

ROBOCOP: THE RECUPERATION OF THE SUBJECT

Steve Best

We now live in the detritus of high-technology¹

Since cultural texts are deeply rooted in the ideological and social conditions of their time, it is no surprise that in the last decade or so Hollywood has been preoccupied with the postmodern themes of simulation, reproduction, doubling, and cloning. Films such as *The Stepford Wives*, *Boys From Brazil*, *Blade Runner*, and *The Terminator* have focused on the technological simulation/reproduction of the human body. Frequently, these films are part of a dystopian genre which symbolically encodes our deepest fears and anxieties about the present and the future. A key aspect of this fear concerns the erasure of human identity under advanced technological conditions.

This theme is dramatically evident in *Robocop*, the sleeper hit of summer 1987. *Robocop* tells the story of a Detroit police officer (Murphy) killed in action and resurrected as a cyborg super-cop programmed to restore law and order. His former memory returns, however, and he sets out to track down his killers. While *Robocop* provides the standard Hollywood fare of violence, humor, and sentimentality, it is also an acerbic attack on corporate capitalism and the mass media, as well as a dark meditation on the detritus of modernity and the fate of the subject in a post-industrial world. But, as a complex and contradictory text, *Robocop* is unable to push its thematics into the radical context they require and it succumbs to conservative and metaphysical positions.

POSTMODERN CINEMA

Postmodernity in Toxic USA

It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.

REM

In a general sense, postmodernism is what Fredric Jameson has termed an "inverted milleniarism": a burnt-out era lacking any sense of future, filled with a sense that it's all over with, that everything's been done (and done badly), that nothing lies ahead but degeneration or repetition of the same. Decline, disappearance, detritus — these are the passwords to the postmodern scene. If, as Marx has written, a social order continues to expand until it exhausts its possibilities, then the explosive growth of the whole Western order seems to be decelerating, imploding, and approaching an entropic breakdown. In postmodernity, late-bourgeois society confronts its own rationalist and technicist myths (truth, reason, freedom, totality, and representation) just as early bourgeois society confronted the naturalist and religious myths of feudalism.

As a new, complex, and rapidly changing social era, postmodernity poses a strong challenge to all political ideologies, left and right, to rethink their basic assumptions. Any ideology which is not completely impervious to the changes brought on by our transition to a late-capitalist society of signification becomes compelled to adapt to new conditions and struggle for hegemony on a social terrain which is shifting and destabilized, and for that reason open.

In this vein, *Robocop* is a meditation on the exhaustion of modernity. The wreckage of industrial modernity is visible everywhere in *Robocop*, not only in the graveyards of the steel mills — toxic dumps pushed aside to the margins of the urban metropolis, but in the anarchy of crime-ravaged "Old Detroit," and in the technified and mediated spaces of everyday life. Modernity stands as an empty husk which capitalism leaves behind as it exuviates into the new postmodern space, and *Robocop* attempts to negotiate this territory.

Thus, *Robocop* is perfectly "postmodern" — a panic film suffused with a sense of crisis precipitated by our rapid entrance into the brave new world of simulation, media, and high-technology. Stylistically, *Robocop* could also be identified as postmodern in its pastiche nature which implodes and combines numerous film genres (romance, sci-fi, detective, horror, revenge, the western, etc.). As a postmodern text, it betrays a scavaging amongst the debris of modernist styles, severed from the ideology of self-identity and subject/author, and recombined by the *bricoleur*. One could thus see *Robocop* as a recycled, updated, postmodern version of *High Noon*, *Frankenstein*, or, more recently, *Blade Runner*, itself a pastiche.²

But there are many ways in which *Robocop* is not a postmodern film and, ultimately, postmodernism is itself simply one more code or style constituting its complex pastiche. Although *Robocop* is a panic depiction of

a moribund modernity, it eschews other key apocalyptic postmodern themes — the end of political economy and the end of the social.

Capitalism is no missing referent in *Robocop*, rather it is foregrounded as the determining force behind labor conflicts, crime and corruption, social distress, cutthroat individualism, and the impoverishment of subjective life. "We will meet each new challenge with the same aggressive attitude," says Dick Jones, the malevolent vice-president of Omni-Consumer Products, and this perfectly expresses the present philosophy of capital as it moves beyond the cul-de-sacs of the old, used-up avenues of accumulation, and appropriates the new opportunities of the post-modern world.

