memory site dissolves the distinction between the internal mind and the external documentation, breaking down the conventional perception of human personality. Additionally, the notion that Leuenberger (2022) treats memory as a narrative act, meaning that processes of recollection constitute the self, is becoming problematized because memory has ceased to be the exclusive property of the individual and has become a shared experience, allowing for the telling of stories in one's own way.

The loss of personal memory into a shared and centralized digital repository and the underappreciation of narrative authority compel the characters to contend with the problem of authenticity, agency and selfhood as never before. Egan, in his depiction of a digitized memory, is therefore serious in asking questions regarding the problem of ownership of memory in a networked society.

2.5.4 Application of the Theoretical Framework

This paper explores the overlap between postmodern theory, surveillance studies, and the discourse of digital identity to explore how *The Candy House* is a critique of the digital culture in the present. It is possible to read the fragmented structure of the novel and the heterophonic voice in the context of the delineated identities that postmodernism facilitates. The possibility of the fictional technology presented by Egan to serve as the means of control and normalization can be illuminated by the surveillance theory to a certain degree. In the meantime, the sociotechnical situation of the theories of digital memory and identity encloses the inner and outer behaviour of the characters.

The triangulated analysis looks at the novel as an imitation and commentary on the realities experienced in a digitized, surveillance society by means of structure (form) and content (themes) and more. Narrative decisions (e.g., broken chronology, polyphonic narrative) and thematic displays (e.g., consent, exposure, commodification of memory) are examined specifically, but also the development of the characters. All that is geared towards describing the psychological consequences of being monitored and recorded in a digital panopticon. Not only can such a framework provide the textual analysis with a significant theoretical basis, but it also permits perceiving the postmodern critique by Egan in a multidimensional way. These notions are brought to bear in the following chapters based on the close readings of the chosen episodes, which permit, on the one hand, proving the convergence of ideas on memory, identity, and surveillance and, on the other hand, tracking the development of ethical and existential issues in a new digital state.

2.6 Identified Gaps

Literature has a tendency of addressing memory, identity, or surveillance separately and does not merge them into a single critical perspective. Additionally, the existing literature on digital culture and selfhood does not include postmodern narrative strategies, and they can be applied to investigate the causal connection between digital culture and the storytelling process. A triangulated literary analysis that places *The Candy House* at a central text in discerning the way narrative form is suggestive and critical of digital surveillance and identity fragmentation is evidently needed. Overall, this literature review has established that there is a gap in the incorporation of the themes of digital memory,

identity, and surveillance using narratives despite a considerable body of discourse regarding the topics. The research that fills this gap is an attempt to analyse The Candy House as a postmodern work using a fusion of theory and literary style to evaluate the psychological and narrative consequences of living in a surveilled, digitised world.

III. METHODOLOGY

This part describes the methodology of the study that is used in this study and involves analysing the use of narrative techniques used by Jennifer Egan in *The Candy House* in order to identify how memory, identity, and surveillance are interconnected. The section explains the research design, theoretical framework, data sources, and mode of analysis, which outlines the approach of interpretation of the text in a clear way. The thematic content and the convoluted form of the novel, combined with the postmodernist aspects, explain the selection of a qualitative approach to the literature.

3.1 Research Design

The research design that is used in this study is qualitative, based on the interpretive textual analysis. This kind of approach is longstanding in the literary studies field, and success has been made in identifying the way to place meanings into narrative design, lingo, and symbolism (Silverman, 2021). Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for analyzing phenomena that are discursively and symbolically constructed, such as identity formation, memory representation, and surveillance trends (Flick 2018). Considering that qualitative design is suitable, as The Candy House belongs to the tradition of postmodern fiction with its non-linear chronology, metafictional composition, and variety of voices, one can engage with the formal aspects of the text quite intimately. The point is not to generalize the results, but to shed light on how Egan's stylistic experimentation critiques the present-day state of digital life. This concurs with the opinion held by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), who believe that qualitative inquiry aims to provide thick descriptions and interpretive richness, as opposed to statistical regularities.

