An electronic panoptic society: hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgment, and examination in American hard rock band Starset

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Abstract: In the early 21st century, the whole society finished the transformation from a panopticon to an electronic super panopticon. With the development of intellectual technology, the view of surveillance increases. People in a technological society are monitored in every movement they make. In Starset's post-apocalyptic society of the future, people are controlled by technology and become docile and prolific labor machines. This essay will analyze three songs by American hard rock band Starset, Breach, Where the skies end and Icarus, using three of Foucault's theories of discipline and punishment, hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgment and examination. Under the disciplinary surveillance, people from Starset's post-apocalyptic society have been tamed by the power of technology and are constantly disciplining themselves and checking themselves, becoming a single efficient producer. It also shows that society is becoming a transparent high-speed panopticon prison.

1 Introduction

In the early 21st century, IT technology developed rapidly, which led to its widespread use in various fields of society. In the contemporary era of rapid technological development, technology continues to influence the relationship between individuals and society. As Dzhioev mentioned, industrial 4.0, the use of artificial intelligence in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has not only created more highly precise personalized products in production but has also brought fundamental changes to many aspects of people's lives, society and economy [1]. This paper aims to analyze the impact of the combination of power and technology on individuals through the themes of Starset's lyrics and official music videos, using Michel Foucault's theory of punishment and discipline as a framework.

The hardcore rock band Starset, established in 2013, uses lyrics and music rich in technological elements and cosmic backgrounds to depict an era of high concentration of power and technology [2]. Starset's lyrics highlight the contradictions between humans, technology, and power, which prompt people to reconsider the impact of the combination of technology and power on individuals and awaken their pursuit of autonomy. Starset also exhibits a rebellious spirit and pursuit of freedom.

In the Starset, society is developing at a rapid pace in terms of technology. People have entered a phase of development where technology is stronger than ever. Technological development is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, technology points to the unfolding of the realm of truth and brings great productivity to human society. According to Spears, Russell, and Martin, the anonymity of computer-mediated communication (CMC) reduces the anxiety of expressing emotions in communication and decreases interference from groups and superiors, allowing individuals to express themselves more authentically. Therefore, using technology benefits individuals in expressing themselves [3]. On the other hand, technology is not simply a harmless tool or instrument; it implies a certain supreme command. This supreme command defines the way people live and forces them to live on a prescribed path. As Heidegger mentioned that technology is thus no longer just a pure tool for truth but a means of domesticking human power [4]. Under the high-technology era, power grows quietly in another place without being known and gradually becomes entangled with the combination of modern technology. With the conveniences that technology has created for us, our close relationship with these modern technologies has reached a symbiotic level. They are used as a matter of course as if they were our limbs and central nervous system. All of the combinations of technology and power are portrayed vividly in Starset's lyrics and official music videos. In order to analyze the embodiment of technology and discipline in Starset's songs, this essay will focus on Foucault's rationale for discipline. Foucault proposes three theories around Discipline, namely, hierarchical surveillance, the power of writing, and nominalization judgment [5]. Through the training of discipline, the body should be economical, efficient and productive. This bodily submission produces a form of absolute surveillance—the domesticated individual experiences constant coercion at many times and locations. Individuals, as a result, become more physically docile and useful [6].
By using Foucault's three concepts about punishment and discipline, this paper will analyze the discipline of society in the high-technology age by using a few pieces of evidence from Stareset's three songs, respectively, Icarus, Where the skies end, BREACH [7-9]. Meanwhile, this paper will demonstrate how the rapidly developing technological age has led to the concentration of power in society.

