

Unveiling the Truth of Industry as a Superstructure in Rob Hart's *The Warehouse*

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Abstract:

In light of digitalisation, technology has become an integral platform for all types of working fields in current society. Innovations in technology have given rise to transformations in systematic processes to some extent. The reliability of technology gradually plays a significant role in people's everyday lives. The private sector and the government try to improve technologies in an advanced way and provide all kinds of services to the entire population. The corporate culture uses a range of modern technologies to speed up the distribution of products, thereby enhancing the economy of the nation and other growths. Even though technology has advanced globally, there are still plenty of crimes increasing day by day with the help of this. Scam alerts, online threats, hacking, violating privacy, and many other cybercrimes create anxiety for people. Moreover, these grim realities highlight the darker side of technological advancement, where increased surveillance, exploitation of personal information contributes to a pervasive sense of vulnerability and mistrust in digital systems. Hart shows how the cloud band has been introduced itself to examine the employees' constant work while working long in the big company called Mother Cloud. This novel, *The Warehouse*, exhibits the unveiling truth of industry as a superstructure.

Keywords: Superstructure, tyrannical conditions, financial autonomy, and totalitarian observation.

The emergence of capitalism began in the early Renaissance period in Europe. There were many contributions from history and developments that brought out the rise of capitalism. Feudalism, urbanisation, and the industrial revolution were the important movements that shaped capitalism even more. Later, in the mid-nineteenth century, Marxism emerged with the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called “The German Ideology” (1846). The other work, “The Communist Manifesto” (1848), expressed the concept of Marxism that outlined the class struggle and the working class people’s role in the mass industry worldwide. In contemporary society, both capitalism and Marxism play eminent roles in influencing and shaping social and cultural challenges, political ideologies, and economic disparity. The Warehouse by Rob Hart depicts modern capitalism through the company Cloud. Moreover, it controls almost every aspect of its employees’ lives with the help of technology. In positions of power, the dominance of the Cloud shows the workers’ extreme exploitation and how the Cloud gives less importance to the individual’s freedom and their well-being. With the use of modern technologies such as GPS tracking, drones, and surveillance, this novel illustrates modern capitalism.

Rob Hart is a contemporary American writer known for his crime novels and series. He authored the Ash McKenna series, a five-book crime thriller collection. In 2017, Hart collaborated with James Patterson on the mystery crime novel *Scott Free*. His other works include *The Woman from Prague* (2017), *Potter’s Field* (2018), *The Store* (2019), *Take-Out: And Other Tales of Culinary Crime* (2019), and *The Warehouse* (2019).

The Warehouse (2019) is an industry and technology-based dystopian novel that deals with a significant proportion of the narrative focused on a corporate industrial entity known as Mother Cloud, controlled by the owner, Gibson Wells. Moreover, it encompasses the technological components that construct a superstructure in this industry and control the employees constantly, reflecting an ideological positioning that critiques the extremes of corporate capitalism and surveillance. Cloud is a company where people can order and purchase any sort of product. It earns a reputation for using drones to deliver things with the help of workers who can be identified by the GPS tracking device called a cloud band. The employees wear it on their wrists. The workers' whereabouts are often tracked by cloud bands.

For employers, they provide accommodations in Mother Cloud itself. The names of the apartments are, "Oak, Sequoia and maple" (Hart 34). Using the charging mat, the cloud band is charged. Even though there is not much camera in this workplace of Cloud, the managers in charge of each floor constantly force the employees to work for hours. However, the workers are given limited time to relax. The founder of Cloud establishes many restrictions on the workers. As per the guidelines, the employees must spend money on other forms of entertainment there. Although in the contemporary era, advanced technology eases people's livelihoods, such as online transactions and other online related business and jobs. But, on the other side, it increases many cybercrimes. Online crimes are increasing day by day with the help of such technologies.

