"They'll fix you, they fix everything." — Murphy/Robocop

Considered one of the most violent films of the year, Paul Verhoeven's ROBOCOP is also unexpectedly a satire on the incongruities of consumer capitalism. The film's police drama reiterates the most popular and most violent film and TV subject; yet the rich texture, created by interspersed newscasts, hi-tech sets and simulated advertising, exposes a faltering U.S. technology and infrastructure in a world on the brink of self-annihilation. In the film's combination of populist cultural values with a witty critique of those values, ROBOCOP satirizes the tensions among the seduction by consumer goods, the new service-oriented economy, progressive ideals and the actual practices of our economic and political institutions.

In the film Murphy, a cop from a quiet district, is transferred to what his fellow officers call "hell," duty in the most dangerous section of Detroit. In the process of tracking down members of the drug underworld, including its leader, a thoroughly evil figure named Boddicker, Murphy and his female partner Lewis are caught in an abandoned factory, now used by Boddicker and his gang for manufacturing cocaine. Murphy is attacked and tortured by the gang and left for dead.

Cut into this series of events and parallel to it is another series in the corporate meeting room of Omni Consumer Products (OCP), a corporation moving into social and governmental services (privatization) such as the military, hospitals, fire and police departments. The meeting introduces the police robot, ED-209, created by company Vice-President Jones; during the demonstration of Jones's product, however, the robot malfunctions and kills one of the corporate team, whose body falls on the architectural model of "Delta City," the new Detroit. This model represents the dream of OCP's president, who sees the robot's murderous malfunctioning as an annoying interruption in his creation of that new city. Taking this opportunity to rise in the corporate structure by ingratiating himself with the president, Bob Morton (Jones's rival) offers the President his team's version of a robot cop to replace ED209.

At this point the two series of events coincide. Murphy, barely alive, is revived by a medical team, so his body can be used by Morton to create Robocop, a knight in shining head-to-toe indestructible steel, who moves in masterfully lumbering, yet computerized gestures and body language. Thwarting criminals and saving the innocent, Robocop is programmed to serve and protect, to arrest rather than kill, and never to attack an OCP employee. His recycling as Robocop destroys the entity of Murphy, initiating the subplot of Murphy's recapture of his former identity through his memory, his one remaining human attribute. His programming is further interrupted when he discovers that Jones and Boddicker work together, scheming to provide drugs and illicit services to workers employed in building the model city. Eventually, Murphy kills Boddicker in an extremely violent shoot-out in the drug factory and then dispatches Jones in the corporate meeting room in the final scene of the movie, thus saving and serving the corporation.

Montaged among the plot incidents are a number of fascinating recreations of ads for futuristic products and newscast reports of daily malfunctions of machines and services. The film's sets are filled with hi-tech, beautifully designed consumer products, as attractive and erotic as they are poorly made. These interruptions in
the plot create dissonance between the film’s facsimile of cop thrillers or westerns undercut by these reminders of the violence, greed and entropy that lie at the heart of our abundance. In both news and advertising everything is commodicized (“You give us three minutes, we’ll give you the world”).

Robocop's body is the nexus of hi-tech production and of consumerism as an end-in-itself. His body focuses a wide range of literal and metaphoric body imagery, expanding into the total corpus: the human body, the corporate body, the body politic, the social body. Throughout the film characters act out fantasies of invulnerability with extensions of the body, such as weapons, drugs and luxuries. According to the president of OCP, the city of Detroit is a body, suffering from a "cancer of crime." By eradicating this cancer, he hopes to "breathe life" into Detroit by creating a million new jobs in the construction of "Delta City," whose motto is "the future has a silver lining."

