



## The Firewall and the Flesh: Staging the Digital Panopticon in Tim J. Lord's The Honeycomb Trilogy

Ansam Riyadh Abdullah Almaarof<sup>(1)</sup> | Hafsa Emad Ghani<sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>College of Education for Women, University of Tikrit, Salah Al-din, Iraq

Email: <sup>1</sup>[Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq), <sup>2</sup>[hfsaemad96@gmail.com](mailto:hfsaemad96@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Cyber security issue becomes increasingly important in digital era, thus, this paper explores the way The Honeycomb Trilogy, and the focus is on the “We declare you a terrorist...” projects a dramatic vision of the digital panopticon, where technological surveillance coincides with biopolitical control to turn the human body into both target and medium of force. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s panopticism and extending it with Gilles Deleuze’s societies of control, Shoshana Zuboff’s surveillance capitalism, and Donna Haraway’s cyborg theory, the work compares the trilogy with contemporary digital and posthumanist theatre. Actually, the trilogy tells us the producers of suffering are in one place, and the sufferers are encased in the mechanical; II and III are alike. The analysis suggests that the plays show the move from architectural surveillance to distributed and algorithmic monitoring. They make systems of control that are otherwise invisible by nature visible in the theatre—live. The paper also shows how the text represents the body as data, looks at the gendered aspects of surveillance, and discusses how stage technologies act toward other actors inside a networked production environment. It also examines how audiences mimic the gaze of the Panopticon, making them fair game for surveillance everywhere (not just on some stages), but just as theatre becomes one place to subvert and confront all this watching, so too does it lie under suspicion. Ultimately, it argues that the trilogy reconceptualises embodiment as a basis for resistance, underlining how touch, voice, and human vulnerability work against digital abstraction. In staging the tussle between technological control and human presence, it reveals the moral conflicts of contemporary surveillance culture and underscores how live theatre continues to be a relevant platform for challenging political visibility and autonomy.

## Introduction

Lord's three interlocked plays — *We Declare You a Terrorist...*, *In the Middle of the Fields* and *A Dismal Place* — are referred to collectively in this paper as the “Honeycomb Trilogy.” This is a term typically used in production contexts to note that all three have a central thematic element. This project reads *The Honeycomb Trilogy*, focusing on “*We Declare You A Terrorist...*”: *a theatre of digital enclosure, a dramatic world where power operates less through spectacular violence than through continuous monitoring, predictive management, and being watched becoming normal*. The trilogy offers particularly productive material for scholars interested in the encounter between a digital panopticon and the body on stage, not only because it repeatedly sets up survival, political belonging and bodies' legibility – who can pass, who is trackable, who is “transparent” to authority, but who is a risk to be contained. Rather, the conflicts within the trilogy are not just ideological or military; they are bio-political, realised through bodies that come under governance and, vitally, for governance through media which reaches bodies.

The theoretical and methodological background of this phenomenon remains important. Michel Foucault’s account of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* provides a foundation for understanding how modern power turns visibility into discipline: subjects internalise surveillance and develop self-control because they can be watched at any time (Foucault, 1977). The present paper extends panopticism into the new “digital turn” with three trajectories that complement each other: Surveillance capitalism as Zuboff argues that digital systems extract behavioural data to predict and influence human action, thereby making everyday life a resource of power and profit (Zuboff, 2019) As a material friend to the body, a cyborg figure is a challenge for theorists of human and technology. It threatens the firm boundaries between natural/artificial, human/machine. This conception of “the human” as information, not biology, became an important tool in post-human theory in the late twentieth century. In using performance studies that take surveillance as a technique of viewing, how to arrange who sees, who is seen and the way in which to make visibility an ethical or political relation, the paper aims at imagining swarming direction.

The present paper argues that *The Honeycomb Trilogy*, and the focus is on “We declare you a terrorist...”, creates a digital panopticon in which technological surveillance merges with corporeal governance, turning human flesh into both target and medium of power. Throughout this series of plays, it dramatises how networked control is not simply “outside” the body, as cameras, databases, or screens are, but is now performed through bodies themselves: through what they reveal, what they conceal, and what modes of intimacy (touch, voice, vulnerability) can still offer resistance to being converted into data.