Thus, in *Robocop* we witness not the demise of capitalism (Baudrillard), but its intensification (Mandel): the universalization of market relations, the transmutation of capital as abstract circulation of information and images, and the colonization of new economic spaces — urban gentrification, privatization of prisons and hospitals, automation of the workplace, mass media, and, that "final frontier," outer space. Crime, drugs, gambling, and prostitution also become important avenues of capital accumulation as the distinctions between civilian, business, and military, legal and illegal, order and disorder, implode in the movement of capital which is always already violent, immoral, and anarchic, and is itself an implosive logic, prior to and independent of the implosive effects of mass media.³

Similarly, we should see that *Robocop* depicts not some strict, unqualified, and vaguely formulated "end of the social" and its correlative thesis of "dead power" (Baudrillard) — abstract, semiotic, and disembodied — but rather the crisis of the social, the social under siege by capital and criminal forces, and their traumatic impact on individuals such as Murphy and his family. To the extent that individuals, while resisting the forces of atomization and alienation, still share an intersubjective world held together by lines of communication, empathy, and shared projects and needs, the "end of the social" is a theoretical mystification which erases complex material realities.⁴ Here the graphic depiction of violence in *Robocop* has a contradictory function: to serve as spectacle and so foreclose critical reflection (and so contribute to the decline of the social), and to remind us of the real, all-too-real, underbelly of a signifying society, the grim, everyday presence of violence, pain, death, and urban blight, the postmodern city as the crisis-ridden site of chronic social war, class struggle, and dehumanization.⁵

As a contradictory, disunified text, *Robocop* simultaneously advances a liberal critique of an immoral capitalism in need of rational control, a conservative recuperation of the social and the subject (legal and moral unities rooted in the traditional family governed by discipline, male authority, and the work ethic), and problematizes the postmodern claim that social, political, and economic reality have disappeared in the black hole of radical semiurgy by vividly representing and critiquing the material forces and

POSTMODERN CINEMA

ideologies which reduce the natural and social world to raw material for an interplanetary, panoptic capitalism.

Technology and Reification

*Belief in the omnipotence of technology is the specific form of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism.*⁶

While *Robocop* offers a vigorous critique of capitalism as an inhuman, ruthless, and corrupt society (as represented in the figures of Jones, Morton, and Boddicker), its critique is also directed against technology. In the paranoid, technophobic world of *Robocop*, technology is out of control. Throughout the film we see the human world trying to master nature but ultimately failing. Thus, the numerous failures of ED-209, the power failure at the SDI space station and its subsequent misfires, the return of Robocop's memory and former identity despite computerized programming — all signal the film's critique of technological reification as a flawless cybernetic control over the human lifeworld, albeit one already integrated with technology.

"They'll fix you," Robocop mordantly tells a wounded Lewis, his tough female partner, "They fixed everything." But it is clear at this point that "they" — the technocrats — cannot fix everything and *Robocop* satirically debunks technocratic ideology. Specifically, *Robocop* presents a timely and powerful message: the failed robot technology serves as a metaphor for and warning against the policies and attitudes behind SDI, the assumption that a "fail-safe" nuclear "protection" device can be created for the scientific management of world conflicts. *Robocop* suggests that if robots cannot be controlled, neither can more complex systems such as SDI, despite the assurance we receive daily from Reagan and his minions in the White House and universities.

Most generally, *Robocop* voices a warning against "technicism,"⁷ that ideology which sees technology as the solution to all problems and seeks an unqualified technical mastery of the world where massive system breakdown is "only a glitch" (Jones) requiring minor adjustment.⁸ The postmodern world is the victory of what Canadian theorist George Grant, following Nietzsche, has termed the "will to will," willing purely for its own sake, that is, for the sake of technology, a nihilistic absorption of human morals and values to the unlimited, autonomous movement of technology, the (tragic) completion of Enlightenment logic in the maximization and technification of the means of domination.⁹ Where technology has always constituted an important aspect of human existence, in the postmodern world it delimits the horizon of our existence and so informs our most basic attitudes and experience, marginalizing all other languages, recasting all values in a means/ends scheme of maximal efficiency, seeing all problems — be they the "disorders" of the body or the social — as resolvable through technology.