3.2 Data Collection

The data used in this study originates from the novel *The Candy House* (Egan, 2022). This decision is explained by the abundance of themes, the new approaches to plot development, and its topicality in

terms of discussing the problem of digital identity and surveillance nowadays. Key chapters and passages highlighting the subject have been selected with the help of purposeful sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The selected chapters provide data that prove:

3.2.1 The representation of digitized memory.

3.2.2 The fragmentation and reconstruction of identity.

3.2.3 The mechanisms and consequences of surveillance.

Passages featuring the Mandala technology, metadata exchanges, and polyphonic narration are given particular priority. These excerpts form the core of the analytical process.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analytical strategy, which combines thematic analysis and close reading, enables the researcher to follow not only what is written in the novel but also how it is structured. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a versatile and systematic technique for identifying patterns within qualitative data. In this study, they are used to identify recurring themes, including:

A- Surveillance capitalism; **B-** Algorithmic identity; **C-** Memory commodification.

This analytical method is backed up by the close reading because focus is made on language, tone, voice, and structural decisions. The theorization of such happens with the list of literary devices, which include fragmentation, polyphony, metafiction and non-linearity. To illustrate this, Foucault's panopticism can be used to analyze the internal surveillance that shapes a character's behaviour. In contrast, the theory of surveillance capitalism, developed by Zuboff (2023), supports the extraction of data through Mandala mechanisms. Otherwise, the analysis will rely on the works by Pierce (2024) on posthumanism and the studies by Wang & Tucker (2021) on algorithmic subjectivity to understand the construction of identity in digitally saturated spaces. The method enables the interpretation of not only the narrated content but also the manner of narration, focusing on the relationships between form and content. Major themes, including data storage, algorithmic behaviour, and performative identity, are situated within a broader theoretical context.

This study is also narrowly applied to *The Candy House* only, and thus, this may not be generalizable to a larger

literary or sociocultural setting. The subjective and text-specific nature of the study also implies that the findings will not be empirically generalized. Nevertheless, these constraints allow exploring the selected reading more profoundly and contributing more significantly to the literary research on postmodern narrative and digital culture.

Being a literary study, the work will not need human subjects, and thus it will not need institutional review boards to approve the study ethically. However, academic ethics is upheld by effective referencing and citing of sources. Intellectual property care. Theoretical and critical views were represented to give an objective picture.

IV. ANALYSIS

This part is an extended literary discussion of *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan in the prism of the postmodern narrative theory, surveillance studies, and the digital identity theory. It sets out to show how the form and thematic interests of the experiment come together by Egan to criticize the commodification of memory, the fragmentation of identity and the normalization of surveillance in the digital age. These findings are then placed in the perspective of the existing scholarship in order to bring out the distinctive value of the current research.

4.1 Memory as Digital Archive and Epistemological Instability

Egan's novel reconfigures memory as an external, collective commodity rather than an intimate, individual phenomenon. The Mandala platform in the fictional world symbolizes this change, offering its users the opportunity to enter a continuously growing digital database of memories. *"He stared into the Mandala, seeing not his own past but a mosaic of fragments shaped by everyone else's perceptions."* (Egan, 2022, p. 214)

This passage serves as an example of how memories, when uploaded, are reconstituted by a process of collective mediation, which can be referred to as hyperreality, as suggested by Baudrillard (1983), where the real experience becomes lost in an infinite simulation. This epistemological crisis is further increased by the non-linear nature of the narrative as the chapters are shifting across time and perspectives, and is in line with the uncertainty of grand narratives and the fixed truth that is defined by Lyotard (1979).

Another illustrative passage notes: *"Memory, once sacred and secret, now sat catalogued like inventory, ready for retrieval or deletion"* (*Egan*, 2022, p. 185).

Recent critiques bolster this perspective. Ozbilen (2024) posits that metadata-based fiction embodies "datafied subjectivity," in which memories operate as algorithmic codes rather than serving as narrative continuity. Pierce (2024) posits that Egan's narrative challenges the boundaries of posthuman recollection, shifting the ownership of memory from the individual to the collective. Estrada (2024) presents Mandala as a metaphor for neoliberal data capitalism, where emotional recollection is extracted, shared, and monetised.

Furthermore, the ethical dimension of shared memories becomes evident through characters like Alfred Noll, whose use of a Mandala to reconstruct his past illustrates the paradox of reclaiming agency while surrendering privacy. This supports Estrada's (2024) reading of memory as data capital, a commodity in the neoliberal attention economy.

