The Repercussion of Corporate Espionage in Rob Hart's *The Warehouse*

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Abstract:

In the modern world, technology has firmly established itself as a platform across all professions. Everyone has benefited from digitalization. The systemized works have been enhanced with the help of digitalization. Imperceptibly, people's lifestyle is completely dependent upon technologies' accountability. The government and the corporate promote efficiency in technology and keep on enhancing their facilities for people's convenience. The corporate culture fastens goods delivery in an advanced method by using a lot of innovative technologies. It ensures the nation's economy in a wider way. Though technology is recognized for its advancement, it causes many problems. Rob Hart's *The Ware House* illustrates the corporate panopticon. The term 'panopticon' was introduced by English philosopher and social theorist, Jeremy Bentham in 1791. Micheal Foucault developed this concept in his work called *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. The workers' lifestyle has been controlled and monitored by the cloud band. Hence, the author showcases the element of hierarchical observation in this novel.

Keywords: Corporate Panopticon, Totalitarian surveillance, Economic empowerment, late capitalism and Tyrannical environment.

Rob Hart is a contemporary American writer and novelist. He is known for crime novels and their series. He has written *Ash McKenna novels* which contain five book crime thriller series. Hart and James Patterson collaborated with the mystery crime novel *Scott Free* in 2017. His other works are *The Store (2019), Take-Out: And Other Tales of Culinary Crime (2019), Potter's Field (2018), The Woman from Prague (2017)* and *The Warehouse (2019).* His novel *The Warehouse is* sold in more than twenty languages all over the world. This novel has technological elements which illustrate the occurrence of espionage in the form of the corporate panopticon. According to Bledstein, "Espionage is legal under international law, but generally illegal under the laws of the country in which the spying is occurring. To restate the obvious, human intelligence operations require spies on the ground that can be caught, jailed, traded or executed" (106).

The Warehouse (2019) is a corporate dystopian novel which discusses a corporate company called Mother Cloud. Cloud is a company where all the goods would be available to order for. It is known for delivering goods by drone with the help of employees who have been recognised with the cloud band in their hands. Through cloud bands, the workers' activities would be traced. In *The Warehouse,* "Cloud tracks its employees with a Cloud Band, which monitors location, biometrics, directs employees where they need to go in the facility, serves as ID and wallet, and as an entry point to various places within the Mother Cloud". For employers they provide three dormitories at Mother Cloud itself; they are "Oak, Sequoia and maple" (Hart 34). The cloud band is charged by the charging mat. There are a few trams that help the employees to move from their workplace to their residential quarters. The assistants in this company often exhort the employees all the time. This novel encompasses the future risks because of the technological growth in totalitarian surveillance. "In this dystopian America, where resources are scarce and climate change has been pitiless, the only company that is thriving is Cloud" (Larman).

There are lots of boundaries that are constrained by the founder of the Cloud. In terms of the stipulation, the workers have to regulate themselves for other

entertainment. However technology helps many people to ease their economical transactions and its economic empowerment in a wider way, it roots many cybercrimes. Hackers and criminals use the technology for their own profit. Ward and Lucy Williams state, "One of the greatest opportunities offered by the digital is this ability to reconstitute the archive and thus track convicts as they moved through the judicial system and beyond" (894).

In Cloud, the employer has set many rules and regulations for the employers. Every week, the employees have to maintain their five-star rating which would increase their payment to a better level. Gibson points out, "If you're a four-star worker, you're in good shape. At three stats, maybe you could pick up the pace. Two, and it's time to buckle down and show what you're worth. That's why one star is an automatic dismissal" (Hart 82). The workers are recommended to charge their cloud band every day at night. Moreover, all transactions would transfer through their cloud band. Their works are passively monitored through that device. According to Bentham, "Panopticon does not require the presence of an observer to have its effect. The possibility of being watched can result in self-surveillance and self-censorship" (Lewis139,140). Gibson also has the same ideology in his mind. He wants the employees to be conscious of GPS tracking over their hands. Bentham describes the 'panopticon' which always brands the target people to be aware of power-based dominion. In order to get financial stability, the people in the city are worked in this sector. The workers are asked to work there for more than twelve hours. Further, overtime is forced to accept by the employees for increasing their employee rating, but it seems like it is an option for them. Miguel explains to Paxton, "It's strictly volunteer. But it keeps you in good standing. Counts toward your employee rating. It's an option you want to take. Builds you a buffer on your rating. The more you refuse, it goes the other way" (Hart, 114).

The novel has three main characters; they are Gibson Wells, Paxton and Zinnia. Gibson Wells is the main protagonist in the novel. The author uses first-person narration for Gibson's speech. He is the founder of Mother Cloud. He has thirty million employees in the warehouse. Gibson utters, "I say Cloud has been the kind of accomplishment I can be proud of. It's the kind of accomplishment most men don't get to make" (Hart 04). His wife's name is Molly and they have a daughter named Claire. He has a big corporate

company. He suffers from pancreatic cancer. He is in the last phase of this type of cancer.