This paper asks how the trilogy presents digital surveillance, not merely as content but also embodied in the dramaturgy. This article contends that through the assembly of space, language organisation, and the audience's perspective are reified, surveillance can be turned into theatre. This study is a very valuable addition to the field of digital performance studies, as it uses various theoretical frameworks, including Foucauldian ideas and ones derived from Deleuzian philosophy, as well as posthumanist thought.

## Theoretical Background: From Panopticism to Digital Surveillance

### Foucault's Panopticon: Visibility, Discipline, Self-Regulation

These ideas, derived from Michel Foucault's Panopticon, which was introduced in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), emphasise monitoring and regulation of society through optical means. The architect of the model that Foucault assumes is Jeremy Bentham. Bentham laid out the blueprint for modern society, whose forms have been with us ever since to a great extent. People would not be trained by the harsh means of violence, Foucault concludes, governments and society learned to use gentler forms of surveillance to make individuals internalise and self-regulate their behaviour. Because power lies within oneself, it is effective: individuals begin to act as if they were always on display, even though no single watcher may be present. Foucault writes that the Panopticon creates “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Three things emerge from this formulation: that “visibility” is a technology of power, in that being seen by others becomes an instrument of discipline; asymmetry (or unequal distribution) of knowledge, where observation conveys the observer a particular advantage over the observed; self-discipline—surveillance is internalised, and people monitor themselves

The panoptic organisation strongly resembles the venue in dramatic terms. For the theatre has been the organiser of vision in history: here are people who look around at performers within a specific visual frame. But Foucault's theory serves as a warning that modern power does not take place only within literal architecture. It becomes a social condition, infiltrating institutions like schools, hospitals, armies, and workplaces. Hence, the Panopticon presents a vital point from which to understand how performance and observance meet: both are systems of ordered visibility. The world of monitoring, classification and control presented in *The Honeycomb Trilogy* (2013) can therefore also be seen as an extension into speculative futures of Foucauldian discipline applied within a theatre.

### The Digital Turn: From Architectural Visibility to Algorithmic Invisibility

Although Foucault's panopticism utilised physical architecture, today's surveillance increasingly relies on digital infrastructures. In his essay, “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1992), Gilles Deleuze tells us that power in the late 20th century has transcended disciplinary institutions and seeks instead to capture and control a continuous distributed individual; capture and control are achieved through processes with network characteristics rather than any one enclosure. Power no longer has a centre or focuses on specialities. It is scattered and always up for grabs as information flows through open systems like data banks and communication networks (Deleuze, 1992). Deleuze sees this as a shift from discipline to modulation. Individuals are no longer confined; according to Deleuze, they are now constantly measured, corrected and evaluated. From identification numbers to passwords and finally biometric data, the several layers through which subjects can be recognised or controlled merge into probabilistic profiles. (Deleuze, 1992). The individual thus becomes a distributed phenomenon: a collection of data parts circulating throughout society

Shoshana Zuboff elaborates on this theme in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), emphasising the economic dimension of digital surveillance. Contemporary power, according to Zuboff, lies primarily in extracting behavioural surplus—the data produced by daily activities. These data are then used for purposes such as predicting and shaping behaviour, turning human life into a resource for political and economic control. Surveillance today is no longer merely a matter of watching. It's also about creating and anticipating the future. This digital change,

fundamentally modifying the mode of vision, makes surveillance itself unseen and pervasive, rather than localised. Observation itself takes on characteristics typical of prediction and algorithms as opposed to mere descriptive ability. Subjects become sources of data, not just the body as a subject for the Patriots. Then, in the subject's own terms.

