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The Prophetic Vision of Robocop 3

Andrew Thompson

Abstract
With this paper, I reviewed the final installment of the Robocop movie trilogy through a satirical, post-Occupy Wall Street lens.

Keywords: Robocop, Occupy Wall Street

Author Interview

Which professors (if any) have helped you in your research?
Professor Omar Moran has helped me.

What are your research/creative interests?
I am interested by how reality is perceived in photographs.

What are your plans after earning your degree? What is your ultimate career goal?
I intend to display a number of exhibitions locally and abroad. My ultimate career goal is to have museum exhibitions and to publish books about contemporary art theory and criticism.
Robocop 3 is the second sequel to the smash hit Robocop, which was originally directed by Paul Verhoeven in 1987. In this 1993 version of Robocop, Omi Consumer Products (OCP), the creators of Robocop and Guardians of Detroit city, are on the verge of bankrupt and plan to sell off to an Asian investor. The investor has devised a plan to destroy Detroit only to rebuild the first entirely corporate owned township, known as Delta City. Though out the movie, Robocop will turn against OCP, fights alongside the resistance and ultimately defeats the corporate invaders. While the movie is poorly acted, directed and conceived there are a number a plot points that seem almost prophetic from the vantage point of 2013. Among them are: a bankrupt Detroit city, the relocation of civilians/natives from property, and the lack of punishment for CEO’s who’ve ruined world economies.

In the background of this story is the instilled “American Jesus” metaphor for Robocop which original director Paul Verhoeven explains:

“'The point of 'Robocop,' of course, is it is a Christ story,” Verhoeven said. “It is about a guy that gets crucified after 50 minutes, then is resurrected in the next 50 minutes and then is like the super-cop of the world, but is also a Jesus figure as he walks over water at the end […] I put something just underneath the water so [Weller] could walk over the water and say this wonderful line... 'I am not arresting you anymore.' Meaning, 'I'm going to shoot you.' And that is of course the American Jesus” (Rosenberg).

Yet this version of Robocop takes a very Nietzschean twist, because OCP, the creator and thus the Father of Robocop has become corrupted. OCP now brutally removes unarmed civilians from their homes, hires a paramilitary group to inflict corporate will and intends to sell its corporate assets to investors; including land it does not legally own. For Robocop, whose prime directives are “Serve the public trust”, “Protect the innocent”, and “Uphold the law”, his father has betrayed him; his god has died. The fourth prime directive was, “Never oppose an OCP Officer”. With the help of Dr. Lazarus this commandment is removed and Robocop become a Nietzschean Übermensch, freed from the control of Christian morals, or in this metaphor, OCP command. In his way, Robocop becomes a super Jesus for justice.

Robocop is not the only movie Jesus metaphor. In the latest Man of Steel movie, Superman sheds his original Jewish heritage and becomes an American Christ. “The explosion of Planet Krypton from the Superman tale is partly based on the Genesis story, and partly a reflection of what was happening in the lives of Superman’s Jewish creators, [Joe] Siegel and [Jerry] Shuster. “The world their parents had left behind in Eastern Europe was being destroyed. Superman’s escape from Krypton was like the World War II Kindertransports [trainloads of children sent out from Nazi Europe]” (Leon). Yet, in Man of Steel when his father Jor-El sends his son to earth he tells his wife, “He’ll be a god to them”. Another obvious sign, “occurs during a climactic battle: Superman jumps from General Zod’s ship and hovers in the sky with his arms out-stretched like the crucifix” (Craig). Another Jesus movie metaphor was the Disney released science fiction dud, John Cater of Mars. In one scene, “John Carter will enter a tomb, seemingly dead, and it’s only after he rises again, within the next few days, that he can finish his work” (Wickman). I point out these American Jesus metaphors in movies to set the table for the What Would Jesus Do question in Robocop 3.

Unlike Superman’s father who dies and remains in heaven, Robocop’s father (OCP) lives long enough to become corrupted and no longer godly. OCP begins their corruption by devising a plan, with the help of a Japanese mega-corporation, to forcibly remove civilians from their property. It is a striking resemblance to the seventh American President Andrew Jackson’s campaign for, what he called, “Indian removal”. “Working on behalf of white settlers who want to grow cotton on the Indians’ land, the federal government forced them to leave their homelands and walk thousands of miles to specially designated “Indian territory” across the Mississippi River” (History Channel). Jackson had spent years as an Army general leading brutal campaigns against Native Americans throughout Georgia, Alabama and parts of Florida. Despite laws that required the government to negotiate removal treaties fairly, “Jackson and his government frequently ignored the letter of the
law and forced Native Americans to vacate lands they had lived on for generations” (History Channel). A few self-appointed Cherokee representatives negotiated a treaty with the federal government but they were betrayers of their people. “The instrument in question in not the act of our nation” wrote the [Cherokee] nation’s principal chief, John Ross, in a letter to the U.S. Senate protesting the treaty. “We are not parties to its covenants; it has not received the sanction of our people” (History Channel). Despite nearly 16,000 Cherokee signatures Congress approved the treaty anyways.