Gibson's speech addresses directly the readers in the novel which would help the readers to know better about his intention behind the evil plot. He has let his employees do the work manually rather than bringing up the robots for the machinery works. He chose not to purchase robots in order to save money. Gibson brainwashes people to pursue jobs for their future well-being. He introduces drone technology in his company which would deliver goods to customers. For his company's growth, he initiated many advanced technologies. His daughter Claire would replace his position as president and CEO of cloud after his death. Ray Carson, one of the partners of the cloud, is expected to be the next vice president and chief operating officer of the Cloud. He exhibits strong views about the advancement of technology. He states,

> At a pretty young age I knew the future was in drone technology. The air and the roads had been all gummed up by these giant trucks, taking up space, spitting out poison. If we could solve the truck problem, we could solve a lot of other problems. Traffic, pollution, crash fatalities. (Hart 53)

Paxton is another protagonist who was a former prison guard and former CEO of Perfect Egg. But Cloud's continuous insistence on discounts on things caused an extreme loss. At present, he enters the Mother Cloud as a security guard. He is a person who dedicates himself to any work he is assigned for. He initially does not understand Cloud's strategies but eventually becomes aware of the corporate setting and its paradigmatic manoeuvres, "Paxton never thought he'd be working for Cloud, the giant tech company that's eaten much of the American economy" (Allen). He encounters Zinnia for the first time in this warehouse. He is fascinated by her appearance. He likes to spend his time with Zinnia most of the time. Zinnia often surprises Paxton who loves his new job in spite of his old company being ruined by Cloud:

> Zinnia was surprised at the passion with which Paxton was defending Cloud. The company that ruined him. He had always seemed prickly about it. Maybe he had been converted. Become a true believer. Maybe in the face of violence or death he

needed to justify it to himself, because the truth was too hard to accept. Zinnia sat back, watched it unfold, waiting for a free moment. (Hart 251)

Zinnia is another protagonist of the other two. She is a corporate spy who disguises herself as an employee in Mother Cloud. She is allotted as the employee to infiltrate Cloud under another corporate sector. Schrefer observes, "Zinnia's hardly a naive cog in this machine, however: turns out she's actually a corporate spy hoping to hack into Cloud's highly guarded data networks". More than that, she comes here to know about the dark secrets of this company. She introduces herself to Paxton as she is a former teacher who worked in the school. Many times, she hears about a few employees who mysteriously died in this company. The author defines her as, "The girl was in her mid-thirties, dyed pink hair, her face an explosion of freckles. She was very pretty" (Hart 146). The author uses third-person narration whenever he defines Zinnia and Paxton. Zinnia always gets irritated about GPS tracing cloud bands. "She wasn't so worried about being seen. Like Gibson said in the video, there weren't a lot of cameras around. The problem was the damn GPS tethered to her wrist" (Hart 77). She wonders about the number of managers who often visited each and every floor. Referring to Foucault, Michel explains the power matrix, "Foucault emphasizes the materiality of power. For him power operates on the material level of existence, on the body itself (see for example his thoughts on Panopticism in " Discipline and Punish"), but this power functions through discourse". Gibson's primary goal is to enhance his business worldwide:

> Our mission at Cloud is to promote an enriching and supportive atmosphere that allows everyone to thrive and succeed. We provide a comprehensive approach to inclusivity, access, and equality, through collaborative, deliberate efforts within our community. The Rainbow Coalition empowers employees to take control of their own destinies. (Hart 133)

There are other minor characters in this novel. They are Miguel, Sheriff Dobbs, Dakota, Rick, Ember and so on. Miguel is a co-worker of Zinnia. He instructs certain things to Zinnia in the first few days of Cloud. He is a young Latino man with curly hair. He helps her to feel free about the surroundings of Mother Cloud. The workers are given two fifteen-minute breaks for using the toilet and half an hour for lunch. Miguel has

been here for five years, "it looks like workers get more control over their own work and the organization. In fact, the means of control become less visible, and power is more precisely distributed. Surveillance substitutes hierarchy and bureaucracy" (Sidorkin18). In Cloud, they maintain a kind of capitalistic notion towards their employees:

> By the 1970s and early 1980s, surveillance was propelled and enhanced by what could be understood as an electronic Panopticon, with miniature microphones, wiretaps, hidden tracking devices, and discreet video cameras. In Bentham's Panopticon, inmates would know that they were being watched, but with the modern forms of surveillance, the subjects are not even aware they are being observed. (Arnett 402)

Ember is one of the business-women who once owned a job in the trade market. But the market asked her to choose Cloud. She let Cloud take all the benefits given by them. Later, Cloud only cared for the customers, not those sorts of markets. As a result, they went bankrupt. Because of this event, she hates Cloud. Slowly, Ember comes to know about the Cloud's prime ideologies. She is one of the rebels who made Zinnia know much about Cloud's implication of capitalistic exploitation of innocent workers. She feels terrible about Cloud when she knows about Gibson's plans. She questions,

> Do you know what the average American work week used to be? Forty hours. You got Saturday and Sunday off. And you got paid for overtime. Health care was included in your salary. Did you know that? You got paid in money, not a bizarre credit system. You owned a home. You maintained a life separate from work. Now? (Hart 248)

In the Cloud, everything happens in reverse. They exploit the employees for more than twelve hours per day. They have to work even on the weekends. They will not be paid for overtime. They have to stay with their respective residents. Mothercloud has everything. It establishes schools, colleges, hospitals etc. Throughout this novel, the author reflects Gibson's strong intention. His prime motive is that MotherCloud should be a big one for the fast delivery in the trading arena. As Los Angeles review books point out, "Its employees live on campuses called "MotherClouds," which contain dormitories, hospitals, schools, and entertainment centers arranged around a massive warehouse. In a

world struggling to deal with runaway warming and environmental disaster, they're oases of cool futurism".