The body's significance in the film is conveyed through agonizing scenes of Murphy's pain and suffering that communicate the very nature of pain: physical pain defies language. Elaine Scarry in her brilliant book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* describes the nature of pain and the political ramifications of its inexpressibility in war and torture.[1]

ROBOCOP is about the physical pain inflicted on bodies (physical, corporate, social, political) and the ways in which we ideologize (because we cannot verbalize) the experience of pain. The inexpressibility of pain makes it impossible to feel another's pain reflected in the paucity of pain language.[2] Historically, according to Scarry, pain is usually described by allusions to agents inflicting pain, such as weapons or torture instruments, and to the bodily damage done:

> "Physical pain is not identical with (and often exists without) either agency or damage, but these things are referential; consequently we often call on them to convey the experience of the pain itself" (p. 15).

In ROBOCOP, Verhoeven presents a long torture scene focusing on Murphy's suffering, screams and staggering physical disability. Murphy is shot at part-by-part, so that his pain, not his death, is the focus. His pain, however, does not end with Boddicker's *coup de grace*, but is prolonged by the medical team trying to save him and by the corporation that recycles him for its own use. In the film the hospital's life-preserving treatment and practices are as violent as the life-destroying acts of the Boddicker gang. Their devices — electrical shocks, tubes, injections — fail to revive Murphy, but only recycle him for corporate manipulation. The corporate team's decisions to cut off the one arm the doctors saved and to try and destroy his memory completes his physical destruction. His body endures violence from all quarters, even unwittingly from himself, since Murphy signed a release form when he became a cop. Murphy, reified, signed himself away body and soul to the company.

The corporation inflicts pain on its own agents; police complain about OCP's incompetence and inability to provide back-up help or protect them against the worst cop killer in Detroit's history, Boddicker. But it is OCP's VP Jones who has hired Boddicker to build up an illegal underworld which will provide drugs, gambling and prostitution to the expected two million workers (whom Jones calls "new markets"). More telling is the failure of characters to respond adequately to death and pain: Jones calls his robot ED-209's fatal malfunction a mere "glitch," while the president's only response to the employee's violent death is that he is "disappointed." In the opening montage newscasts run graphically violent footage, but each time the camera returns to the newscasters they smile cheerfully, acting as if they had not seen the violence they are, in fact, reporting. The film engages in its own gratuitous violence, especially in the now-standard final shoot-out with its piled up bodies, each one dispatched by a different, ingeniously horrible death.

Violence appears in all activities, whether police work, medicine, corporate rivalries, organized or random crime. The superficial contradictions between scientific ideals and corporate motives quickly dissolve in the ready collaboration between torturers, medical profession and government described by Scarry in fascist regimes in Greece, Nazi Germany, Latin America, the Philippines and the Soviet Union. Medical personnel are required by such regimes to assist torturers, to add pain to pain as collaborating doctors employ advanced technology to increase the torturer's effects. In the case of the concentration camps, industrial
companies also participated in the "final solution" by providing technologies of destruction.

Despite its ubiquity, however, pain has no language and its inexpressibility has serious consequences for our value system:

"If property (as well as the ways in which property can be jeopardized) were easier to describe than bodily disability (as well as the ways in which a disabled person can be jeopardized), then one could not be astonished to discover that a society had developed sophisticated procedures for protecting ‘property rights’ long before it had succeeded in formulating the concept of ‘the rights of the handicapped’ (Scarry, p. 12).

As Robocop enters the corporate building for the final time, his nemesis, ED-209, threatens to kill him because he is "illegally parked on private property." As Scarry points out our callous loss of affect is not simply the result of seeing so much media violence. It is primarily the result of accommodating our awareness to language which articulates violence and death in terms of ideologies of power and purpose (i.e., justifying it and rationalizing its perpetuation).