Ultimately, the goal of technicism is to replace natural and social life with technology and to create a totally artificial and processed environment to be controlled through the technologies of domination. Although prone to exaggeration, Baudrillard has provocatively described the increasing technologico-semiotic mediation of this contemporary experience and our gradual entrance into and immersion in a hermetic universe of signs, consumption, technique, cybernetic codes and models. His narrative of simulation helps us to understand the growing eclipse of the human lifeworld, and his distinction between the automaton and the robot provides a conceptual space in which to locate the historical specificity of the technologies depicted in *Robocop*.

In Baudrillard's scheme, the automaton belongs to the first stage of simulation, the "counterfeit era" or "classical period" of simulation which begins in the Renaissance and ends in the "industrial era." This is the first period after the symbolic era of feudal society when signs were non-arbitrary and referred to persons in distinct social obligations. With the bourgeois revolution, signs became "democratic" and arbitrary, referring only to their own "disenchanted signifieds,"¹⁰ now simulating an obligation and referent to the real world.

The arbitrary sign is the beginning of semiological hegemony, the triumph of signs over reality. Within this world, the first stage of simulation and semiotic domination, the "automoton" emerges, which Baudrillard sharply distinguishes from the "robot." The automaton belongs entirely to the order of analogy and resemblance. It is bound up with the metaphysics of being and appearance. The distinction between the human and the machine is still maintained, as is the distinction between truth and falsehood, being and appearance.

The robot, however, belongs to the next stage of simulation, the industrial era and its infinite multiplication of identical objects within the series. This is an advanced stage in the hegemony of technique (at the service of (re)production). It liquidates the metaphysics of being and appearance — much too other-worldly — and brings everything into the strictly technical logic of production ruled by exchange value. Unlike the automaton, the robot is not the analogy of "man," but his equivalent. Both are serialized simulacra.

If the automaton belongs to the first order of simulation, and the robot to the second order, then the cyborg must belong to the third stage of simulation, the era of "hyperreality" where images, signs, and codes engulf objective reality. *Robocop* is the product of this postmodern era of cybernetics, media, and simulation. On a Baudrillardian scheme, *Robocop* is neither the analogy of "man," nor his equivalent, but a computer generated video being that surpasses man, a prosthetic being of a prosthetic age, where signs are "realler-than-real" and stand in for the world they erase. The scientific/medical replacement of human parts, in addition to being

POSTMODERN CINEMA

a graphic representation of a technological reality, is a metaphor for the replacement of nature, representation, reality, and society in a technologically processed, automated, semiurgic consumer world which proliferates signs and simulacra from multiple reproductive models. "Everything is obliterated only to begin again,"¹¹ resurrected within technique and hyperreal semiurgy. The sudden rebirth of Murphy as Robocop speaks equally of the mutation of our age as the age of mutation.

Postmodern Bodies

*It is our plight to be processed through the technological simulacrum; to participate intensively and integrally in a 'technostructure' which is nothing but a vast simulation and 'amplification' of the bodily senses.*¹²

Robocop is the perfect metaphor of our postmodern condition and postmodern bodies, symbolizing a new, "emergent" (Williams) form of subjectivity which is increasingly technologically mediated. He represents, first, what Jameson has termed the "waning of affect."¹³ This does not mean the literal death of emotions for Jameson, but the reduction of the expressive energies of modernism (such as angst) to a flat, monotonous, solipsistic and lifeless plane, a robotization of the life-world. In one sense, Jameson is describing a mechanization of emotions, their implosion into a closed machine-like cycle, an affective decline such as where Robocop's blank stares *from* the video screen parallel our dull gaze *into* it. But, in another sense, Jameson is describing the explosion of emotions in a diffuse and discontinuous schizoid world, an internal violence such as Robocop comes to know when jolted by memories of his former self, his lifeworld reduced to staccato bursts of conflicting "intensities" ("I can feel them, but I can't remember them") where meaning is transcoded as processed information.

More literally Robocop represents not the waning of affect, but the technification of the human body. He is the fantasy expression of our new "technobodies" (Kroker), "half-metal, half-flesh" (Grant), a completely "new man" who is daily "x-rayed by television" (McLuhan), a video being whose very body is transformed into some sort of "operational screen" irradiated within the informational circuits of ecstatic communication (Baudrillard), quantified, rationalized, fragmented, and commodified (Adorno and Horkheimer).