4.2 The Networked, Fragmented Self

In Egan's digital landscape, identity is not singular or stable, but dispersed across online platforms, social networks, and archival traces. And this has become the paradoxical world that the charismatic founder of Mandala, Bix Bouton, strives to explore. As a preacher of radical transparency, he is a highly secretive person and has several and occasionally inconsistent ways of being. *"Each version of him, the visionary CEO, the nostalgic father, the secretive dreamer lived in parallel, coded and archived for others to retrieve."* (Egan, 2022, p. 97)

This narrative multiplicity mirrors Wang and Tucker's (2016) framework of distributed identity, in which the self is not discovered but is endlessly performed and predicted through digital interactions. The formal enactment of this destabilization of the self is achieved through Egan's polyphonic narration. It shifts in point of view, resulting in a fractured reading experience. This is similar to the thesis of behavioral surplus developed by Zuboff (2023): the information based on identity performance is collected to predict and modify the behavior, and the self turns into the object of algorithmic control.

This theory is played out in the polyphonic form of Egan, which destabilizes any individual or authoritative self and forms a mosaic of voices and broken time lines.

This loss of sound identity is pointed out in a subsequent chapter:

"He no longer knew which version of himself he believed in, the one the world saw, or the one that remained silent" (*Egan*, 2022, p. 241).

Pierce (2024) describes the development of posthuman identity as a product of interface and code, rather than embodied experience. Its rejection of the provision of linear, resolved character arcs in the story reflects the greater cultural truth of performative, broken selfhood in the digital ecosystem.

4.3 Surveillance and the Voluntary Panopticon

The surveillance in The Candy House does not appear as coercive but rather consensual. Mandala depicts soft surveillance (Ellis, 2020), and people voluntarily renounce privacy to receive connection and social capital. The example of Chris Salazar illustrates this conflict: he keeps his actions down to align with the desires of his hypothetical audience.

"He felt comfort in being seen — as if invisibility were a greater fear than exposure." (Egan, 2022, p. 180)

This self-gawking gaze reiterates Foucault's (1977) idea of the panopticon, updated to the digital age, in which the subject takes the positions of the viewer and the viewed. This effect is reflected by the fragmented, multi-voiced structure of Egan, each of the characters being an observer as well as a performer in a networked panopticon. The novel should show that exposure, which people do voluntarily, can be detrimental to human beings. Unlike future tales of being scrutinized everywhere, Egan demonstrates how ubiquitous observation can cause one to feel lonely, nervous and feel that his or her genuine self is being stolen. This section adds to the interpretation of *The Candy House* (2023) by Abbar as an area of consensual surveillance via the emotional dimension of it. Another relevant moment occurs when a character reflects:

"They watched each other so intently that privacy became performance, and performance became truth" (*Egan*, 2022, p. 226).

McStay (2020) introduces the term biometric intimacy, which means that surveillance is not only the detection of actions but also the creation of inner wants and feelings. This disorientation is replicated in the fragmented perspective adopted by Egan, in the recursive techniques of storytelling applied, and in the opacity of narrative, to the extent that readers are encouraged to encounter this fragmentation in the characters.

4.4 Metafiction as Formal Critique

Metafictional schemes that Egan employs indicate that the text can be an archive in its own right, a story within the story, when Mandala. Attributing attention to its splintering and diversity, the novel accomplishes the same epistemological instability that it accuses.

"Stories about stories, threads about threads — it never ends." (Egan, 2022, p. 233)

This self-awareness is similar to postmodern self-consciousness (Hutcheon, 1984) and the postmodern critique of grand narratives by Lyotard. The viewer is engaged in the act of active reconstruction of meaning based on the fragmented and incomplete elements of the narrative, which is the way digital individuals construct identity and memory out of the disseminated data streams. This reflexivity is explicitly acknowledged later: *"Even our attempts at coherence are mosaics, edited and redacted in real time for imagined audiences"* (*Egan*, 2022, p. 246).

The reader turns into an accomplice of the instability of the story, and he/she has to find his/her way in a labyrinth of opinions which can never be closed or regulated. In this meaning, therefore, the novel is an interpretive machine, such as Mandala and duplicates the systems it condemns.

In a short but detailed analysis, this section gives a thorough discussion on The Candy House, using the postmodern theory and the modern critical discourse. The discussion, based on thematic readings of memory, identity and surveillance, discloses how Egan builds up a critique of digital culture not only in terms of content, but also form. This contribution to the study by the longstanding debate has also helped in placing this study within the context of prior research and establishing a clear research gap.

4.5 Discussion

This study aimed to question the novel *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan, utilizing the postmodern triangulation of memory, identity, and surveillance. By doing so, it relates to and critically differs from past scholarship in at least three meaningful ways: through the combination of several themes that are rarely treated together elsewhere, through emphasizing the narrative form as vulnerable to ideological intervention, and through pointing out the price of its traces in modern fiction of living algorithmic peoples.