Police work is a locus of suffering, pain and death, what Jones callously calls the "inherent risks" of police work. The police officers complain about OCP's incompetence, calling the company "a bunch of morons" who will "manage the department into the ground," and throughout the film police threaten and finally vote to strike. Their problems are typified by the failure of Murphy and Lewis to get a back-up despite their desperate calls. Disagreements among officers over whether to strike result from sharply contrasting philosophies of the role of police as public servants. While officers demand safety, their sergeant argues that police exist to serve the city at all costs; after all, he says, they are "not plumbers, but are police officers." While he believes police are professional or semi-professional, OCP treats them as easily replaceable. The potential for such unbearable working conditions in actual urban police forces is real: Congress refused to outlaw bullets capable of piercing bullet-proof vests despite lobbying by police on behalf of their own safety. The NRA won the debate. Police are the property of the city and subject to the political, as well as the legal and protective, needs of its citizens and government superiors.

Suffering and deprivation were identified with work in its 19th-century historical reality for Marx and Engels. While undergoing excessive, physically demanding labor, workers were denied the fruits of their labor, whether ownership, self-determination over working conditions, or enjoyment of the products they created. In the film, work becomes the central human field for action and emotion. The work of the film, furthermore, is service-oriented (police work and the public services taken over by OCP) and bears its own conflicts of economic needs and emotional authenticity.

Work replaces family as the center of human and social life. The traditional role of the family as an extension of the body and a comfort to it are replaced by the workplace where most of us spend the majority of our time anyway. The workplace is now home — in the precinct station locker room in the film policemen and women dress and undress together without sexual interest, as if siblings. The workplace offers an opportunity for men and women to work together and gain mutual respect and friendship, and this friendship offers the highest bond in the film, overriding even the love of spouses. Several years ago policemen's wives protested their husbands riding around with female officers as partners while on patrol. They admittedly feared sexual entanglements. It is also likely that the wives might have feared an even stronger bond, the kind associated with male bonding, the bond of those who share many daily, and in the case of police work often traumatic, experiences.

Just as the workplace replaces home, co-worker bond replaces sex; it is stronger, less hierarchic and allows women (as is the case in ALIENS I and II) to make decisions and to have a say in their own fate. It even allows them to make mistakes, as Lewis does. In the police department hierarchy softens. The sergeant's problem with his subordinates is not that he abuses them but that he is so dedicated. When Lewis admits she erred by talking to Robocop, an act which leads Morton to demean the sergeant, the sergeant instantly forgives her; the two
obviously have much affection and respect for each other, feelings totally absent from the corporate structure. The familial structure in the police department allows women and blacks (like the sergeant) to rise according to their merit. True, Lewis is the one who gets the coffee, but she also makes decisions, some good, some near-fatal, and alternately gets to drive the car. Lewis reveals Murphy's name to him, holds up the mirror in which he sees his human face for the first time after his transformation, and helps him get his targeting back on track, directing his gun when he asks her to 'aim for me." She is also fiercely loyal; when Murphy suggests she leave before the final shootout, she refuses, saying, "We're partners." Lewis symbolizes the best human qualities Murphy must recapture: fidelity, love, hard work and even fallibility.

This bond is one of the vital forces missing from the corporate structure, as exemplified by the irony of Jones's remark in his death message on video to Morton, "We could have been friends." That friendship was, in fact, never a possibility to those climbing the corporate ladder. When Morton verbally attacks Jones in the bathroom, no one will stand by him; the washroom empties of all corporate employees when the two VPs confront each other. There are no lateral relationships, only hierarchic ones in the corporate world. The applause in the corporate meeting room is insincere and self-serving.

The film's advertising further exaggerates inauthentic feeling: the bright smiles of the nuclear family playing "Nukem" ("get them before they get you") or the fear on the faces of people watching Godzilla descend on their city in an ad for the Bank of California are exaggerated and falsified. In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feelings* sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, using the airline industry as the paradigmatic service industry, argues that service with a smile is a corporately managed image that alienates workers from their own feelings.[3] Analogous to 19th century industrial barons' notions of their workers as mere hands or bodies, modern corporations now attempt to control the feelings of their employees. Hochschild points out that in the modern world emotions and feelings are at the service of corporate power and greed for the sake of encouraging mass consumption, as service employees insincerely exhort us to "Have a nice day":

"By linking standardization to honor and the suggestion of autonomy, the company can seem to say to the public, we control this much of the appearance and personality of that many people — which is a selling point that most companies strive for" (p. 103).