In Mother Cloud, Gibson has established a number of guidelines that have to be strictly followed even by the securities and other experts who monitor the entire industry. Workers are required to maintain a five-star rating every week in order to receive better compensation. Gibson states that if the employees get a four-star rating, it is considered to be good. If an employee gets a three-star rating, he has to work hard to get the better result next time, and two

stars showcase his level and how he has to put efforts to reach the betterment. It is advised that employees charge their cloud band each day. The cloud band helps them transact according to their needs. The apparatus in the form of a cloudband serves as a passive observer, which monitors them while they wear it on their wrist. But this kind of surveillance once used by the pioneer, “Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, or surveillance architecture, in prisons to observe prisoners. Panopticism is the internalisation of the watcher as a means of control” (Rathbone 01). But it never has any intention to observe constantly the workers who work there. But Gibson makes and expects the employees to be aware that their movements are being tracked by GPS. Bentham’s coinage on “panopticon” (Lewis139) also constantly alerts the existence of the dominance of powers. “Builds you a buffer on your rating. The more you refuse, it goes the other way” (Hart114). The above lines indicate indirectly that if the employees refuse to follow the constrained rules there, they should answer for the consequences. The company has emphatically denied any wrongdoing in its treatment of employees. Here, the author represents the Cloud industry as a superstructure in which power constructs rules and squeezes the employees with surveillance.

The dystopian setting of this novel sets in the fictional North America, where technology rules abundantly with the help of the mass corporate sector, Cloud. It stands for autonomy, and the whole nation depends highly on this Mother cloud. No one easily beats this industry. It is required for the employees to work more than twelve hours there. Additionally, employees must accept overtime in order to raise their employee rating, even though it appears to be voluntary for them. One of the workers called Miguel expresses about the overtime as, “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).

Gibson Wells, Paxton, and Zinnia are the three main characters in this novel. For Gibson’s speech, the author narrates with the first person narration. Being a founder of Mother Cloud, he employs thirty million people there. According to him, this company is “kind of accomplishment” (Hart 04). Most of the conversation of Gibson addresses directly to the readers, giving them further insight into his evil plots for the employees who are innocents and unaware of his plans. Instead of bringing robots to handle the jobs, he allows his workers to complete the manufacturing tasks by hand. Despite this, he presents himself as sagacious, showing as if he implements many intellectual plans over the employees. He never buys any AI there with the purpose of saving money on the overpriced electronic products. This decision also reveals a discriminatory attitude, as it exploits human labor without providing the technological advancements that could ease their workload, thereby highlighting his disregard for employee welfare. Gibson introduces various new products to this industry. He displays strong opinions regarding the development of technology and says, “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 the second prominent character, who formerly served as both the CEO of the company, Perfect Egg and a prison guard. However, Cloud’s persistent demand for product discounts resulted in a significant loss and led Paxton’s company to go bankrupt. As a result, he was jobless and finally entered the Mother Cloud to work as a security guard. Although Cloud appears to be a nice place to work on the surface, Paxton brings other perspectives about the

company that others do not know about. And he shows how Cloud destroys other small companies through mass productions. The purpose of bringing panopticon not only controls people but also, “brings direct benefits to human society; citizens generate the so-called self-discipline under the supervision of it”. (Zeng 170). Paxton is the type of person who gives his all efforts to the work wholeheartedly. At first, he doesn’t comprehend Cloud’s schemes, but he gradually learns about the corporate environment. He never thinks that he works in the Cloud, which would eat the entire American economy. It is at this warehouse where he first meets Zinnia, who frequently gets surprised by Paxton’s dedication to work despite ruining his previous jobs:

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 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 a third protagonist who is a corporate spy and gets employed in Mother Cloud as one of the employees. She comes here to learn about the dark secrets of this corporation and more than that. Zinnia “finds out that Paxton has been assigned to the security team, she realizes she can use him to help her cause” (Crown 1). She introduces herself to Paxton, saying that she went to work at the school as a teacher. She has frequently heard about a few workers at this company who died suspiciously in Mother Cloud. Dobbs is one of the chief managers in Cloud; he describes her as, “She’s a corporate spy, Gets hired to root into companies, steal their secrets” and accused her as a, “cold-blooded killer” (Hart 318). Being a spy, she gets irritated by the encroachment of GPS-tracking cloud bands. When Dobbs gets to know about her plans and

utters, “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). Most of the conversation of Gibson, who maintains an authoritative stature, keeps on insisting that his actions are aimed at poverty alleviation to the workers in Mothercloud. He says:

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. During the rating process your ranking will be taken into account, as well as your previous work history, and we will reconsider your placement and find a position that is mutually beneficial to both our needs and yours. (Hart 133)

The employees in this industry get only half an hour for lunch and a few minutes’ intervals for breaks. Cloud maintains a capitalistic mindset over the employees. Gibson knows that, which brings out such hierarchy among the readers. The dystopian novels encompass such characteristics of surveillance that have both hierarchy and bureaucracy (Sidorkin18). With tiny microphones, wiretaps, covert tracking devices, and covert video cameras, monitoring was accelerated and improved by what can be called an electronic Panopticon. But the plight is that the people are unaware that they are being watched in contemporary monitoring (Arnett 402).

