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“Man Made and Remade: the Avatars of Masculinity in *Robocop* (1987) and its Remake (2014)”

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It is tempting to begin with a truism: nothing comes from nothing. This is a belief articulated by many in the twentieth century, among whom George Steiner in *After Babel*,¹ where he presents culture as a long chain of translations and transformations of verbal, thematic or formal constants. The problem raised by the notion of a syntax of culture, however, is the same as with language, as exemplified by de Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*: if all one ever does is move around “building blocks” following the constraints imposed by a system, what of individual creativity? If the question is, generally speaking, of little import to most speakers of a given language, things are different when it comes to art and culture: finding one’s voice, embodying a sort of progress for one’s chosen form of expression and leaving one’s mark on the latter, is what being an artist is about. The question of whether there is such a thing as true artistic singularity might be insoluble (no artist exists, who has not been influenced in some way, no matter how unpleasant the idea might be to him)², but one could say that in the field of popular culture, the twenty-first century inverts the proposition, especially in the collaborative form of art that is the cinema. If there is of course a form of crass commercialism at work behind the bevy of sequels, spin-offs, and remakes we are subjected to on an almost daily basis, it is also possible to envisage this familiarity the receiver is supposed to recognize in the cultural products he or she is exposed to as built in the works themselves. The spectators’ sense of agnition would then only be the flip side of the creators’ self-consciousness, recognition and admittance of an overbearing and multifaceted heritage.

In any case, on both ends of the creative spectrum, there is now in popular culture a sense of the inescapability of the reiteration of the same. It is a form of culture that *knows* itself to be always-already-made, ready-made, easily remade, all too aware that it constantly cannibalizes itself for parts; but if creative novelty is no longer of the essence, might the risk not be a certain disenchantment with art and the potentialities of culture? The sentiment of an exhaustion of the narrative models is certainly greater in genre production than elsewhere; no film today is perceived outside a vast, *explicit* normative system of reference, quotation and borrowing, and it is the explicitness of this self-reflexivity that characterizes genre fiction today, as the commercial and critical success of so openly referential a director as Quentin Tarantino demonstrates. The creator is no longer *homo faber* (“man the maker”), but *homo fictus* (“man modelled”), one is tempted to say.

Not so long ago, however, it was still possible to consider oneself original. In the documentary *Flesh + Steel: the Making of Robocop* on the *Robocop* DVD³, Paul Verhoeven explains, ingenuously one suspects, that he was not under the impression at the time of the

¹ George Steiner, *After Babel - Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: O.U.P. 1977.

² See for example the many ways in which poets distance themselves from their forefathers and negotiate their debt as inheritors, in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 1973.

³ Jeffrey Schwarz, *Flesh + Steel: the Making of Robocop* (2001), as presented on the DVD of *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) as collected in *The Robocop Trilogy*, 2002, MGM Corporation Home Video.

making of the film that he was stealing from such classics as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or *Metropolis*; even such an obvious connection as J. Whale's *Frankenstein* and its "mechanical" rendering of Mary Shelley's somewhat more organic creature⁴ is discarded as of no or little consequence on the finished product. At best, he was an unwilling inheritor and he wouldn't let the heritage inherit the heir, to transplant Marx's phrase in a new context. The legacy, grudgingly acknowledged though it may have been in 2001, sounds to have been far from stifling for him, at least consciously.

An analogy could be made here with Robocop himself, man-made and yet who eventually turns into the creature no man made. He, too, escapes determinism, after old, dead tissue is almost mystically reanimated with new life. Robocop escaped his programming, on film and as a real-life project, Verhoeven seems to say. However, as a figure, or perhaps a pop culture icon, he created a new model, spawning a prolific if inconsistent franchise composed of sequels, TV movies and series, cartoons, comic-books, and the by-now mandatory remake. Of course, if ever there was a character worthy of being reworked and recycled in the context of mass production, it is this metal man, forged in a system (1980's Hollywood) that was then just beginning to understand the advantages of establishing a template for the purpose of churning out stories; it was about that time, a decade after the success of *Star Wars*, that the practice of film sequels became truly generalized, as the further adventures of Indiana Jones, John McClane, John Rambo, Axel Foley and their likes testify.