The end product is what scholars more and more call the digital panopticon—a machine that is round-the-clock (on any time it happens), (was invented for this purpose exactly in fact. At Tilburg University in the Netherlands, researchers who wanted a place to store their data used it in the school of life sciences and planted it into everyday life. Unlike Bentham's tower, the digital panopticon has no clear centre; it is spread out across networks over a network. For theatre, this shift represents a paradox. Theatre is one of the last art forms that relies on physical proximity between performers or creators and audience members, and between all those present at all times. By staging digital surveillance, theatre needs to turn invisible systems into visual experiences. This tension makes the performance venue (theatrical space) a particularly potent forum for examining digital control.

### **Theatre as Counter-Surveillance**

Performance theorists contend that theatre can function as a form of counter-surveillance. Because surveillance systems often run covertly, theatre can unmask their mechanisms by making surveillance visible and embodied. In other words, theatre lays bare the structures that usually lie hidden. Live performance offers several strategies for this effect: embodiment when actors represented the impacts of surveillance upon human bodies, spatial design that simulates control centres or data maps, and audience awareness: Audiences become aware of their own role as observers.

Performance thus becomes a laboratory for exploring the politics of viewing. When audiences watch characters being spied on, sorted, or followed, they experience firsthand the ethical consequences of surveillance in their own lives. Theatre turns spectatorship into a place of critical experience rather than passive reception. Within this context, *The Honeycomb Trilogy* may be seen as a theatrical experiment for showing how surveillance works – by showing how technological systems alter intimacy, autonomy, and trust.

### **Key Conceptual Terms**

In order to analyse the trilogy, the discussion will be guided by several major conceptual terms:

**Digital Panopticon**, which means an updated version of Foucault's model, where surveillance has become decentralised, algorithmic, and enshrined in digital networks.

**Biopolitics**, which refers to Foucault's concept for explaining how modern power governs populations by regulating their lives, health, reproduction, mobility and danger.

**Cyborg Body**, a term used first by Haraway, who wrote that the figure involving human and machine fused together challenges the boundaries between nature and technology.

**Posthuman Subject** refers to the identity that no longer depends upon the autonomous individual as an object, but moves towards new, hybrid forms of being on creative peripheries where communication and information technologies play an increasingly important part.

**Network Control**: these are networked, but also semi-formal, distributed systems of governance. They use data flows, communication infrastructure, predictive analytics, etc., in

ways that blur surveillance over a wide geographical area rather than concentrate it on any one node or channel into definite channels.

All these concepts taken together yield a framework for understanding how The Honeycomb Trilogy Weaves Surveillance into the total environment in which we find ourselves. This framework allows the trilogy's interrogation scenes to be read as dramatisations of disciplinary visibility.

### **Analysis and Discussion: Under Watch: In *The Honeycomb Trilogy***

One immediately notices that power not only resides in institutions and technologies; it also works through bodies which are watched, altered, and tracked as concrete forms of data. Thus, the trilogy provides a dramatisation of what Foucault calls biopolitics, the technologies for governing life and behaviour as well as birth rates in specific bodies (Foucault, 1977). Through the force of its own logic, Theatrical Surveillance

#### **Surveillance of the Body.**

In The Honeycomb Trilogy, one of its most effective patterns is this consistent segregation of political power from what it means to exist physically. Surveillance is not only external but felt as an intimate probe into autonomy in one's body. This in itself reflects panopticism: in the opening staging, an entire panorama unfolds like nothing else, with THE AUTHOR sitting inside and below that stage. His hands are handcuffed: The stage directions read, His Eyes are shut.

Here we have asymmetrical visibility, complete vulnerability and institutional power. The line of the FSB Officer at once fits Foucauldian discipline: "Your words are in contradiction with your deeds." (Lord, 2013, p. 7)

It reflects the normalisation of behaviour, suspicion about any deviation, and governance through psychological homogeneity. From the perspective of performance, this dynamic is played out as dialogues functioning primarily as tests of faith, little beds into the stage space for actors to move around in, smaller characters (not only size-wise but also morally) or characters chafing at moral constraints imposed on them by this setting

In the trilogy's world of What if, instead of any constitutional arrangement of the economy, government, for its day, seeks only to give out some form of question-and-answer pamphlet on ethics. Maintenance of state power depends on who is in and who is out, who are the good guys or traitors

It resonates perfectly with Foucault's argument that modern power is concerned with classification and normalisation. Only with the help of sorting, categorising, and following in real time can control actually be achieved. No one goes to Chechnya unless they are ordered to go there. Or unless they are a terrorist... Or unless they wish to commit suicide. (Lord, 2013, p.17) This is pure Foucauldian classification: the legal body, the terrorist body, the suicidal body.