Drawing from McLuhan, Arthur Kroker has described the technological dialectic of postmodernity.¹⁴ First, we find the full and final exteriorization of our senses in technology — the "technological extensions" (McLuhan) of human experience. If the wheel was an extension of the human foot, then informational technologies are an extension of our central nervous system (as Samuel Morse was the first to write) and the computer is an extension of our brain. Modern electronic technologies bring about a

final exteriorization of the senses, and "complete the cycle of mechanization of the human sensorium."¹⁵

But since, on McLuhan's conception, the (technological) environment is not a passive container, but a dynamic shaping process which "works us over completely," altering not only our social relations, but our very "ratio of senses," the technological sensorium produced as a simulation of the human body returns to encompass the body in a pervasive, but invisible merger of technology and biology, in the loss of a substantial distance between the body and its technological extensions, in the integration of the body into Sony Walkman's, IBM computers screens, and the semi-otic surfeit of consumer capital.¹⁶

It is this merger and the fact that it has gone unnoticed, that motivated McLuhan's theorizing and his attempt to shock us into a heightened awareness of the transformative work of technology and media. One could also say this is a potential effect of *Robocop* which dramatizes the fact that we're approaching a closed system that adapts us to its workings. "[T]he new media ... are nature."¹⁷

As a technified, schizoid subject, *Robocop* symbolizes the disintegration of the bourgeois humanist ego, its ruination in the postmodern scene of toxic poisoning, technological deprivation, surveillance, and body invasion. In a brilliant visual scene, we witness the resurrection of Murphy as *Robocop* from a series of interior point-of-view shots. We assume the visual field of an objectified looker which implodes Sartre's distinction between the objectifying subject and the objectified object of the gaze. We witness the dawn of a new subject, an ontogenic mutation which recapitulates the phylogenetic transformation of subjects in techno-capitalism.

But there is still a higher level of literalization in *Robocop*: technobodies are becoming a literal possibility as genetic engineering moves closer to the simulation/reproduction of life. As we move into the twenty-first century, science not only has been able to substitute technology for biology (artificial hearts, etc.), but seems capable of simulating life itself through technological creation (genetic splicing) — a giant leap beyond McLuhan's technological extension of the body. Is the brave new world of full technological simulation only a matter of time? What is certain is that the scientization of capital and the capitalization of science brush ethical questions aside, or that a new "ethics" has emerged based on technological imperatives. The humanist language of valuation doesn't cease in postmodernity: its displaced referent becomes technique and simulates a relation to a specific subject world long ago surpassed.

POSTMODERN CINEMA

Utopic/Dystopic Projections

He doesn't have a name. He has a program — he's a product.

Morton

Thus, *Robocop* conveys an intense awareness of our new "postmodern condition." It articulates the fear of a completely alienated, rationalized, mechanical world where human beings and their body parts are technologically processed, where emotions are lacking, where the ego is in ruins, where personal identity is absent, and where simulation approaches perfection. The fear in *Robocop* is two-fold: that human beings will be *replaced* by machines (automation), and that human beings are *becoming* machines (alienation), spiritually and emotionally lifeless rationalists, technologically processed and simulated beings.

Both developments augur the end of the lifeworld in its implosion with cybernetic systems. This grisly fusion is vividly portrayed in the homecoming scene. As Robocop walks through the door of his former existence, he confronts not the living warmth of his family, but the cold technological pretense of an automated salesman to guide him through the designer environment. The images and sounds of his past life, already technologically processed, merge with the pre-recorded video salespitch. Bereft and metaphysically estranged, the lonely cyborg smashes his fist through the television screen in an act of rebellion against the reified object world of which he is inalterably a part.