Obviously, the scope of this paper cannot be the whole of the *Robocop* franchise, or even just the film legacy, although a study of at least *Robocop 2* (Irvin Kirschner, 1990) would be interesting, in conjunction perhaps with the more recent publication in comic-book form⁵ of an adaptation of the original screenplay written for the sequel by Frank Miller, whose *Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics, 1986) had been at least tonally a major inspiration for the first film; arguably, this comic constitutes a re-making of Verhoeven's *Robocop* in its own right, but the elusiveness of this complex object, "Robocop 2," its transmedial nature and problematic shared authorship would make it a daunting task. One thing can be noted, however: the way in which both Irvin Kershner's 1990 film and Frank Miller's comic find it necessary to reduplicate the key episode in the original material by re-staging an erasure through violence of the hero's self: reprogrammed at the hands of "pro-social" forces, Robocop imposes self-willed electrocution upon himself to overcome the determinism of his status as machine. Even once established as a very identifiable figure after the first film, he has to be almost destroyed in order to be "rebuilt" anew. Obviously, this may be seen as symptomatic of the "anxiety of influence" seizing artists acting as continuators, and not creators in the literal sense, an almost meta-artistic comment on their own effort and relation to the original material. However, one has to consider how central the *reconstruction* of Robocop is to not just those two, but to all the iterations of the figure. The main character's sacrifice is the heart of the matter, as it were, and the most important common denominator

⁴ The two bolts at the base of the creature's neck were imagined by make-up artist Jack Pierce, and its mechanical, clumsy gestures, robot-like, elude the creature's mastery of bodily motion after a while in the original novel.

⁵ Frank Miller, Steven Grant and Juan Jose Ryp, *Frank Miller's Robocop issues 1-9*. Avatar Press, 2003-2006.

between all the pieces of the franchise seems to be precisely the re-making of the hero: of Alex Murphy into Robocop, later of Robocop into himself as he should be. The main character's sacrifice, through his martyrdom, expresses the "making holy" (if we follow the etymology of the word "sacrifice") of an ordinary creature, its access to transcendence.

Arguably, then, re-making (and the related question of identity in both senses of the word), as a process is part of Robocop's DNA. The difference between sacrifice as a figure and the more mundane process of film remakes (both re-enactments of sorts) lies in the fact that the former entails repetition with a transcendence, an added value that comes without saying, while what a remake adds to the original is a question that is always subjected to close scrutiny, and open for discussion. Through its evocation of a man being re-made by technological means, and its insistence on sacrifice, *Robocop*, one could claim, already calls for a remake. Now remaking and sacrificing bear at least this much in common, that in a sense they always rest on an ambivalent celebration of the initial drive. As Jean Ungaro writes,

The celebration of sacrifice in general pertains to (...) ritualized repetition: the sacrificer's gesture performs again the original gesture of the first one to have accomplished the founding act, as repetition refers to what was, what has already happened at another point in time. Sacrificing is a murderous gesture, but at the same time, it is supposed to be a loving gesture, even one of adoration, to be equated with an offering to the mightier powers ruling over both the world and men.⁶ [my translation]

In the documentary, Verhoeven acknowledges this dimension for Murphy/Robocop, whom he calls "an American Jesus," and it is striking that he should acknowledge the biblical intertext nothing loath, while refusing to trace his creation's lineage back to a more cinematographic inheritance, by explicitly rejecting, for example, the influence of the design of Fritz Lang's Maria in *Metropolis* as an inspiration for Robocop's armour. It is worth noting, then, that before his film asks the question, "What does man transcended look like?" it asks, rather, "What does he look at?" Indeed, after Murphy's death, the film fades to black, and when light returns, Robocop is first presented not externally, in terms of his new appearance, but as a point of view, the essence of film one could say -an *I* reduced to an *eye*. He first comes into existence through a long sequence filmed in fragmented point of view shots, in a low definition video format, clips that narrate, through his being switched on and off repeatedly, the various stages of the process of his "activation" (a birth more than a rebirth) at the hands of a team of scientists, under the supervision of an ambitious executive. Narratively, the choice of a change in film grammar at this point (subjective camera was not the principal mode of storytelling in the film so far) corresponds to a change in the focus of the story, and even the genre of the film: the fairly conventional, if futuristic, blue collar buddy movie gives way to an examination of the status of the individual when faced to extreme dehumanization from the corporate, capitalistic forces. Resorting to subjective camera here means that the film