The newly homeless resistance fighters in Robocop 3 are quickly labeled as terrorist only to be hunted and shot down by OCP’s paramilitary group known as Urban Rehabilitators. After witnessing the slaughtering of innocent people, including his former partner, Robocop joins the resistance. That is what a compassionate, law abiding super Jesus would do.

There is a real world example of a former police officer joining the resistance. Former Philadelphia police captain Ray Lewis, became a beacon of symbolic hope when he joined the Occupy Wall Street protests in his full uniform. Before he was arrested he was seen holding a sign that read ‘NYPD don’t be Wall St Mercenaries’. Lewis has been quoted “Here they are worrying about dirty parks when people are starving to death, where people are freezing, where people are sleeping in subways and they’re concerned about a dirty park. That’s obnoxious, it’s arrogant, it’s ignorant, it’s disgusting” (Bates). Eventually, in Robocop 3, all the police officers turn against OCP and their quest for urban relocation. The fictional, Sergeant Warren Reed proclaims, “Driving people from their homes is no work for a cop!” before removing his badge and dropping it at the feet of a senior OCP officer. Real life former police captain, Ray Lewis stated during the forceful breakup of the Occupy Wall Street protests, “You should, by law, only use force to protect someone’s life or to protect them from being bodily injured” and “the number one thing that they always have in their favor that they seldom use is negotiation - continue to talk, and talk and talk to people” (Bates).

After a civil war like confrontation in the streets of Cadillac Heights, Detroit between the Urban Rehabilitators and the former police officers, Robocop swoops down to save the day. He eliminates the leader of the Urban Rehabilitators and the robotic assassins sent from Japan in one mighty explosion. In the flaming aftermath, a limousine pulls up and out spills the former OCP C.E.O. who does not get arrested, nor acknowledge any fault or blame on OCP’s behalf. At the very worst, he gets fired from the company by the more evil Japanese C.E.O. and then insulted by Robocop, “My friends call me Murphy. You can call me Robocop”.

The Japanese C.E.O., and architect of the forceful rehabilitation cum hostile takeover of Detroit City, gets off even easier. He walks to within a few feet of Robocop, bows and drives away.

So what does this mean? Despite being the leaders responsible for all the hardship, destruction and warfare, they get to drive away into the idyllic sunset? Doesn’t this sound familiar? There have been many C.E.O.’s that have been fired and given obscene amounts of money to leave after failing, “even after the uproar over Jack Welch’s $417 million farewell kiss from General Electric Co. more than a decade ago” (Green). Jack Welch is just one example, “At the top of the list compiled by Bloomberg are three executives who each would receive almost a quarter of a billion dollars or more if they were sent packing: McKesson Corp. (MCK) CEO John Hammergren, eligible for $303.4 million; CBS Corp. (CBS) chief Les Moonves, with $251.4 million; and Discovery Communications Inc. (DISCA)’s David Zaslav with $224.7 million” (Green). With safety nets this gargantuan, it is easy to lose sight of the plight of less fortunate civilians.

But what about the main architects of blood shed? Those who plot hostile take overs of foreign lands? Like the Japanese C.E.O. in Robocop 3 most of them just bow out and go away unpunished. In 2008, an International Criminal Court prosecutor wanted to bring charges against Sudan’s president, Omar al-Bashir for crime against humanity and war crimes.

“I have no sympathy for people who make others suffer. Nevertheless, I wonder at the International Criminal Court's
pick from the assortment of war criminals? Why al-Bashir? Is it because Sudan is a powerless state, and the International Criminal Court hasn't the courage to name George W. Bush and Tony Blair as war criminals” (Roberts)?

I do not expect any Western President or Prime Minister to be charged with war crimes despite, “the highest estimate of Darfur casualties is 400,000, one-third the number of Iraqis who have died as a result of Bush's invasion” because Darfur does not have the same economic power that the U.S. and Britain exerts (Roberts).

“If you're waiting for ex-President Bush, former Vice President Cheney and the whole host of their accompanying war criminals to be tried for any crime by any foreign nation, forget it. It's not going to happen” (Goodman). This is because the United States has military forces in more than 100 countries and the status of forces agreements “protect even the lowliest American private soldier in virtually all of them from prosecution by a host government if he or she is carrying out an official duty” (Goodman). Basically, if you have the power, the money and the influence you are untouchable. This is especially true if you are acting under direct orders from the federal government. “President Bush claims that the enormous destruction and death he has brought to Iraq and Afghanistan are necessary in order for Americans to be safe. If we are accepting excuses this feeble, Milosovic passed muster with his excuse that as the head of state he was obliged to try to preserve the state's territorial integrity” (Roberts).

In the case of Andrew Jackson’s crimes against the Native Americans, his punishment came as being the face of a twenty-dollar bill. Which is hardly a punishment at all, if anything Jackson is portrayed as a hero while Native Americans continue to struggle. There is an old saying that 'time heals all wounds' and I would like to add, that money covers all crimes. Unfortunately there is no happy ending in real life.

References