Murphy, like most service employees, presents polite, programmed, unfelt expressions of reason and happiness until he recaptures his feelings and acts with authenticity. Murphy's body language is a masterpiece of robotization and indicates the disunity of his mind and body. His uttered phrases are purely mechanical and cliched: he tells the stunned 7-11 owners, "Thank you for your cooperation," after he has blasted the armed robber into the glass doors of a beverage refrigerator. In the cocaine factory he asks Boddicker's workers and gang to drop their guns or "there will be trouble," understating the potential violence of the situation realized by the consequent shoot-out. When he changes direction, Murphy moves either his head or his body first, never the two together. He is completely controlled by programmed directives.

Yet, even before his recycling, Murphy was conditioned by the expectations and messages of corporation and media. Murphy learns to spin his gun to satisfy his son's admiration for the TV cop R. Lazer in hopes of gaining his son's admiration. "Role models are important to a boy," Murphy assures Lewis, despite the fact that his son's role model is a TV hero and not Murphy. Verhoeven iconicizes this gesture, making it a sign of Murphy/Robocop's mythic and heroic qualities, exactly what it signifies in westerns. Murphy's gun twirling becomes his signature, his emblem of human vulnerability, his bond with his son and a sign to Lewis that Robocop is Murphy. This gesture is the one memory not removed by the corporation, his last link to his family and his former body, the communicator of his identity and the sign of his humanness. The other sign is his name: Morton tells Lewis that Robocop has no name, "he's a product," but Lewis helps Murphy recapture his identity. At the end when the president of OCP asks Robocop his name, he smiles and says, "Murphy." The final scene again echoes generations of westerns in which the hero's name becomes iconic (e.g., SHANE or the Lone Ranger).
Yet, despite his return to his identity with a new understanding of what his former life meant and the significance of his loss, the final scene demonstrates that Murphy is still the employee of the corporation. The two greedy, evil VPs are segregated from the corporation and from its president who remains untainted by greed and moral culpability, so that he can help Robocop in the end. He has risked nothing but instead

"has a relation to the system of production that allows him to survive without risking his own embodied psyche, will, consciousness in that survival" (Scarry, p. 265).

For Marx the free attribute of nonparticipation characterized the role of "capitalist." Such liberation is not even available to OCP's Vice Presidents who must compete in a hostile environment and, like the police, are embodied in their work.

The president is disembodied, total spirit, the deus in the deus ex machina ending of the film. A good father ("Nice shootin', son," he tells Robocop), he fires Jones to remove the last programmed hurdle (that Robocop never attack an OCP employee) to killing Jones. As Jones is shot and plunges to his death from the meeting room window, OCP president and Murphy/Robocop are free to work together, presumably in rebuilding Detroit as Delta City and privatizing our entire infrastructure of social, military and health services. The disembodied president is freed from any taint of corruption despite the hostility, decadence and greed evinced by his two top VPs. The order restored in the film is the corporate order. Murphy's consciousness has not changed significantly; he never dissented from the ethos of advertising and corporate profit, and he will most likely get to share in the latter by the film's end.

The audience of the film, however, witnesses disturbing consequences of advertising hype, corporate calculations and product malfunctions which have so thoroughly failed us, despite Jones's warning that "the last thing we want is our products to turn against us." The profit motive undermines the seductive promises of capitalism. Just as Murphy can no longer enjoy his quiet suburban home and family, rewards promised to hard workers for their efforts and for living in a free enterprise United States, so, too, the very nature of capitalism allows it to be readily assimilated for any and all uses, such as drug production in a defunct steel mill, simply substituting one industry for another. Discussing their underworld dealings, two members of Boddicker's gang call cocaine "capital investment." One member, Antonowsky, argues that free enterprise offers "another way to steal." Capitalist values are seamless in their application and offer a neutralizing amorality for any labor. Corporate presidents are heroes and role models; the grammar school Robocop visits is the Lee Iacocca Elementary School.