⁶ Jean Ungaro, « Le corps sacrificiel du héros » in Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb (ed.), *Le cinéma des années Reagan : un modèle hollywoodien ?* P 170 : « La célébration du sacrifice relève en général... de la répétition ritualisée : le geste du sacrificateur refait le geste du premier qui a accompli l'acte originaire, la répétition faisant référence à ce qui a été, à ce qui s'est déjà produit dans un autre temps. Le geste du sacrifice est un geste meurtrier mais il est censé, en même temps, être geste d'amour ou d'adoration, synonyme d'offrande aux puissances supérieures qui commandent à l'existence du monde et des hommes ».

is no less being reset than the main character, and the fact that the focus should be on Murphy's vision, and not the machinery that produces the "robot-cop," is far from incidental.

Although ensuring continuity through identification with the main character for the spectator (or perhaps forcing it upon the latter), this disconnection of the narrative regime also puts into effect an erasure of the default parameters for the film, and this intradiegetic rebooting paves the way for an ontological sleight of hand. By any right, the creature that survives in the second part of the film is not the man Alex Murphy, or even a man for that matter: the off-hand remark from an executive that the scientists can "ditch the hand" that could be saved as they reconstruct the body leaves no doubt as to the preservation of his literal manhood. Even the secondary sex characteristics, we can assume, are gone (what's physically left of Murphy, his head, is completely hairless when he takes off the helmet towards the end). Sexless (as the erasure of his masculinity obviously did not give way to feminization or androgyny), what is left of Murphy⁷ is in a sense a *tabula rasa*, certainly a conundrum in light of gender, an aberration that only a teratology of the sexes could account for. His *dis-memberment*, however, is only one of the ways through which he might be established as no longer being a member of the class human beings; his lack of a social anchorage, the loss of his status as family man (as his wife and son left the city), is, the film insists, what might truly dehumanize, and as we shall see, devirilize, him. This is the point of the flashbacks regularly interspersed throughout the second part of the film, those ethereal domestic scenes establishing very explicitly a connection through the memory process between who Murphy was before and what Robocop is now. Therefore, the film posits not just a professional continuity between the human cop and the robot-cop, but also one of the mind, and chooses the endurance view of identity over that of identity as perdurance.⁸ In other words, the film claims rather counter-intuitively, it is not some minor characteristics from Murphy that endure into Robocop, but some basic, ontological, inalienable principle and, if anything, the imposed metamorphosis was instrumental in confirming his true nature.

Man re-made remains Man, it seems, and what makes Robocop so, and not "just" a robot, is first and foremost the survival in him of a sort of "father drive." Of course, the huge gun he carries around in a compartment in his leg is a transparent phallic symbol, but more importantly, it is the symbol of his fatherhood. Early on, it is established that Murphy is validated as a policeman in the eyes of his son because he can emulate with his gun what a character from a TV series does with his. This trick of the hand survives into Robocop as a

⁷ This is not necessarily true for Robocop himself, as the armour, with its pectoral muscles aggressively on display, corresponds to an athletic physique that leaves little doubt as to what gender the completed creature is to be classified in.