Importantly, *Robocop* not only dramatizes the dehumanization of untrammelled technological development, it resists the postmodern fatalism of someone like Baudrillard who concludes that the Subject has lost its battle with the Object and so should surrender and embrace "fatal strategies." While *Robocop* depicts a cyberblitzed, post-catastrophic, hyperreal, technified world, it also suggests that technology *cannot achieve its goal* of a perfectly enclosed, self-referential entombment, that simulation strategies do not necessarily succeed, and that the human subject is not so easily erased. Robocop's struggle to understand what has happened to him and who he is, his identification with his former human self irrevocably entrapped within a steel body, his rebellion against bureaucracy and his corporate creators, and the forging of his own will against a technological determination, constitute this film's undeniably utopian moments. *Robocop* dramatizes the resilience of a subject, albeit a cyborg, amidst the most incredibly reified and subjugating conditions, and allegorizes its attempts to find meaning and value within a corrupt and decadent postmodern world. The film preserves a moment of struggle and refusal that is now threatened with extinction. Thus, the *dystopic* projection of a hyper-alienated future coincides with a *utopic* hope for spiritual survival, salvation, and redemption. This key theme, however, is given a reactionary coding as the film conforms to its own — or that of Hollywood's — "directive

four." Thus, where Robocop could not arrest any top executive of OCP, *Robocop* cannot deconstruct the law of genre, the ideology of traditional narrative, and the metaphysics of the bourgeois subject.

Post-mortem/Post-modern Identity

Yes, I'm a cop.

Robocop

*First identity had to be constructed, ultimately it will have to be overcome. That which is identical with itself is without happiness.*¹⁸

Where subjectivities are increasingly in peril, technified within conditions of cybernetic control, narcotized by consumerist pathology, pathologically destabilized within the material and psychic economy of incessant innovation with nihilism as its by-product, a renewed search for radical subjectivity becomes a necessary precondition for an emancipatory politics. Thus, as George Grant saw, any movement that seeks to transcend the present technological horizon must begin with a reformation of human identity.¹⁹ But this project, at once philosophical and political, must proceed in a way that avoids a return to (1) the humanist conception of the subject as a unified and rational ego, a pre-given essence positioned outside of determining social and historical forces (the epistemological basis for domination of the social and natural world); (2) the Romantic conception of an authentic, natural subjectivity defined in opposition to technology (a reactionary naiveté which fails to grasp the emancipatory aspects of technology); while also avoiding (3) the post-structuralist celebration of a schizophrenically decentered self (which perfectly coheres with the ideology of fashion in late-capitalism).²⁰

And here is a key point where *Robocop* must be understood not as a postmodern, or even critical, text, but rather as a conservative, technophobic narrative governed by traditional narrative codes of closure and redemption.²¹ For Robocop gradually *overcomes* the alienation of his technological processing and *resynthesizes* his fragmented memories into a complete *recuperation* of his identity — that outrageous final moment when Robocop reclaims his former name/self. In a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Robocop identifies his object being with his subject being, Robocop with Murphy. Not as the same Murphy, of course, but as a higher expression of his former self, a "concrete" identity achieved through the movement of alienation (in this case, not the "self-alienation" of a Subject, but as caused by an external attack on the subject by capitalism and technology). In a sense, there never was a rupture in the transformation of Murphy to Robocop for Murphy became the moral gunslinger he always wanted to be (as evident by his identification with the TV cop T.J. Laser). To

POSTMODERN CINEMA

paraphrase Camus, we must conclude this cyborg is happy — a postmodern self at one with its technification, alienation, and commodification in the electronic sensorium/marketplace.

Thus, while *Robocop* shows postmodernism as a site of intense struggle where the subject must battle against the forces of dehumanization and reification, it also suggests that the subject will survive its integration into cybernetic technology without resisting/appropriating it at a political and collective level. *Robocop* is exemplary of the conservative project to save the disintegrating bourgeois subject — under assault by the very forces which conservatives valorize — and resurrect it as a moral/legal entity, and as a traditional male subject — macho, individualist, heterosexual, conservative. Beneath this hero-redeemer's steel plating lies the old bourgeois ego, safe within the inner truth of natural law.

But *Robocop* deconstructs itself. As typical of mainstream crisis and dystopian genres, *Robocop* concludes with the figure of a wasted wreckage — not the capsized boat of *The Poseidon Adventure*, nor the smouldering high-rise of *The Towering Inferno*, but the battered and damaged body of a cyborg already constructed from the ruined fragments of a human being — which foregrounds the very issues and implications the film, once it has raised them, tries to evade through narrative closure.²² As a panic film and narrative which dramatizes the de-authorization of the modernist subject, *Robocop* tells us as much about postmodern capitalism and subjectivity as it does about U.S. mythology and bourgeois metaphysics in the current stage of capitalist crisis and decline.