2 Features of the Panopticon

In the beginning, Bentham designed the structure of the panopticon to build an effective prison [10]. The panopticon structure should consist of two parts, the circular building, which allows the supervisor to inspect every situation, and the second part is a single cell surrounded by the exterior. From Foucault's point of view, the panopticon structure is widely used in different types of social institutions, such as factories, hospitals, and schools. Under this panoptic structure, the person in the circular tower is able to observe everything happening. Everyone except the person in the tower is under constant coercion, while they know nothing about the existence of the supervisor [5,10]. Moreover, Foucault mentions that the panopticon is not only an architectural form but a political instrument [5]. The structure of the panopticon is used by those in power to infiltrate discipline into the various institutions of society. This disciplinary power can make individuals more compliant and prolific, thus accelerating the development of society as a whole.

2.1 Changes in the Panopticon

In the technological information society of the present, where power and technology are highly integrated, discipline becomes a tool of power over individuals. Lyotard mentioned that the emergence of this technological panorama of unobstructed vision is also a product of the proliferation of information and scientific inflation [11]. In this system of discipline, with the aid of technology, people have become a single instrument of labor. In information society, the panopticon has also reached a new stage. As Seifie says, information has now become an atomic warhead that combines power and quantity in society. Everywhere information goes, it has a huge ripple effect and impact. The impact of information on the world is comparable to the impact of fire on mankind [12]. The ubiquitous spread of information brought about by technological innovation has gradually expanded the scope of power. As a result of the enormous power that information and technology have brought to our society, a vast network of power woven by information and technology has gradually formed, which can record everything in a document [12]. Moreover, the post-information infrastructure quickening construction in the twenty-first century has brought society into the information technology era [13]. In the 21st century, information infrastructure quenches have brought society into the age of information technology. The power of the internet has spread to every corner of society with its super speed, creating a holographic super panopticon society [14]. In the smallest sphere of society that information can reach, power can penetrate in the form of discipline. Society as a whole has been transformed by the dissemination of information brought about by technology, as has the structure of the panopticon. The development of technology has brought about a new form of panopticon, where people are constantly monitored by an electronic invisible eye and controlled by those in power [5,10]. In this new society, consumption and entertainment have become the primary focus, and the differences between things are disappearing. As a result, the human factor is being overwhelmed by the power of high technology, and science and technology are not only seeking to conquer and dominate nature but also aggressively attempting to control humans themselves. This shift towards a technology-dominated society represents a significant departure from the earlier panopticon model, but it still serves the same purpose of maintaining social order through surveillance and control [13].

3. Analysis of Starset's official music video

3.1 Hierarchical surveillance in Starset:

Icarus is a song by Starset. [7]. In Icarus, Starset creates a fictional high-tech city called NEW EAST. The New East is a product of a society that is highly developed in terms of information technology. The New East presents a technological and virtual way of life in an age of technology. The New East is a virtual platform for people to obtain all their needs [7]. People are paid for their work through BMI, where they can satisfy all their desires. Satisfying desires in BMI became a major way of life for the people of the new east, apart from labor. As seen in the music video, people are creating technology and virtual societies like Daedalus, the ancient Greek technologist. The modern Daedalus has created a new way of life, reshaping mankind's perception of technology, power, and lifestyle. They fly higher and higher, seemingly on par with the gods. However, the punishment comes to Daedalus in the form of an overwhelmingly proliferating information society and power networks. Icarus, the child of the modern "Daedalus", is being led to his doom by his own achievement, the "technological society". Just like Icarus, the human offspring of the New East is coming to an end in technology and discipline. In the New East, people are totally dependent on technology and have lost their judgment, becoming single producers and consumers. As a result, people are constrained and become the product of authority and technology.

From Foucault's point of view, society as a whole has been transformed into a vast panoptic prison. The "hierarchical observation" is an important means of sustaining the panoptic prison [5]. It is through this discipline that the workers are assigned their production. At the same time, BMI is a symbol of society as a society of communication technologies. The people of the New East are data loaded into BMI. According to Lyon, new high-tech techniques such as computerization provide a common digital language for generating [15]. The new
technology turns bodies into a string of coding, which can be recorded in the documentation system. In the meanwhile, BMI, as an invisible eye and as an apparatus for disciplining individuals, is constantly monitoring people's movements. In the official music video of Icarus [7], BIM has a good disguise, appearing as a harmless face, which makes people unaware of its hierarchized continuous functional surveillance, and penetrates into their minds through the ubiquitous information network. Under this surveillance, BIM's ubiquitous micro-regulations are able to influence every single decision that is made by individuals.