Studies by Abbar (2023), Merrill (2024), and Kelly (2021) have thus provided empirical insight into how memory in fiction is increasingly reframed as

fragmented and digitally mediated. The translations of *The Candy House* by Abbar, in the sense of postmodern hyperreality, emphasize the replenishment of lived memory through imitation. Likewise, Merrill (2024) discusses state-induced memory erasure as a metaphor in dystopian fiction, and Kelly (2021) emphasizes artificial intelligence as an epistemology of memory threatened by AI in the works of both Egan and Ishiguro. These studies highlight how the barrier between memory as an embodied experience has been broken to become digital. Nonetheless, none of them directly analyzes the role of narrative fragmentation as the locus of the articulation of memory commodification itself. This study fills that gap by illustrating how Egan's non-linear narrative mimics the discontinuity and instability of datafied memory, primarily through the Mandala platform.

Building on this, Ozbilen (2024) and Power (2023) outline the development of metadata fiction, where memory is processed with the input of an algorithm. The effects of metadata on alienation, depersonalization, and emotional dislocation are mentioned only briefly, but power confirms that metafiction is an answer to metadata culture. This work builds on the debate regarding ethical and existential terrain of memory capitalism with the assistance of close readings of such characters as Alfred Noll and Bix Bouton. In terms of identity, Wang and Tucker (2016, 2021) develop an adequate theoretical framework, whereby the authors rely on the notion of algorithmic subjectivity. According to them, the digital age produces an identity not created, but dictated by the loop of feedback and predictive technologies.

Although their sociological analysis is very intriguing, the literary aspect has not been thoroughly explored. This study contributes to their theory by illustrating how Egan's polyphonic narration, which involves a change of voice and interrupted continuity, reflects the disorientation of the subjectivity in digitalization. Similarly, D'Ambrosio (2019) and Malinen (2022) offer their comments on the disintegration of the self in Egan's prose, particularly the contradiction between the genuine and the performative aspects of the self. However, both studies have failed to explain the recursive element of a narrative structure as a form of criticism strategy appropriately. This study fills that gap by demonstrating that the very narrative form constitutes a performance that mirrors a multi-algorithm identity.

It is possible to divide theoretical counterparts around the topic of surveillance capitalism, introduced by Zuboff (2023), which lays a theoretical basis for understanding identity as a behavioral surplus. While her writing is grounded in economic and sociotechnical systems, this study situates her within the realm of literary aesthetics. It demonstrates how Egan dramatizes the condition of behavioral capture through the archiving, codification, and manipulation of her characters' lives. The subject is made programmable, and this study follows this development through textual criticism and structural analysis. Surveillance is framed by foundational contributions from Foucault (1977) and Ellis (2020), highlighting visibility and observation as essential mechanisms of power. A similar claim can be found in Ellis, who argues that narrative has been transformed into a participatory model of forms of surveillance; this study also treats polyphonic storytelling as a panopticonic mechanism. However, when Abbar (2023) coins the notion of consensual surveillance, the work adds to the problem and it becomes evident that Egan aestheticizes the emotional weight of continuous surveillance. The incarnation and inclusion of surveillance in the performance, worry, and dissociation are brought to the front line wherein such characters as Chris Salazar introduce psychological deviations to a former theoretical construction.

Additional note to are made by Meeran (2024), whose research work on the needs to be seen and observed at all times is in line with the interpretation in the present study that the process of surveillance influences the inner life, and not just the outer behavior. The concept of biometric intimacy developed by McStay (2020) does not refute the research statement either. Such structures guide the approach of this study to the interpretation of the narrative style of Egan, which is recursive, fragmented, and polyvocal, which all artificially recreate the destabilizing the circumstances of life under the conditions of the digital examination. Rather briefly addressing the issue of metafiction (Power, 2023; Pierce, 2024), the given work focuses more on it and discusses The Candy House as an archive that can not only represent the system it criticizes, but also be a narrative. The fact that Chen incorporated Egan into a posthumanist tradition is to his credit particularly when we mention the aspect of predictive authorship. Nevertheless, this paper has gone a step further to correlate narrative fragmentation to the loss of narrative power since this text was founded on how Egan explored forms that unbalance and disrupt conventional storytelling in the era of algorithms.