In Cloud point, the decision is made by the authorities. "Foucault used the panopticon as a way to illustrate the proclivity of disciplinary societies to subjugate their citizens. He describes the prisoner of a panopticon as being at the receiving end of asymmetrical surveillance" (Larman). The constant surveillance through GPS symbolically represents a kind of entrapment. "Bentham, it seems plausible to conclude, is outlining a psychology of internalization, with the inmate, under the pressure of constant observation, gradually and unconsciously absorbing the rules of the prison; eventually, the rules become, permanently, part of his very identity" (Rosen and Aaron Santesso1053). In this concept, they convey the fundamental idea of totalitarian observation. The workers or the prisoners in their respective areas would be controlled by the institution. To some extent, the workers are suffocated by this continuous surveillance. "The thing with dystopian novels is that they are meant mostly as cautionary tales of what could happen if we, as a society, maintain our present course" (Rachel).

In Cloud, there is a famous food which would be cheaply supplied by the organization for the employees. However, the Cloud burger actually contains less protein and less fat. Zinnia finds a protein bar which also contains, "low in fat, low in carbs, high in protein, and doesn't taste like a block of Styrofoam smeared with stale peanut butter" (Hart 190). Gibson proudly says Cloud Burger would be available only in their company. "He'd been wanting to check it out. The Cloud Burger was renowned for being one of the best and most affordable fast-food burgers in the country, but you could only get it in a Mother Cloud facility" (Hart 92).

In Cloud, they would be allocating one day for software update day, "software update is getting sent out on Cloud Band, which means the facility goes into lockdown. Everyone reports to his or her room for the duration of the update" (Hart 192). Zinnia takes this as a prospect to enter Cloud Point. There she tries to access the Cloud Point which has been maintained in a systematic way. Unexpectedly, they trap her. Her new assignment is to kill Gibson, a man who is "the richest, most powerful man on the

planet, on his home turf, when he was surrounded by a metric fuckton of security" (Hart 271). She's a corporate spy," Dobbs said, the words landing like a fist on his ribs. "Gets hired to root into companies, steal their secrets. We've been able to piece together some of who she is, and let me tell you, you ought to count yourself lucky to be alive. That woman in there is a cold-blooded killer." (Hart 318)

Although the concept of Bentham was developed in the name of 'Panopticon', later George Orwell reproduced this term by coining a new term called Big Brother. Sherwin says, "Foundationally, the "Panopticon" in Foucault's theoretical text is intentionally replicated in the process of Big Brother" (03). Bentham's concept indicates the disciplinary things which are to be followed sometimes for regulating decorum. Bentham's prison-Panopticon was not actually all-seeing, and the purpose of the such central inspection was to obviate the need for watching, punishment and the Panopticon itself (Galic et al. 13). The institutions believe that only through observation the workers would be regulated. However, corporations take this as a key for their production. The panopticon is a mechanism whereby discipline becomes internalized and in doing so, the discipline internalized becomes abstracted from individual examples or commands of the overseer (Kumar 347).

Zinnia and Gibson meet each other for the first time in Cloud. When her attempt to kill Gibson fails, she is imprisoned by the guards in a dark room where nobody would accompany her. Zinnia is threatened by the American economy: "Zinnia earns a living infiltrating companies, and Cloud is her latest assignment, but this ruler of the American economy is threatening to swallow her before she can get the job done" (Iglesias). When Gibson talks with Zinnia, he specifies that he followed Bentham's concept 'Panopticon' for his Company's welfare. But he manipulates everyone through GPS navigation. He utters to Zinnia:

> "I don't like CCTV. It really is unpleasant to see a camera every time you look up. It's expensive, too. And I got to thinking, if people are wearing a tracking watch everywhere, then even subconsciously, they know there's not much they can get away with. It's like a built-in security system. Why spend money twice? (Hart 329)

"Communication theorists have long argued that information is central to the control of any system. In fact, some have noted that power itself rests with those possessing access to the greatest amounts of relevant information" (Beltramini 307). The prevalent problems among the workers are caused by power in the form of corporate surveillance. Many people, like Paxton, reside in the tyrannical organization due to their livelihood. Hart strengthens this novel with strong personalities like Gibson, who holds a capitalist doctrine in his thoughts. However, the author cites Zinnia's appearance as a springboard to unveil the facts of Cloud in the novel. Corporate sector expansion diminishes green energy, which results in environmental emissions. Hence, the author alerts the readers about corporate industries and their dogmatic tribulation.

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