As Foucault mentioned, discipline makes people become submissive and docile, which can make people transform and fulfill economic goals [6]. This tameness is creating a pattern of total supervision. This leads to people becoming physically docile and, at the same time, more productive [6]. People need to follow specific social mechanisms in order to gain access to more resources or rewards. Thus, people in Starset voluntarily follow social norms, labor and consumption to satisfy their desires through the use of BIM. As in the case of the first male worker in the official music video, he is paid for his work by repeating it endlessly. The discipline represented by BIM is the use of 'work' to bring the idea of private ownership to the individual [5]. Thus, people's self-sufficiency becomes docile flesh. As Foucault said, labor establishes a pattern of subordination among individuals to the institutions of production [5]. When the worker finishes his work, the salary is paid directly into his BIM account, which he can use to buy virtual women in BIM to satisfy his desires. Under this system of discipline, people conform to established social norms in order to produce, enhance the economy, and consume. The purpose of the communication technology society is also successfully achieved by this discipline, to create economic benefits. Foucault also said this surveillance was inextricably linked to private property [5]. In the virtual cloud of BIM, the individual can satisfy his sexual needs by purchasing objects for sexual intercourse. BIM acts as a surveillance mechanism, capitalizing on the individual's body and maximizing the benefits of each body part. Under the discipline of BIM, people's bodies become submissive.

Under the constraints of technology and power, the individual body becomes a body that can be manipulated, which means that the body is tamed and subjected to. At this point, the body can be used, altered and enhanced for the purpose of increasing economic development [5]. At the same time, technology has become a human neuron, and humans can no longer escape its regulation. This also proves that people have become completely caught up in this discipline. As in the case of the first male worker, the body can be recorded in the documentation system. In the other society, people have to continuously exploit themselves and consume themselves in order to comply with the social norms until they annihilate themselves. People are observed and monitored by the invisible eye in this electronic panopticon and trained to become submissive and prolific bodies. The purpose of the disciplinary apparatus can thus be fulfilled to increase the economy and productivity [5].

3.2 Normalizing judgment in Starset

Foucault has argued that normative adjudication is the pursuit of uniformity and the control of individual behavior through the power of norms [5]. It is this normative power that Authority has developed. In Where the skies end, in the official music video, the phrase "Unity by Union" is presented. "Work harder makes a powerful nation." This discourse becomes a social norm in the disciplinary society of the Starset. To be rewarded, people need to adhere to social norms. At the same time, people's actions are influenced by Normalization judgment [5]. In Starset's song Breach, people's behavior is regulated by a schedule [8]. People are required to work and live according to a schedule within a specific timeframe. This social norm is an instrument of a power designated by the authority to control people's behavior at the most microscopic level, thus achieving the effect of discipline.

3.3 Examination in Starset

The examination is established through a combination of Hierarchical observation and Normalized judgment, and the role of Examination is to classify, punish and monitor through normative scrutiny, thus further establishing control over people from the smallest of details [5]. There is also a greater emphasis on the human conquest of the subject. Documentation, as a key feature of Examination, plays a major role in discipline. This documentation refers to the characterization of people in a super-electronic panopticon society [17]. This system of disciplined writing treats people as objects to be described and analyzed [5,6]. It makes the most of people's bodies, of their individuality, of their abilities. It is in this way that the function of the record is no longer that of a memoir of the past. This means that the record is not a celebration of the glory of the individual but rather a means of control that embodies the display of the power held [5]. In the song 'Where the skies end' by Starset, the music video is set in a huge prison, with the two main characters wearing numbered prison uniforms. Moreover, in the official music video, the slogan "Work harder makes a powerful nation." is also strong evidence of objectification. In this official music video, prison is here a reflection of a panoramic society [9]. Moreover, the prisoner is a symbol of the human being. The human being is objectified in society and recorded in a series of digits.
Secondly, censorship also means being observed at all times. This visibility becomes an expression of the disciplinary force exerted on the person, as in the official music video of Icarus, the girl who separates her consciousness from her physical body and leaves her consciousness in BIM. Through BIM, she uploads her body to the Internet cloud, a virtual world in which she is constantly examined by the Invisible eye. In order to gain more praise, she never ceases to display herself in the virtual world. Under this surveillance, she is presented as an object in the virtual world. The ritual of the presentation of her own virtual world in the official music video is a manifestation of power. The endless exposure of the woman to the virtual world is a demonstration of the power of discipline. Under constant scrutiny, she constantly examines herself, moves towards a uniform standard, and thus becomes controllable and useful.