Yet, in this conflicting process of serving personal gain and social good, capitalism deconstructs itself. Manipulation of "value-free" capital flies in the face of democratic capitalism's stated and idealized intentions for material betterment and social progress. Defending this system means defending it against itself; its demise is from within, represented by the partnership of Jones and Boddicker. Those who serve in our burgeoning service economy, however, are caught in the middle of these contradictions and forced to serve polar opposite masters. For police officers, who fit no established category of worker (e.g., professional or unskilled), these contradictions make it impossible to serve at all, since it is so unclear what or who is being served. Dichotomous intentions of personal material benefit and social good are as incompatibly joined as the belief that OCP can make business out of non-profit enterprises; or the intention of OCP to eliminate crime in 40 days (according to the department of "Security Concepts") for the creation of "Delta City," a purified, crime-free Detroit. Commenting on the success of the company's ventures into non-profit enterprises, Jones says, "Business is where you find it." Boddicker repeats this remark to the mafioso Sal. The desires to do good and make money, scathingly presented in the parodic "I have a dream" speech of the president of OCP (and the supposed desires of Reaganomics to induce the private sector into social services) are the intentions of an irrational society uncommitted to its supposed ideals and ignorant of its real motives.

The synapse between these two irreconcilables is language, as readily appropriated as capital for any purpose. Through media and advertising language becomes disembodied from meaning.[4] The 6000 SUX luxury sports car signifies
this disruption of words from a verifiable meaning in reality. Advertising’s
disembodied language which floats free of reality or truth can capitalize on
anything, even turning failure into a valuable commodity and seducing us into
adjusting our expectations down to fit incompetency. The most desired car, the
6000 SUX (sucks), is emblematic of inefficiency turned into merit for conspicuous
consumption (“an American tradition, 8.2 miles per gal.”).

The urban settings in the film feed on such misappropriations. The postmodern
building which houses Omni Consumer Products is an image of contemporaneity
and power. Despite the initial hope of postmodernist architects that their work
would sustain a more affective, less monolithic corporate image, such a hope could
not be realized. Corporate authority is imaged clearly in the pink cement and glass
structure with its jutting, cantilevered forms reemerging in the body of the deadly
ED-209. Modernity in all its clarity, rationality, and undecorated bluntness defines
the buildings of OCP, Morton’s apartment, Jones’s grand office. Wishing to make
expressive, “humane” architecture and serving multinational corporations are as
mutually exclusive as the other contradictions inherent in capitalist economic
aspirations in the film. The intentions of the architects to fuse modernity with
feeling through allusions to tradition have only resulted in a more aggressive
expression of corporate power.

Postmodern architecture also revived the art deco style, in its own day a style
symbolizing modernity in machine-formed shapes and a conscious rejection of
history and tradition. In its architecture and other ways, too, ROBOCOP is
reminiscent of Fritz Lang’s METROPOLIS (1926). The model of “Delta City” shows
white, windowless monoliths recalling the extravagant settings of Lang’s film,
complete with Lang’s highways in the air. Lang’s workers are robotic in their
behavior and living conditions, and the ultimate creation is a humanoid, the
brainchild of a mad scientist in Lang’s film. The Master of Metropolis, like the
president of OCP, is disembodied and cannot feel sympathy for his workers. The
conclusion of both films is a return to corporate order. Finally, Lang’s film also uses
the body metaphor: the workers are the hands; the master of the city is the brain;
and his son becomes the heart that links body and brain, according to the heroine
of the film. More cynical than Lang, however, Verhoeven offers no easy synthesis
and undercuts the return to order by his continual reminders that the order is
incompetent and entropic.