⁸ « ... le perdurantisme se représente chaque objet existant au-delà d'un instant comme une somme de parties temporelles connectées. Le temps n'est donc pas un milieu que traverseraient les objets spatiaux comme c'est le cas dans la conception classique de la substance : c'est l'une des dimensions même de leur existence au même titre que les trois dimensions de l'espace euclidien, ce qui vaut au perdurantisme son qualificatif de 'quadridimensionnalisme'. A l'inverse, en considérant que les objets persistent en étant 'entièrement' présents à chaque instant de leur carrière temporelle, l'endurantisme rejette l'idée même de parties temporelles et refuse de pousser plus loin l'analogie entre le temps et l'espace : les objets existent dans l'espace et au travers du temps ». Filipe Drapeau Contim, in *Qu'est-ce que l'identité ?* Paris: Vrin, 2010. P. 62. »Ce qui est nouveau et controversé dans le perdurantisme, c'est d'affirmer que les objets ordinaires ont des parties temporelles au même titre que les processus » ; p. 63.

quasi-reflex, but also as a symbol, when he twirls his gun around his finger after every shootout. While the criminals in the film indulge in a rather puzzling phallic arms race culminating with the use of a bazooka, their use of weaponry is purely destructive; Robocop's, by being signed and almost dedicated, celebrates his fatherhood. Tellingly, it is this trick that will lead Lewis to reconcile the figure of Robocop and Alex Murphy, and this recognition validates explicitly what the film posits implicitly. The film's biting social satire doesn't apply to gender roles, and it endorses a strict adherence to the conventional coding of masculinity, exalting strength and fatherhood.

One might think it fares better as far as women are concerned: Lewis, with her urchin cut and gait, is not coded as feminine, and the fact that there is no sexual segregation in the locker room at the police station could be taken as a sign of radical egalitarianism in the workplace, reinforced perhaps by the fact that Murphy is willing to let her use the patrol car they share—if she beats him to it, that is. However, the depiction of the police in the film systematically smacks of testosterone, a notion the film never sets into question or even examines, and one has the feeling that Lewis, who is threatened with rape during an arrest, had to adopt masculine characteristics to survive in this male-dominated environment. Although Murphy/Robocop is surrounded by women (his wife, Lewis, the leader of the team of scientists in the POV sequences, in a sense acting as a surrogate mother at the time of his recreation), Verhoeven never challenges gender roles, in fact. The unfeminine Lewis (a supporting character with no backstory) is not an object of desire for Murphy, while his wife, as she appears in the flashbacks, is “all woman,” connoted erotically as a willing and enticing sexual partner. However, the film confines her to the role of Eurydice, evacuated as she is as an active participant in the events of the story: when Robocop visits his now-deserted home; her absence from the premises signifies the limbo of the American dream emptied out, but Robocop will never try and bring her back from this Hades. Unsurprisingly, women are sexually inaccessible for him, and as it cannot cast them in this role, the film uses them as instruments in the validation of the main character's identity: Robocop's first “feat” is to save a woman from rape, Lewis ensures the spectator never questions the equation of Robocop with Alex Murphy through her acknowledgement of the “twirling” as fatherly signature, and the wife (an ethereal Eurydice) is reduced through her absence to a potentially dehumanizing and devirilizing threat that will paradoxically goad the main character towards his revenge, and therefore, a restored sense of completion after it is accomplished.

In José Padilha's remake (2014), Mrs Murphy is not so easily discarded. She is an insistent figure, very much present in the film, so much so that she literally blocks Robocop's way to revenge at one point by placing herself physically on the path of his motorcycle. It is just one of the ways in which she feels (for the spectator) “displaced” in this world, as she seems, to begin with, to come from a genre very different from the action/science-fiction film she actually is in; in attitude and dress, she looks closer to a character one might expect in the context of sentimental melodrama. Be that as it may, she will not be silenced or let herself be “etherized”, and even comes to embody the most powerful female figure in any iteration of