Through these dramaturgical moves, the stage becomes a zone of examination. The actor's body becomes a piece of evidence, and movement becomes a sign that must be interpreted. From a biopolitical perspective, the trilogy suggests that the most effective form of power is not overt violence but the ability to define whose body is safe and whose body is a threat.

## **The Flesh as Data**

Shoshana Zuboff's concept of surveillance capitalism describes how human behaviour becomes a resource for data harvesting (Zuboff, 2019). The trilogy operationalizes this, too: the body as data bank. In the narrative arc of the trilogy's first two parts, survival requires areas such as: identification verification; authentication of biotic legitimacy; publicity (the utter absence) of bodily hidden agendas.

The body now becomes a permit: "Arabic is written on it." (Lord, 2013, p. 7) On the south coast: a citation mark can be a digital trace, it can also set off suspicion, or on someone's high-risk profile—a key to whether and where one can live in peace. Foucault is writing about the shift in power structure and management; he refers to life being managed as an object in terms of biopolitical control. In live performance, this change is especially powerful because theatre exposes the face and body. When humans are treated as data points, the tension created for engagees wants to feel their real-life existence on stage versus the demand to physically understand an actor's information processing. A disturbing contradiction within contemporary digital life is laid bare at this point: the more data we produce, the more our bodies are turned into bits of information.

The most theatrical aspect of the biopolitical system these works depict must be its manipulation project, wherein characters can perform submission or nonresistance. Foucault emphasises that power produces subjects who participate in their regulation. The trilogy stages this process through compliance when characters adapt behaviour to survive under scrutiny, self-monitoring speech and movement, and internalising the logic of surveillance, or resistance when there is a refusal of transparency, protecting secrets and intimacy, and using the body as a site of defiance.

Stagecraft reinforces this dynamic through visual and spatial choices when confined staging evokes containment, harsh lighting suggests constant visibility, and audience proximity creates the feeling of shared surveillance. These techniques transform spectators into witnesses of the surveillance process, blurring the boundary between observer and participant.

The text dramatises the transformation of the body into a site of surveillance and governance. The next section moves outward from the body to examine technology itself as a theatrical presence—how the stage becomes an interface and how digital systems function as actors within the performance.

## **Firewalls and Frontlines: Technology as Stage and Actor**

If the previous section explored how surveillance enters the body, this section shifts focus to the trilogy's technological environments. In *The Honeycomb Trilogy*, technology is not a neutral background; it becomes a dramaturgical force—an active participant shaping action, space, and perception. The stage itself increasingly functions as an interface, a site where networks, screens, and systems of control are made theatrically visible.

### ***The Stage as Interface***

Current digital performance studies tell us that the modern theatre often turns the stage into a hybrid space where physical and virtual realities coincide (Dixon, 2007). Therefore, instead of regarding technology as a mere prop, most productions now include such features as giant projected images, gridded lighting systems and music backdrops that simulate networked environments. In the trilogy's imaginary world, technological presence is conveyed by

omnipresent communication systems, flows of mediated information, and environments constructed by invisible infrastructures. "You were exactly there when we found you in the minefield". (Lord, 2013, p. 18) The minefield becomes an invisible digital fence, a physical firewall and a space carved out by unseen control. These elements invite audiences to experience the stage as a networked space rather than just a physical location. The audience sees characters move through intangible systems that act on them in powerful yet indeterminable ways. This transformation bears the echo of Deleuze's concept of capitalism," in which power does not emanate from centres but is rather dispersed through infrastructure (Deleuze, 1992). The interface on the stage becomes a spatial metaphor for these invisible networks.