The images of the city, the model of Delta City, and the 6000 SUX all express the
ironies in the choice of Detroit as site. The reputation of Detroit rests on both
murder and the automobile industry as a barometer of our economic well-being.
The film’s Detroit has passed into its current state of collapse: the dismantled car
industry, which in the 1920s invited workers by the 1000s, mostly Southern blacks,
to a new life, and then rose to become a symbol of American prosperity and know-
how. Now it stands for technological incompetence and the deficit in our exports
and imports of the automobile, the product as central to the American Dream as
the suburban home.

The most examined interior is Murphy’s former suburban home which he re-visits
in the process of rediscovering his past. Recalling the warmth and affection of his
family life, his memory is a foil for the face and voice of a realtor (“Welcome
Shoppers”) on a repeating video that recites a sales pitch on the features of the
house but not the home of Murphy’s former, unexamined life in a beautiful suburb
on 548 Primrose Lane, a neighborhood “with a growth factor of 7.” The home is
empty except for some remaining detritus. Its interior is contemporary, white walls
and polished black brickwork around the fireplace, an old-fashioned hearth in a
modern home more efficiently heated by gas. Murphy’s memory revives images of
rooms filled with Better Homes and Gardens furniture, and three brass pots on the
mantel, reflecting recent nostalgic taste for brass. The large, kneeling brass deer
combines current taste for art deco and kitsch sculpture of wild animals. Equally
kitsch is the broken coffee cup inscribed “World Class Husband.” These
manufactured objects sustain Murphy’s affective life as memorials to his Edenic
world before the fall into corporate hands. Experiencing a profound sense of loss,
Murphy smashes the TV screen and the video realtor to defy the advertising hype’s
false presentation of life as forever rosy and its failure to capture deeper emotions
beyond surface sentimentality.

The furniture Murphy remembers represents the domestic extension of our body.
Marx expresses this relationship in terms of our appropriation of the natural world and our own products:

"Thus, originally property means no more than man’s attitude to his natural conditions of production as belonging to him, as the prerequisites of his own existence, his attitude to them as natural prerequisites of himself, which constitute, as it were, a prolongation of his body."[5]

Marx interpreted the entire made world and all its objects as extensions of our individual and collective bodies. Workers project themselves into the world in the making of that world, while capitalists, on the other hand, are disembodied. In the 19th century Marx saw the two classes as discreet and opposite; the workers were starving, suffering, unable to afford the objects they made which would have extended their bodies and provided them with food, shelter, pleasure. In the United States in this century workers project their bodies into products they can afford; here and now workers reap the material rewards of their labor. The model has not changed so neatly, however, since it still defines the relationship between U.S. and Western European consumers and the Third World workers who work and live in 19th century Industrial Revolution conditions, hungry, cold, deprived of even the basic amenities made possible by the products they make but cannot afford to consume.[6] For Marx making characterizes our essential humanness and brings us bodily expansion and the joy of creation, both now perverted by capital.

Goods and capital substitute for social and emotional bonds in the film. One repeated example of this social substitution of money for love or feeling is in the interspersed sitcom in which the male lead, about to have sex with two women (which Morton tries to engage in, life imitating art, before he is executed by Boddicker), says he’d “buy that for a dollar.” The pervasiveness of this image is thorough: members of the Boddicker gang love to watch this show, as does the old owner of the 7-11 store which is robbed while he is watching it. One of Morton's co-workers, an executive who welcomes Morton “to the club,” repeats the punch line. The sitcom pervades and homogenizes all desires of all classes, as does advertising. Both aim for broad public appeal for profit.

The products we consume further define our social selves and our relation to the world of objects. A car does more than get us from place to place; it establishes status in the hierarchy (for which reason Boddicker blows up the 6000 SUX of his gang member, since his subordinate cannot have the same quality car as Boddicker). It stands for a wealth of values and gives back to the human owner more than was embodied in the mere physical car by the workers who made it or the inventor who conceived it. The longer cars have been around, the more values they accrue; and this is true for the other major objects in the film, especially videos and weaponry. We name our cars and guns. Antonowsky’s only expression of affection occurs when, upon getting his latest military weapon, he says, “I like it.”