*Robocop*⁹, exerting the right of life or death over her dying husband. Contrary to what happens in Verhoeven's film, she is given the choice here between euthanasia or extraordinary treatment when he is killed. The role she plays in his preservation is not just indirect, by not vetoing his reanimation: she also makes a man of him again, her man one could say, by maintaining contact with him during the final stages of his "convalescence," but also by replacing him in his role as family man after his return as a "finished product" on US soil. This is no small feat, and indeed takes an act of faith, as earlier, the film went further than the original by clearly showing what little is left of Murphy, in a scene expressing a sort of sanitized horror: at his own request, "Robocop," while attached to a life-preserving device in a laboratory that might as well be a germ-free room in a cancer ward, is gradually stripped of his limbs and torso, the dispossession culminating in the revelation that at this point, "Alex Murphy" is just a set of lungs, a hand and a head. The sense of his identity does not rest in Padilha's film on the survival of his gaze; there is no fade to black here, no point of view shots that refocus the perspective after a radical break, but "third-person" shots that locate our perception of his identity, and his own¹⁰, externally. In the original, subjective camera gestured at a "short circuiting" of the structural distance between film and viewer, placing the latter in the character's seat (of consciousness). Since we were experiencing his rebirth through his eyes, our entry point into this fictional world, seeing *was* believing, and we were in no position to question his nature or identity. By not replicating this narrative device, Padilha refuses to centre the film, and the spectator's point of view, on the character as principle, unchanging or "posthumously" revealed for what he has truly been since the beginning. Instead, he chooses to examine the social mechanisms through which the identity of Alex Murphy is maintained, all evidence to the contrary.

In this respect, it is particularly striking that the film should make so little use of an intriguing premise: in order to improve his fighting skills, the scientist in charge of the rebuild decides to replace Murphy's free will in combat mode with a programme that takes over when necessary. Murphy is unaware of this, but this a serious challenge to the notion that he is, as it were, "his own man."¹¹ The remake never examines this unacknowledged cybernetic

⁹ The flip side of the coin, however, is that all the other noteworthy female characters of the original become men: Lewis, the scientist in charge of the programme...

¹⁰ He looks at himself in the mirror in this scene, and therefore sees himself "from the outside," in the third person, as others see him.

¹¹ Further complicating the issue is Robocop's relation to the images "in his head". In the original, memory images were POV shots, these artifacts from his previous existence being presumably indicative of the presence of his former self in the new shell, interspersed as his former life appeared as fleeting flashes. In the remake, the images from his memory (his death right in front of his house, for example) are not inviolable indications of his preserved identity, but are subjected to a reworking that extends the point of view beyond what Murphy could have seen; when he remembers his death, the scene is presented as it was when we saw it, but a "scanning" of the environment is generated, recomposed, and through extremely fluid camera moves, seamlessly branches with a more omniscient point of view whereby details that Murphy could not have had access to directly are revealed. It is not just that Padilha's Robocop has no specific way of envisioning the world, contrary to the video format denoting his POV in the original; this also means that at the level of the narrative, there is no formal compartmentalization between Murphy's point of view, Robocop's and the spectator's in the film. The reason for this might be tonal and generic, more than the result of advances in special effects. In the original, the satire levelled at American society and politics in the 1980's depended on the recognition by the spectator of boundaries between discourses, exemplified by literal ways of envisioning the world: we came to accept Robocop's video-camera vision as flat, unconstructed, unmediated, paradoxically

schizophrenia, but rather posits and enacts a direct continuity between Alex Murphy and Robocop, the catalyst for which is Mrs Murphy. The equivalence between Robocop and Murphy is not of his own accord or volition, contrary to what happened at the very end of Verhoeven's film, where Robocop ultimately claimed for himself the name of the dead policeman. The connection between human and cyborg is validated in the 2014 film through the recognition by his wife that they are one and the same, leading for example to a domestic scene where it takes an act of faith to envision Robocop, clad in full armour, as the father he used to be. However, by having him assume the role, she makes him so, in a process reminiscent of Searle's vision of institutions as creative of the reality around us through their imposition of status-functions on individuals. Here too, only through an operation of sheer willpower does "X count as Y in context C"¹² (Robocop counts as Murphy-the-father in the nuclear family) although his wife, not an institution, is the one to decide on the matter; but isn't her sole function in the film to embody the institution of marriage?