### ***The Firewall Motif***

A major metaphor in the trilogy for its politics of visibility is the firewall. In digital contexts, a firewall protects systems by controlling access and filtering data. The trilogy's metaphor extends beyond technical terms to become a psychological and social construct.

The firewall operates on several levels: digital level, psychological level, and Political Level. It is either protecting networks, or protecting identity, or protecting autonomy. And it is either policing intrusion, or guarding secrets, or resisting control. Therefore, it is working on data filtering, filtering emotions, or regulating access.

Characters are constantly rubbing up against the force field of conflict between private spaces and the wide world beyond, or between being an opposition-rule subject or participant in its system; between the natural stamping ground and the mechanical surveillance it echoes. 'Come to Chechnya' "Because I wanted something real." By saying this, the script wants an end to artificial barriers, out of the binding arena-friendly sense Prince Russet talked about, and must leave. Instead, we can have a feeling of "real" coexistence endeavours where comradeship soothes existencelessness, and yet entropy is all around you. In terms of theatre, this boundary often appears through light and shadow. text-to-speech (Shi Tao, p. 117, 2000) 3. By Cyborg Aesthetics, Haraway's cyborg portrayal is a powerful lens for understanding the hybrid bodies present in the trilogy.

Cyborgs cut through traditional boundaries of human and machine, or organic versus artificiality. Private- public divide. Because the firewall was breached long ago in the trilogy's world of run-amok systems, the technological environment through which characters move and breathe is already shaping what it means to be human. Cyborg aesthetics arise in the trilogy through bodies mediated by communication technologies, identities twisted by technological systems, and relationships sifted through digital infrastructures

These mixed forms hint at the fact that authority is increasingly brittle. The more technology is integrated into daily life, the less boundary remains to be distinguished: here man ends and machine begins. Theatre is an ideal place to portray this hybridization, because with its concrete flesh plus technological space operations it puts human beings lined up on one side and fingers waving beside the dial on another, making them act together in real sync. Today, people live in this way, carrying their irreplaceable smartphones or making merry with their laptops rather than doing things that need brains and hands, respectively. Finally, in the case of the Trilogy, it eventually slips into what scholars label posthuman theatrical drama. Drama which questions the stability of a human subject in tech society. Posthuman dramaturgy contrasts traditional theatres and dramas, i.e. Traditional Theatre is a text-based narration. It is mapped as a tale of a man. While Posthuman focuses on the machine. Man as a pair of self-conscious units. It is a

time-based narrative. And real human gestures. From this perspective, the Trilogy suggests the human subject is no longer autonomous but a part of the network, under the influence of and exposed to technological governance.

By contrast, those qualities respond to algorithmic surveillance's cold abstractions. The viewer, as a result, also becomes part of this surveillance machinery. But the last section looks at the trilogy's most hopeful aspect: resistance. If surveillance marks bodies, technology, and role-viewer, then how do the characters themselves regain their own initiative? Vi the flesh strikes back: resistance and rehumanization. While the trilogy illustrates how surveillance infuses bodies, technology, and spectatorship, ultimately it turns towards a crucial question: can mankind survive total digital control? The Honeycomb Trilogy creates a world that is shaped by observation, classification, and telemetric government, yet insists at the same time that the body, fragile, emotional, relational, continues to offer hope for resistance. The plays conceive of regaining a place for the self: through embodiment, empathy and community.

"If there's power, " Foucault famously argued, "then there is resistance" (Foucault, 1977). Significantly, resistance is not anything that extrudes out of power. It comes right from within our lives themselves. The trilogy illustrates this principle by showing how its characters resist surveillance not only on occasion but in small ways even as they live their daily lives. KAYIRA

You have to know your government won't negotiate. They'll storm the building, and we'll set off the explosives. We came here to die. You should prepare yourselves for the same fate.

KAYIRA walks away.

THE WRITER & NINA look at each other.

A shift.

Back in the interrogation room.