Ember was once a businesswoman who used to work in the trade-related industry. However, the market demanded that the Cloud be selected to enhance economic growth in their trading industry. Hence, she selected Cloud. She permitted Cloud to benefit from all of their offerings. Subsequently, Cloud ignored those kinds of market-oriented things and considered the

customers completely. They consequently became unsustainable in balancing the financial complications. She hates Cloud because of her strong ideology. Ember learns about the main fundamental principles of the cloud. After this incident, she becomes one of the rebels who informed Zinnia about Cloud's capitalistic exploitation of labourers. The workers are required to work even on the weekends. They won't get any compensation for overtime. They are required to remain with the corresponding residents. Everything is available on Mother Cloud. It establishes hospitals, colleges, schools, and all other facilities. His main motivation is that Mother Cloud needs to be well-known for its rapid delivery in the trading sector. Mogsy explains Cloud industry effectively in the below lines as:

Rob Hart's depiction of a dystopian future where workers no longer have any rights and Cloud is everywhere—in our media, in our houses, and in our faces. Consumers put up with it for the convenience, but for Cloud employees, working the job every day and trying to keep it is a like living through a waking nightmare. Every worker in a Cloud facility is monitored at all times and rated on a five-star scale like the inventory they process and ship out. And when you also live at the place you work, this means constant surveillance and absolutely no privacy. (Mogsy 1)

By using the human fear of being monitored, the panopticon is able to exercise power over the inmates and control the behaviour of the prisoners. The new form of Panopticon in modern society has changed its structure in the industry as a form of confinement, and that extracts labourers even more (Kumar 346). Hart expresses the core principle of advanced totalitarian surveillance in this novel. However, this kind of constant observation suffocates the workers explicitly. Thus, this kind of development not only leads the progression but also it leads the, "overall dependence on technology in all aspects of our daily lives" (Sekulovski 8). There is

a popular food in Cloud that the company provides to their workers at a low cost; that is the Cloud Burger, which has actually less fat and protein. Zinnia discovers a protein bar that also includes, “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).

Like “Panopticon” by Jeremy Bentham George Orwell coined another term called “Big Brother” in his novel *1984*. It also has the similar concept of surveillance. “Big Brother” is a familiar metaphor that conjures up visions of political surveillance, political control of dissidents, totalitarian rule, and loss of individual liberty to replicate this idea” (Power 578). The role of surveillance in such political system describes systematic monitoring of people or groups, usually by governmental organisations, industries, or other organisations. However such surveillance erases the secrecy of individual completely. (Galic et al.9).

After knowing his short roots to exploit the workers for his own benefits, Zinnia wants to abolish the entire industry through resistance. When her attempts fail, the guards lock her. During Gibson's conversation with Zinnia, he makes it clear that he adheres to Bentham's concept of panopticon to maintain his company's growth. However, for this, he uses GPS navigation to control all the workers in this industry. As he comes and says 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)

The characters like Paxton, many employees in Cloud, work under the oppressive industry for their economic needs. To establish such capitalistic dominance over the employees,

the antagonist Gibson widened his network in the nation. Hart constructs the powerful character Zinnia, who brings up the truth of Gibson and the purpose of the establishment of Mother Cloud without considering her life. She resists all his capitalistic rules. In addition, Zinnia unveils the truth with the help of her humanity nature to serve the workers in Cloud, even though she is assigned as a corporate spy by another corporate company. Other than this, she reveals Mother Cloud is the main reason for reducing green energy, resulting in emissions in such industries. The manipulation of the Gibson over his employees has no opposition by any workers there. This makes Gibson more confident about implementing many restrictions for the workers day by day. The emergence of panopticon at first “operates with few supervisors and can manage supervisees on a large scale, and it made the operation of power simpler and easier and was later used in such hospitals, schools, and military barracks” (Liang 1).

For a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political, social, and economic frameworks, the industrial superstructure and other organisations have set many rules. The emergence of these kinds of industries has the plans to enlarge and enhance their power over the world through trading and business. This is how the societal disparity happens. Though Mother Cloud is known for the production of multifaceted and sophisticated sources for the customers, it also crushes the employees for their own welfare. Rob Hart presents well about the industrial superstructure and the employees struggles through this contemporary novel. Thus, this novel shows the retention of power that is used by the character Gibson in developing his network through Cloud.

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