Indeed, she is not presented in another context than matrimony, and "her" plot is hardly connected to what one might assume is the main plot, "Robocop's" revenge. This housewife feels like a character transplanted in a genre she's not native to, almost an experiment in genre grafting. However, if she does not challenge the clichés of gender from, say, sentimental films, she does embody a fairly surprising counterpart to the 'rewriting' of gender in the context of action/science-fiction films: from the 1980's onwards, many a female character in the genre¹³ has been modelled after Ripley from the *Alien* franchise (Lewis certainly was),

"natural", while the more colourful aesthetics of infotainment in the Newsbreak segments or the gaudiness of the inserted commercials had something outré about them that felt untrue, at best disingenuous. It was clear who the good guys and bad guys were just by looking at their very identifiable "worldviews" as embodied in their respective format. By contrast, Verhoeven's stance was not made literally visible, but had to be inferred by the audience as an overarching perspective, integrating all those on display in the film to presumably transcend them. Although it indulges in satire at times (the attitude of the journalists in US-occupied Tehran at the beginning for example), the remake endeavours (for better or for worse) to place the human element, not the social charge, at its core, and strives to convey a heartfelt quality far removed from Verhoeven's irony. Comparatively, the remake does not distance itself from what it shows, refusing to impose a transcendent point of view judging the society it depicts, that of the 2010's; the blending of Robocop's, Murphy's and the viewer's points of view is symbolical of an attempt at a more immersive quality than in the original.

Another aspect of this tonal change is that where the blame lay on community in the original, it rests on individuals in the remake. The processes (potentially) leading to Murphy's reification were exposed as communal: the up and coming executive may have opposed specific members of the OCP board of directors, but he was a figurehead for a shared ideology, corporatism running amok, presented as an offshoot of "the Old Man's" patriarchal capitalism, incidentally. In the remake, the satirical charge is defused somewhat by displacing this blame from a community to individuals: the allegorical dimension of the CEO is much lessened compared with his model in the first film -but not annihilated altogether. If the two journalists of the Newsbreak segments are replaced by a single host, the latter is far more striking a figure than they ever were; an agitator spouting outrageous discourse in favour of the military-industrial complex, the way he imposes silence on the reluctant representative who wants to pass a bill banning the use of military robots on US soil is reminiscent of the heated exchange between Bill O'Reilly and the French ambassador when France refused to commit to the Gulf War. The film's *obvious* satire is confined to him, however, while it was generalized in Verhoeven's *Robocop*.

¹² See John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1995. P 114

¹³ One can think of the influence of the fiction of James Cameron here, where women are rarely "feminine" in a conventional sense: Sarah Connor in the second *Terminator* film, Lindsey Brigman in *The Abyss*, Max Guevara in the TV series *Dark Angel*... This is also true in the films of his then-partner, Kathryn Bigelow (*Blue Steel*, *Near Dark*...). The female captive in *Predator* by John McTiernan is another example.

that is, “masculinized” or rendered man-like in her aptitude for combat, resolution and resilience. Action/science-fiction films have tended to accept women as active participants in the story (unlike for example Holly Genarro-McClane in *Die Hard*) only in so far as they tone down femininity to come to share traditionally masculine characteristics, starting with a gift for violence, supposedly a masculine attribute. This is one of the reasons why in Verhoeven’s film, Mrs Murphy is removed while Lewis is very much present, although not exactly well delineated. In any case, these films posit a counter model for female characters that, by dint of repetition, turns into no less a cliché than the original attitude (that which consists in depicting necessarily feminine women). These “strong women” figures are fashioned after the traditional male hero, complete with aggressive muscles on display (see Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2*), and arguably, in the end, the only mode of existence for women in these films is their alignment with this model. The sexist structure is not really challenged; instead, the masculine cliché is just transferred onto some women, those who matter in those films because they share some of the hero’s characteristics. Mrs Murphy, as for her, is connoted as very feminine, all the more so as she is little else than an embodiment of Marriage in the film. However, this makes her unconventional in *this* context, although the film could perhaps have found a different way to justify her existence than to implicitly pit one generic convention (the strong woman with quasi-male attributes) against another (the feminine woman).