THE FSB OFFICER has THE WRITER

still pinned to the table. (Lord, 2013, p. 16)

This is a weaponised embodiment, where the body becomes a political instrument, and death a strategy of resistance. Such acts of resistance could range from simply refusing to give information to shielding others from systems of classification and expressing emotional loyalty rather than political allegiance. These may seem trifling instances. Yet they disrupt the calculus of total transparency, which contemporary surveillance systems require in order for their logic to hold. In a digital panopticon, secrecy is political. Silence is resistance. Our trilogy recasts resistance as personal relations of friendship rather than merely tools and soldiers.

### ***Restoring human relationships***

Touch, voice, and not just any old physical connection all serve as sharp counterpoints to digital surveillance in a trilogy that actually found quite a few black spots for these three things, even beyond the novel stage.

Surveillance capitalism, as Zuboff argues, thrives on abstraction: human behaviour is translated into data points and predictive models (Zuboff, 2019).

THE WRITER

We just talked.

THE FSB OFFICER

You just talked.

And then four years later, you decided to pay her country a visit.

(Lord, 2013, p. 17)

Conversation becomes human intimacy, anti-classification exchange, and counter-surveillance gesture

In contrast, the trilogy offers concrete instances of embodied experience. Touch, for example, cannot be totally digitised. Voice also adds meaning beyond what is captured in data, and presence itself is a force against the accounts. Moments of intimacy, holding hands, comforting someone else, speaking frankly, are all against digitising emotions and life.

This resistance is also clearly seen in the theatre medium. The importance of live human presence in theatre serves to reinforce the idea that physical co-presence is still a powerful counterforce to digital mediation.

### ***The Hope of the Organic***

Donna Haraway's cyborg theory challenges what humans and machines are, yet at the same time, it urges us to look for something that is uniquely human (Haraway, 1985). The trilogy continues along these lines by suggesting that in a world completely saturated with technology, the organic body still has subversive potential. It becomes one of the last lines as this argument applies on several levels. Here is a schema: | Level | Resistance through the Body. Biologically, nobody can perfectly predict or control a body (everybody should consider their emotions or feelings that break the rational process system. In turn, the trilogy reshapes vulnerability and unpredictability from sources of weakness to points for political intervention.

### **Conclusion**

The trilogy dramatises the theatrical interface between living creatures and digital infrastructure, between being just born and indefatigable systems of surveillance. Why indeed can the trilogy not be merely understood as a representation of surveillance as a political theme? Meanwhile, the plays, through scenes of interrogation, spatial confinement, mediated communication, and exposure, transform cybersecurity into a laboratory on stage. They stage live scenes of contemporary cyber paranoia. But in these moments of interrogatory theatre, the audience is asked to think for itself. Panopticism and thus also the way that surveillance has been elaborated on are a persistent theme in Foucault's work. The analysis also shows how the trilogy moves beyond architectural surveillance to what Deleuze calls control societies: global, continuous, algorithmic. In such a setting the body is no longer only observed; it becomes processed information. A place of data extraction, suspicion, and predictive government. In a sense, the trilogy reflects a world where cybersecurity is no longer confined to guarding networks but extends outwards towards controlling populations, defining risk, and normalising intimacies.

At the same time, the plays resist technological determinism. Because while digital infrastructures may shape subjectivity, they cannot totally erase the body. Touch, conversation, pause, and emotional loyalty suddenly undermine the logic of transparency on which all

cybersecurity systems depend. As a live art co-existent in space and time, this creates more points where theatre not only exposes but actively inscribes tension between algorithmic abstractions and organic presence: Vulnerability, unpredictability, and human relationships maintain acerbic forces that cannot be computed under control. From start to finish, the trilogy proposes that through its digital surveillance, life is made legible and governable – yet the human body remains both object of control and source for resistance. It suggests that the theatre is a place where the ethical stakes of cybersecurity are not only debated abstractly; they are physically experienced. By staging the firewall versus flesh conflict, the plays insist that even within a digital panopticon, the body is still pertinent.

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