The joint promises of advertising and technology to replace our bodies with hi-tech products (wittily described in the Family Heart Center ad for the new Jansen series 7 sports heart, of the Yamaha, both available for tax health credit) articulate a new interpretation of the body. Our bodies do not signify character, selfhood, nor even our status or ethnic origins. Just as emotions are exaggerated and falsified in advertising and in the corporate meeting room, so, too, our bodies can be manufactured part by part and in the future, as the movie implies, completely replaced. We are at the brink of controlling our immortality. Ironically, we are also able to control our death, since death appears in the film to come from our own products. The interspersed TV newscasts report a series of malfunctions and accidents that resonate with our memory of the footage of the Space Shuttle disaster or of the victims of the nuclear leak at Chernobyl or the gas leak at Bopal: in the film the Star Wars Defense Program’s Peace Platform laser malfunctions and sets fire to the wooded area around Santa Barbara killing 113 people including two retired presidents, one of whom (Reagan?) probably created SDI; the South African government claims to have a neutron bomb it promises readily to use against dissenting blacks. Ads, too, reflect the assimilation of disaster technology even into the bosom of warm, loving family life: family games include “Nukem” in which family members destroy each other much as competing nations will certainly do given nuclear capabilities. The film itself indulges its own voyeurism as the toxic waste drum’s contents cover Antonowsky and mutate his body into a hideous
pleprous form before our very eyes.

Our bodies expand into a wealth of goods, generating a reciprocity between ourselves and the consumer products that transform our bodies and consequently our psyches. Robocop's body recapitulates all the medico-technological advances promised by advertisements. He is the sum of a data bank of police experience, quick reflexes, expert programming, the latest technology and research. He is our bodies as artifact, the sum of our labor and the reward for it. He is the one who saves, serves and protects us and our bodies and the extension of our bodies, our private property. Such created objects also alter the knowledge and expectations we have of our own bodies transformed by clothes, eyeglasses, hearing aids, implanted joints and organs, cars, appliances. The extent of our physical transformation can be underestimated; not only do we see, hear, feel better or run faster, but our artifacts present and define our reality. They speak us and the world.

Conversely, our bodies also become artifacts, once they are changed (Scarry, p. 244). As Engels points out, the hand is not only the organ of labor, but the product of that labor. It has evolved into an artifact alter years of doing a variety of refined work. The most obvious examples of the body's modification into artifact are the vastly faster athletes, stronger and with more stamina, doing more difficult tricks than athletes could do or could conceive of doing before steroids and nautilus machines. Robocop's creation is the pinnacle of our self-definition as artificers. He is the consequence of the artificial hearts, eyes, limbs, grafts with which we have so far healed and replicated ourselves. We accept these synthetic parts because we define ourselves as makers (Scarry, p. 254). Robocop, the ultimate artifice, epitomizes our evolution.

Yet, Murphy gradually recovers his memory, identity and will, until his actions are no longer simply programmed but are affected by his own desires, wishes, hatreds. As these changes occur, his reflexes lag (fast reflexes are cited by both Jones and Morton in praise of their respective robots). Thoughts, feelings and memories intercept his programming to slow him down. About to shoot Antonowsky whom he catches robbing a gas station, Robocop falters and lowers his gun, while Antonowsky tries to escape; Robocop is hampered by Antonowsky's words, "We killed you," and by the memory of his "death." While reading Boddicker his rights, Murphy/Robocop throws him through a series of windows, for the first time revealing Boddicker's vulnerability and Murphy's desire for revenge. Murphy/Robocop almost kills Boddicker but is stopped by his arrest mode, which he will later overcome at the end of the film to kill Boddicker. Murphy's vulnerability signals the union of his body and his mind.