This study fills a recognizable gap in the literature by combining a single interpretative framework that incorporates postmodern narrative theory, algorithmic subjectivity, and surveillance studies. As can be seen in the literature review, the features of memory, identity, or monitoring tend to be isolated in the prior studies. This study, however, demonstrates that it is their convergence within narrative form that generates a new terrain of literary inquiry, one that speaks to both aesthetic innovation and sociopolitical critique.

In conclusion, this study offers a triangulated literary analysis that highlights form as a space of ideological conflict. Egan's narrative not only illustrates but also embodies digital fragmentation, providing a nuanced critique of the algorithmic condition. By doing so, the study meaningfully advances current conversations in digital humanities, literary theory, and surveillance studies, providing a compelling model for future interdisciplinary literary analysis.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the writings of Joseph Brodsky and Jennifer Egan, namely, *The Candy House*, the major concepts of memory, identity, and surveillance are examined in this paper as they come to intersect in the postmodern narrative theory and the discourse of digital life in the modern. It was concluded that the fragmented construction of the novel, the polyphonic narration, and the metafiction devices presented by Egan serve a greater purpose than mere stylistic experiments; instead, they provide a literary representation of the cracks, fears, and epistemological crises of the digital age.

The novel is a multi-layered story that expresses the challenge of the de-institutionalization of individual agency in a hyperconnected world. The technologies, such as Mandala, transform memory into a commodity and a surveillance mechanism which redefines the way people interact with their past. This dynamic changes the image of memory as well as its narrative interpretation, which repeats the theory of simulacra introduced by Baudrillard, when simulations replace the experience itself. Egan presents his creation of the digital memory in a heartrending commentary on commercializing human memory.

Equally, the novel reflects the disintegration of a solid sense of self and identity, in which identity is no longer intelligible as a story but as a cluster of roles, performances, and bits of data. The characters like Bix and Miranda represent the mutable and usually conflicting identities mediated by technology. Their mental fragmentation is indicative of wider cultural fears regarding authenticity and agency within the realms of the algorithms. The themes find an echo in poststructuralist ideas on the decentered subject, which have it that identity in the digital age is less narrated and more practiced.

In the novel, surveillance is manifested not only as a form of control but also as a condition of a voluntary nature, a weighty offer of interrelationship at the cost of privacy. The fact that characters were ready to work on such platforms as Mandala shows how surveillance capitalism is based on consent, not coercion. The picture is aligned with the criticism of digital platforms by Zuboff, and it adds to it the literary imagination, the emotional and existential cost of being subjected to constant examination.

Lastly, the work by Egan is a postmodern commentary on the digital age in a structural form, and not merely its tensions. Stylistic experimentation of the novel, the non-linear time frames, multiple narrators, and the metatextual commentary suggest to the reader that they must also have the same disorientation and multiplicity as that stereotyped in the text. This research paper concludes *The Candy House* is a powerful and timely work of intervention in modern-day literature, which is a model of writing that is able to rethink memory, identity, and surveillance in the 21 st century.

To modern literature scholars, this work suggests continuing the investigation of the literary work in which the digital condition is confronted, not only concerning the subjects it portrays but also the structure of the narration. Further comparative analysis of The Candy House and other works, such as Klara and the Sun, Super Sad True Love Story, or The Every may shed light on the new literature in reaction to digital capitalism.

Also, this research paper proposes the use of interdisciplinary models, especially those of media studies, data ethics, and platform capitalism, to enhance the study of literature. Also, future studies can take into account the reader reception studies, which undertake the discussion of the interaction of the digital-native audiences with the narrative which reflects their algorithmic realities. To teachers, the incorporation of such texts into the curriculum can assist learners to critically evaluate their digital spaces and selves. In the case of digital theorists, this study focuses on literature as an important source of

information on the analysis of socio-technological paradigms.

5.1 Contributions

This study makes contributions to the field of literary work as follows:

5.1.1 It provides a formalist critique of *The Candy House* that incorporates postmodern narrative theory and the issues of modern digitality.

5.1.2 It is a gap between literary and theoretical discourse, as it views the novel as a product and a commentary on the subject of digital subjectivity.

5.1.3 It identifies and fills a gap in the current literature by examining how memory, identity, and surveillance co-function narratively and thematically.

5.1.4 It proposes a methodologically interdisciplinary model that could inform future research on digital fiction.

In general, the work claims that fiction such as the one produced by Egan is not only reflective of digital culture, but it also constructs our perception of it. Within literature, the boundary of data, self-determination and human-human relationship is experimented and redefined.

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