However, such a disposition articulates the validation of Robocop/Murphy’s masculine identity on her, making sure that she is the cornerstone of their respective positioning along the gender divide; the price to pay is certainly a form of conservatism, as this arrangement does not challenge, but rather re-establishes, conventional gender roles positioning. The only advantage is that Mr and Mrs Murphy’s respective roles are not presented as truly interdependent: *her* defining characteristics (femininity, motherhood...) are never questioned, and they guarantee *his* position as man, husband, father..., which is entirely predicated upon her being a “true woman.” It is in fact her transformative agency on Robocop that will ensure his remaining a man, while other forces (the CEO or even the chief scientist, Robocop’s quest for revenge) could very well make him become pure cyborg. What might be of interest here, is that this attitude to gender, or rather the exposition¹⁴ of masculinity not as an intrinsic given but as a product of culture, is part of the remake’s larger project: the presentation of the “constructedness” of everything. In its very first seconds, the spectator hears Novack, the journalist implicitly in collusion with the military industrial complex, clearing his throat and indulging in the sort of vocal exercises people who are going to speak in public do. This replaces the lion’s roar traditionally accompanying the MGM logo; the implication is that this voice warming up will be no less a lion’s roar than what it covers, and it is true that the journalist’s aggressiveness makes him a predator more than a balanced “chronicler” of facts. Here again, Padilha’s strategy differs from Verhoeven’s, even when he does use satire: in 1986, the Newsbreak segments interrupted the course of the narrative and were given as pre-constructed blocks, “origin-less” as it were. Here, they are exposed as not pre-constituted but as “in the making,” constructs created before our very eyes, and by gaining access backstage, once more, we see things from within not without, although the caricatural aspect of this

¹⁴ Not “criticism,” as the film’s goal is not to denounce: see footnote 11 on the “toning-down” of the satirical intent of the remake in relation to the original.

outrageous discourse will speak for itself. Everything is presented as constructed in the remake, and Robocop himself no less than the rest.

As we have already seen, Verhoeven gave us access to the “remaking” of Alex Murphy only through his eyes, and whatever operations had been performed on him to keep him alive escaped the grasp of the viewer. He might have undergone Christ-like agony, sacrifice, and transfiguration, but in essence, he was made of one block, and external perspectives mattered but little. In the remake, we are exposed to what the original film did not show: the controversy about whether or not he should be let live, the system of production (and a trace of the globalized economy) that makes his survival a possibility, when he tries to escape the facility in China, but also in a sense his own production of himself. While in the original, Murphy saw what he looked like only when (significantly) Lewis held a mirror to him before the last shootout, and noted that it was far too late to do anything about it, in the 2014 film, this moment of self-appreciation comes far earlier: the sanitized horror scene already mentioned, but also, interestingly, during a scene where, before communicating with his wife via a Skype-like programme, he self-consciously examines his own image on the screen to adjust the camera and choose, cosmetically almost, what he is going to reveal of himself, selecting what makes an acceptable picture; this, incidentally, makes him a director of sorts, but in place of the spectator, we find his wife. Whether this was a way of targeting the female demographic is virtually impossible to determine, but in any case, what the film *does* tell us is that in order to remain a man, he must first be so in the eyes of his wife. His concern for his exotopic image is a sign that the unshakable sense of the masculine ego that prevailed through the use of vision in the first film is not an acceptable focus for Padilha.

While by no means revolutionizing gender as it is appropriated by action/science-fiction films, the *Robocop* remake at least acknowledges the constructedness of this aspect when the original did not, by positing that everything is produced, including what one might imagine is its core, the masculinity of the hero. It might be seen as a sign of the times, and perhaps of maturity for the genre, that in the 2014 film, Man (artificial or otherwise) is not a given but made and remade, the outcome of a long chain of production, the result of a negotiation between his inner self and his environment.

Masculinity, for Pierre Bourdieu in *La domination masculine*,¹⁵ is first and foremost a rather exacting programme for men; cybernetics is originally the science studying the mechanisms of communication and control, in machines but also men. The cyborg Robocop, “part-man, part-machine, all cop,” as the slogan claimed on the film’s poster in 1987, was the ideal vantage point from which to begin an examination of how the supposedly deterministic aspect of masculinity is only relative, a matter of social construction. The film’s status as remake, implying its confrontation with an original and the necessity for it to exist relatedly to it but also independently from it, may have helped it come to this realization.

¹⁵

Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*. Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2002. Pp. 74-77.