By the end of the film, Murphy's mechanical body becomes his own, as well. He repairs himself with pliers and drill before the final shootout. Between his rebirth and his synthetic resurrection Murphy has gained feeling and free will, owning himself as the means of production and gaining self-determination. During the final shoot out, Murphy's head and body work together in a new coordination. From the top floor of the warehouse he moves in one direction but watches Boddicker from another direction. His head — now uncovered so we can see his human face — turns toward Boddicker while Murphy walks along the balcony, his head and body coordinated at 45 degrees to each other.

While Murphy gains self-determination and deprograms himself, the ubiquitous corporation suffers continual internal breakdowns. In the opening of the film, the dominant rule of law, Murphy's Law, "Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong" (and its infinite variations, such as the Peter Principle), is set into motion by the malfunctioning of Jones's ED-209. Everyone expects Murphy's Law to preside, and the corporation anticipates failure by having back-up projects, though these back-ups undermine the main project by existing within the framework of cutthroat ambition. The corporation's safeguard is its undoing.

Our only hope, after all, is that Robocop will embody Murphy's Law. The ultimate irony in the film is that applying Marx's hope that the workers' bodies can be protected, extended, expanded through their labors' products, Americans live in a world in which we, the only workers of the world who can reap the benefits by consuming mass quantities, reap only the benefits of destruction by malfunction. And the destruction is total. Morton's benefits end in death as do Boddicker's and
Verhoeven advances no solutions to the tremendously complex social, economic, political and technological problems the film poses, and the film retreats into a reestablishment of a now-cleaner corporate order and status quo. The complexity retreats further in the face of the polymorphous eroticism of consumer goods, shiny, new, fast, sleek, progressive. We are left, instead, with hopes pinned on a synthesis of human affections and hi-tech invulnerability, an everyman hero whose name is as common as breakdowns. The dim hope proffered is that a synthesis of biology and technology might concoct the best of all possible glitches.

NOTES

I dedicate this article to Ethan Granger who, as a man of the 21st century, understands so much of this world's technology in all its deadly and hopeful possibilities.


2. This lack of an adequate vocabulary for pain has become a focus of medical ethics, and is at the heart of patient-doctor relationships. To the one feeling pain, it is certain; to the one hearing about the pain, it is dubious. Doctor and patient have diametrically opposed responses to the patient's pain.


4. Regina Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) describes the strategies of artists to resist and exploit advertising and the new public language at the end of the 19th century; Gagnier argues convincingly that Oscar Wilde, among others, was acutely aware of the effects of this advertising language on the arts, the last bastion, he hoped, of purity, and that much of Wilde's wit was in subverting this language through puns that, instead of reinforcing bourgeois values, attacked them. The most explicit denunciation of this language, of course, appears in George Orwell's concept of doublespeak in 1984.


6. John Berger in *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), discusses in detail the complex relationship between art making, the myth of the artist-creator, and the capitalist glue holding together Western industrial nations and Third World countries.
Murphy's body is reconstructed within a steel shell and called RoboCop. RoboCop is very successful against criminals and becomes a target of supervillain Boddicker. Written by Colin Tinto / edited by statmanjeff. Plot Summary | Plot Synopsis. Plot Keywords: robot | police | cyborg | graphic violence | robocop | See All (253) ». Taglines: Part man. Part machine. Murphy's Law. Writers: Alan Grant. RoboCop escapes the Nixcops but is severely damaged and his witness is taken into Nixco custody where he is subjected to experimental surgery. After being rebuilt, RoboCop remains immobile, reflecting upon a civilian who was fatally wounded in his battle with the Nixcops. Not until his partner, Anne Lewis, is reported kidnapped by a criminal named Scarface does he find the motivation needed to jump back into action. Arriving at the scene, he find Nixcops and ED-209 droids fighting it out for Anne's rescue; each one's creator seeing her kidnapping as an opportunity for positive publicity. Robo...