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Notes

1. Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984), p 30. Sections of this paper are much indebted to Kroker's book.
2. See Fredric Jameson: "in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and the voices of styles in the imaginary museum." "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Washington: Bay Press, 1986), p. 115. Jameson has not considered whether pastiche itself could be some sort of "stylistic invention," nor whether, just as the subject has always been "dead," stylistic invention too has, and so there might be nothing radically new about postmodern "writing." One might also use *Robocop* against Jameson's claim that parody is extinct and incompatible with pastiche. For Jameson, both are "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style," but pastiche "is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without that satirical impulse, without laughter" (p. 114). If one reads

STEVE BEST

Robocop as a dystopia played just "for kicks," as does Pauline Kael (*The New Yorker*, 8/10/87), then Jameson's point is well-taken. But I see no basis for this claim. *Robocop*'s satire of corporate capitalism, mass media, technicism, and the ideology of progress (such as is evident in the name of the futuristic car "6000 SUX," and the ironic OCP billboards, "Delta City: The Future has a Silver Lining") is too sustained and is tied to serious issues such as a critique of SDI. Any firm rejection of "postmodern" satire as a contradiction in terms is premised on an (elitist and nostalgic?) identification of genuine satire with high modernism. While *Robocop* may not have the artistry of a Jonathan Swift, it remains a strong and effective satire.

3. On the subject of capitalism and illegality, Mandel observes: "Whereas the average capitalist in the nineteenth century respected the law as a matter of course, in the interests of the orderly peace and quiet and his own business, the average capitalist of the twentieth century lives more and more on the margin of the law, if not in actual contravention of it." *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), pp. 511-512.
4. Thus, the reactionary moment of Baudrillard is to project onto the victims of aggression a psychology which seeks nothing beyond the will to a passive consumption of spectacles. See *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).
5. The postmodern thesis of "catastrophe" can be said to "completely ignore the central hallmark of late capitalism — the *crisis of capitalist relations of production* unleashed by the development of all the contradictions inherent in the capitalist mode of production." Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 521.
6. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 501.
7. Technicism is "an urgent belief in the historical inevitability of the fully realized technological society," the ideological linkage of technology and freedom. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 247.
8. For a vivid analysis of this ideology and how it was applied in the Vietnam war, see James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986). I have reviewed this book in *Socialist Review*, 1988/2.
9. See Kroker, *The Canadian Mind*, pp 20-51.
10. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 85.
11. *Ibid.* p. 22.
12. Kroker, *The Canadian Mind*, p. 57.
13. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism, *New Left Review*, #146, p. 64.
14. See *Technology and The Canadian Mind* and *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Volume XI, Number 1-2: 1987.
15. McLuhan quoted in Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, p. 75.
16. "Environments are not passive wrappings, but active processes which work us over completely, massaging the ratio of the senses and imposing their silent assumptions. But environments are invisible. Their ground-rules, pervasive structure, and overall pattern elude easy perception." Marshal McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p.68.
17. McLuhan quoted in Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, p.56.

POSTMODERN CINEMA

18. Theodor Adorno, quoted in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1986), p. 27.
19. See Arthur Kroker's discussion of Grant in *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, pp.20-51. Similarly, Jameson observes that postmodernism necessitates "the reinvention of possibilities of cognition and perception that allow social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle between classes," "Afterword" in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso Books, 1977), p. 212.
20. For a sustained attempt to rethink the nature of the subject, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), and Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
21. Where someone like Jameson would look immediately to the utopian moment of redemption and narrative closure as a genuine longing for the resolution of all the warring conflicts, divisions, and contradictions created by capitalism, as well as the liberation of Desire from Necessity (and such themes may well constitute part of the contradictory, polysemic content of a text), one must remain skeptical that such themes, however complexly encoded, will be *decoded* in a progressive rather than conservative way, since cultural consumers are so strongly conditioned to decode and identify with conservative themes.
22. "All such metaphoric meaning schemes can be deconstructed, simply because it is the nature of [the] anxiety [of crisis films] both to turn away from the source of anxiety and to inadvertently point to its source." Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 68.