3.4 Starset Discipline World

The technological society portrayed by Starset shows the way in which technology affects people's lives. In a technological society, productivity grows at a rapid pace, and people's production and lives accelerate, hurtling forward like a speeding train. At the same time, this rapid development of technology has also led to a deepening of the influence of power over individuals. In the age of technology, information hurts through endless networks, making people's lives transparent and easily monitored by others. As Han said, people think they live in a boundless digital utopia where they can say whatever they want [14]. However, this freedom exposes them to the internet and makes them more vulnerable to surveillance by others and the invisible eye. At the same time, Han Byung-chul says that information technology has also led modern society to a digital panoptic society [14]. This digital panoptic open-view prison is fundamentally different from the panopticon proposed by Bentham. In Bentham's panopticon, prisoners are placed in single cells and are not allowed to communicate with each other. However, in the digital panopticon mentioned by Han, people can communicate with each other in-depth and can voluntarily expose themselves. In this digital technological society, people reveal themselves to each other and put all information flows about themselves outside. This transparent, extremely large flow of information is more advanced productivity and faster growth [14]. In today's communication society, with its high productivity growth, the presence of the other (i.e., heterogeneity) as a sense of difference and negativity is not conducive to the transmission and production of information [14]. In order to increase the speed of development of the information society, a transparent development mechanism is followed. Moreover, in the operation of the transparency economy, surveillance spreads from the most basic unit of society: the individual. In this digital panopticon, people monitor each other, which has accelerated the creation of the electronic panopticon society. Under endless scrutiny and normalized judgment, people are constantly being asked to conform to social norms. In a high-tech society, people have been tamed by the power of technology and are constantly disciplining themselves and checking themselves, becoming a single efficient producer [14].

4 Conclusion

This essay uses hierarchical observation, normalization judgment, and examination of Foucault's discipline and punishment to analyze three songs by the American band Starset. Through the analysis of Foucault's discipline theories, it is clear to identify how Starset's songs illustrate the impact of technology and power on our lives. The songs highlight how technology has become deeply embedded in individuals' lives, enabling the invisible control of our bodies and the monitoring of our every move. In Icarus, people live in a virtual society, BIM, where they are constantly watched by BIM without knowing it. The BIM is able to monitor people's every move, which strengthens the invisible control of people. Additionally, the influence of social norms on our behavior is reflected as individuals strive to conform to these norms even at the cost of self-exploitation. The use of examination as hierarchical observation and normalization judgment also plays a significant role in disciplining people, objectifying them as documents that can be recorded and surveilled. In this way, Starset's songs offer a critical perspective on the ways in which technology and power intersect to shape our lives and societies.

For future improvements, future researchers could explore more on how to combine Foucault's theories and other critical perspectives, such as postcolonial theories together, to provide a more diverse and nuanced analysis of the themes of Starset's music and their broader cultural implications.

Overall, this analysis also gives a solid analysis of the themes of Starset's music through a Foucauldian lens, which helps readers to build connections between discipline theories and popular culture together. Meanwhile, this analysis provides a clear foundation for future research on the intersection of technology, power and discipline in postmodern culture.

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